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Cultural Studies--Honors Thesis

7 Nov

*At the Frontiers of Writing:
Exploring the Productive Encounter
Between the Poetic and the Political in Northern Ireland
during the Troubles*

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Honors Thesis
Fall 2013

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Introduction

You were silly like us; your gift survived it all:
The parish of rich women, physical decay,
Yourself. Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.
Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,
For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its making where executives
Would never want to tamper, flows on south
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
A way of happening, a mouth.¹

So W.H. Auden wrote in his elegy for W.B. Yeats. His view that poetry does not do political work is one shared by many people, poets included. While some lines of verse may be held aloft as a rallying cry and others might memorialize those who have fallen, few sonnets directly exert a revolutionary fervor. And yet poets continue to write verse after verse and continue to publish their work, to send it before an audience. “The minute one starts believing that [poetry] hasn't [any agency], there's no point in doing it,” rejoins Northern Irish poet Paul Muldoon. “It has to have efficacy at some level.” But how the poetic intervenes in a political situation—how its statements and descriptions, its images and aural resonances, can exert itself on bodies and corporeal arrangements—remains unclear. I want to take up this problematic—locating within the poetic the potential for a radical politics. This paper does not attempt any universalizing or totalizing answers to Auden’s proposition; I do not want to assume that any particular literary genre possesses an essential and abstract agency divorced from its context.² Instead, I want to look at how the poetry produced in and through a particular socio-historical moment might make an attempt.

The encounter between the poetic and the political in Northern Ireland during the mid-20th Century complicates Auden’s ready avowal of their disjunction. Forty years after its geopolitical partition

¹ W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," *Another Time* (New York: Random House, 1940) Lines 32-41.

² “The only possible definition of language is the set of all order-words, implicit presuppositions, or speech-acts current in a language at a given moment.” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 79.

from the rest of Ireland, Ulster³ saw the emergence of a new generation of poets who took on a distinctly Northern Irish identity.⁴ Their work attempted to articulate the lived experiences of individuals caught in a bitterly-divided society. Headed by the triumvirate of Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, and Michael Longley, these poets set about reworking the region's literary landscape in their own image. Modern Irish identity had always closely aligned itself with the poetic. "Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry." Yet the 1960s and 70s generations spoke not only to their fellow countrymen, but to a global audience.

Starting in the late 1960s and continuing through the 1980s, sectarian and political violence erupted in Northern Ireland as the predominantly-Catholic Irish Republicans waged an anticolonial campaign against British security forces and loyalist Protestant militias.⁵ The newfound media attention directed the international gaze towards the Ulster literary scene. A note to poets Frank Ormsby and Michael Foley from Longley (in his capacity as the assistant director of the Arts Council) extolls the frustrated resignation the poets showed towards the journalistic narrative of artists working in violent times. Longley writes:

BBC TV's Late Night Line-Up seem to be interested in mounting a programme about the Ulster artists' response to "The Situation."--Ugh! I hear you say: but no publicity is bad publicity, as the fella said. Would you phone me Monday (morning if possible) when we can have a cozy chat about how the tragedy has affected you "and your generation," as [poet] John Montague would say.⁶

More seriously, the violence also exacted its own demands upon the poets. For the Northern Irish poets, Auden's question posed itself as more than an intellectual exercise. With the social fabric rending

³ Northern Ireland contains six of Ulster's nine counties. Throughout history, the province's boundaries have fluctuated. The U.K. press commonly uses the term interchangeably with 'Northern Ireland.' In the statelet itself, the term is also used, predominantly by Unionists; some Nationalists object to the territorial designation. Throughout this paper, I will refer use both "Ulster" and "Northern Ireland" to refer to the polity.

⁴ Gerald Dawe, "History Class: Northern Poetry, 1970-82," *New Hibernia Review* 7.1 (2003): 75-86.

⁵ T. G. Fraser, *Ireland in Conflict: 1922-1998* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000) 46-47.

⁶ Letter from Michael Longley to Frank Ormsby, Frank Ormsby papers, circa 1967-2004, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

around them, they felt called upon to speak to and through troubled Ulster. As Longley would note in a 1979 interview, a writer “would be inhuman if he did not respond to tragic events in his own community and a poor artist if he did not seek to endorse that response imaginatively.” But take caution, he continued, for “the artist needs time in which to allow the raw material of experience to settle to an imaginative depth.”⁷ Each poet faced the pressurized choice: to write or not to write about the Troubles and its bloodshed. If they engaged directly, they could—and were—exposed to charges of exploiting the political situation for personal gain or of aestheticizing and implicitly condoning its violence. If they chose to skirt the miasma, they were accused of ignoring and evading the suffering in front of them in order to dabble in personal or bucolic scenes. “As my Province burns, I sing of love.”⁸ For the most part, the poets whose work has remained in circulation ignored the impetus to an immediate politicizing or grand-standing rhetoric. They opted instead to remain faithful to the imaginative frontier of their art. As Ulster poet Tom Paulin worried in his verse on 1970s Belfast: “The theatre is in the streets,/The streets are in the theatre,/The poet is torn to pieces.”⁹

And so the newly-emergent Ulster literary community served as a space in which the aesthetic was both respected and pursued seriously—not as a mere act of individual catharsis, but as a public act of engagement with an uncertain and tumultuous world. In this particular conjuncture, the sectarian violence and the poetic outpouring of the Northern Irish writers do not appear to merely coexist; they are articulated together into a radical and productive encounter. Muldoon puts it simply in his poem, “7 Middagh Street:”

For history’s a twisted root
with art it’s small, translucent fruit

and never the other way round.

⁷ Quoted in Frank Ormsby, introduction, *A Rage for Order: Poetry of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Belfast, Northern Ireland: The Blackstaff Press, 1992) xvii.

⁸ John Montague, introductory verse, *The Great Cloak* (Winston-Salem, NC: Wake Forest University Press, 1978)

⁹ Tom Paulin, “The Other Voice,” *A Rage for Order*, ed. Frank Ormsby (Belfast, Northern Ireland: The Blackstaff Press, 1992) Lines 94-96.

The roots by which we were once bound
 are severed here, in any case,
 and we are all now dispossessed;

 prince, poet, construction worker,
 salesman, soda-fountain jerker—

 all equally isolated.
 Each loads flour, sugar and salted

 beef into a covered wagon
 and strikes out for his Oregon.¹⁰

It is not just the poets that must deal with the displacement of the Troubles; all of those individuals living in Northern Ireland through the crisis must find ways to adapt and endure.¹¹ We are all now dispossessed, all equally isolated, all striking out for our Oregons with the provisions we see fit. But because of the poet's public position within Northern Irish society,¹² because the province's other discursive spaces seemed unable to speak but in tired clichés, the literary was called upon to make some sort of response. "Collective or national consciousness is 'often inactive in external life and always in the process of break-down,' [and so] literature finds itself positively charged with the role and function of the collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation."¹³ But what response could poetry *qua* poetry make? "Personally I find myself wilting at the thought of instructing people or interpreting experience

¹⁰ Paul Muldoon, "7, Middagh Street," excerpted in *A Rage for Order*, ed. Ormsby (1992) Lines 15-26.

¹¹ "It is not just the [Northern Irish] writers and politicians who must make the effort I'm talking about: the whole population are adepts in the mystery of living in two places at one time. Like all human beings, of course, they would prefer to live in one, but in the meantime they make do with a constructed destination, an interim place whose foundations straddle the areas of self-division, a place of resolved contradiction, beyond confusion...Poetically, it is an aspect of the place to which the quester in Robert Frost's poem 'Directive' is guided, and of the place in which the speaker of Thomas Hardy's poem 'Afterwards' arrives – an elsewhere beyond the frontier of writing where 'the imagination presses back against the pressure of reality.'" Seamus Heaney, "Frontiers of Writing," *The Redress of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995) 190.

¹² In Ulster, the poets were much more lauded and popular figures than they were in many other Western contexts like the United States, for example.

¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka—The Makings of a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 17.

for them in a way that could be done in prose,” Heaney confided.¹⁴ This thesis aims to explore the nature of that productive relationship: between the poet and the revolutionary, the poem and the political imaginary. To do so, I want to critically examine the ligature between three points—the poet as a social position within Northern Ireland during the 1960s and 70s; the poetic as a culturally-constructed and defined category of the aesthetic operating within the Northern Irish 20th Century context; and *poesis* as the individual and creative work that the poem enacts through the materiality of its language.

To begin with, I will tackle the poets’ position with the Northern Irish conjuncture during the 1960s and 70s by arguing that, taken together, they compose a particular discursive formation. Literary critics and the poets have long disavowed the notion that the Belfast poets, as they came to be called, represented any sort of literary school. Their aesthetics and lyrical intonations diverged from one another more often than not; the only element that they seemed to share was a particular affinity for formalism. And given that these writers bridge the religious-cultural divide, they did not cohere behind a common political solution. Instead, I will argue that the Ulster poets (looking at those individuals active during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s) map what Deleuze and Guattari call a “collective assemblage of enunciation.” That is, their poems emerge out of a particular historical arrangement of shared social relations, utilize the same implicit vocabulary, and share¹⁵ a common problematic of locating identity against and through nationalist iterations of place. “We are all now dispossessed.”¹⁶ The individual and individuated speakers are not the focus of this study; the collective statements and interventions that their poetry brings to bear on the Northern Irish “situation” are.

¹⁴ James Randall, “An Interview with Seamus Heaney,” *Ploughshares* 18 (1979), accessed online, *Ploughshares*, 12 Sept 2013 <<https://www.pshares.org/read/article-detail.cfm?intArticleID=9476>>.

¹⁵ “On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand, it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 88.

¹⁶ Muldoon, from “7 Middagh Street,” Line 20.

After establishing the Belfast poets *qua* a collective assemblage, I will then explore how they attempted to articulate the Northern Irish experience during the 1960s in chapters two and three. They did not so not simply through their own verse, but also through the acts of literary reclamation they undertook in order to construct a “Northern Irish” literary topos from among those writers who came before.¹⁷ Here, I turn to Raymond Williams’ notion of the “structure of feeling,” by which he means the felt rhythms and affective positioning that a group lives yet has not consciously articulated.¹⁸ I argue that the Ulster writers fixated their attention on two older poets, John Hewitt and Louis MacNeice, because they found certain structures of feeling embodied in their work that resonated with their lived experiences in 1960s Northern Ireland. Both Hewitt and MacNeice were Protestant, yet they offer radically different articulations of the individual’s place within a sectarian society—and their imaginative mappings condition different political possibilities. Against Hewitt’s rootedness, MacNeice offers displacement. Against MacNeice’s ironical and nightmarish subversions, Hewitt offers an affirmative stance.

Yet ultimately, I argue that neither structure of feeling holds up as the Catholics civil rights movement devolves into a sectarian crisis between Protestant paramilitaries, Catholic guerilla fighters, and the British army. In chapter four, I will step away from the literary to ground this exposition in its conjuncture by undertaking a contextual analysis of the political, cultural, and literary currents that combined in the resurgence of the Troubles from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s. As the 1970s continued to drown Ulster in irrational violence, the project of locating an Ulster structure of feeling

¹⁷ The literary topos here is meant in the manner of Ernst Robert Curtis as a plotting of literary commonplaces within a particular cultural group.

¹⁸ “The peculiar location of a structure of feeling is the endless comparison that must occur in the process of consciousness between the articulated and the lived.” Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters* (London: New Left Books, 1979) 148.

became all the more difficult even as it became more and more politically exigent. "Suddenly as the riot squad moved in, it was raining/exclamation marks,/ Nuts, bolts, car-keys. A fount of broken type."¹⁹

In order to better think about how the poetic mode could intervene in such a barrage, I will take a detour through the theorizations of Martin Heidegger, Raymond Williams, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. All of them provide language with real agency, but only within particular contextual arrangements and with limited means. By reading them in conjunction—at times, disjunction—I aim to lay out some method to understand how the poem could act with material force in Northern Ireland. And then I will turn to the poems themselves. From Heaney to Mahon to ultimately Ciaran Carson,²⁰ I will argue that these poets are working against the dominant Republican and Unionist structures of feeling by revising their territorial claims and destabilizing their control over the individual's sense of location and identity. "Each loads flour, sugar and salted/beef into a covered wagon/and strikes out for his Oregon." They work individually, yet they register a similar structure of feeling. "You could perceive it operating in one work after another which weren't otherwise connected," Williams said of his notion of the structure of feeling. "Yet [these commonality] was one of feeling more than of thought—a pattern of impulses, restraints, tones, for which the best evidence was often the actual conventions of literary or dramatic writing."²¹ Although the Northern Irish poets were writing—often times across religious and socioeconomic divisions—many shared common tones and dispositions. From their shared affective renderings of territory--Belfast as a city built upon the shifting and unstable terrain of a coastal swamp and the countryside as the quiet site of labor rather than of mysticism—from their obsession with spatial mapping and delineation to the dislocating temporality of myth and history, these writers

¹⁹ Ciaran Carson, "Belfast Confetti," *A Rage for Order*, lines 1-2.

²⁰ I will look most closely at Heaney and Mahon as Catholic and Protestant poets, respectively, who are already established and active through the 1960s and 70s. By the text's close, I will also preview the ways in which the next generation will take up where the 1960s poets left off. As a Catholic poet who lived in Belfast through the Troubles, Carson does some interesting things with his work on the city that problematizes the mimetic aspects of language.

²¹ Williams, *Politics and Letters*.

worked to render their world and its “life rhythms.” Ultimately, I will argue that Heaney’s verse, with its emphasis on a rooted community and territorialized identity, furthers an Irish Nationalist imaginary, thereby implicitly falling into the intransigent sectarian dichotomy that perpetuates the province’s violence. Instead, I will turn—like Mahon, Carson, and others—towards MacNeice and his aporetic writing. His verse is able to articulate pure differences rather than reducing them to a black-white divide, which opens more space for new political understandings.

Faced with sectarian trauma, the Belfast poets worked towards a common end—finding a place not simply to survive, but to live against the contradictions. Their poetry recognizes what is at stake in Carson’s verse: “I know this labyrinth so well...Why can’t I escape?...What is/My name? Where am I coming from?/ Where am I going? /A fusillade of question marks?”²² We will see if they provide satisfactory answers, if they make it to the far-flung Pacific coast.²³

²² Carson, “Belfast Confetti,” lines 6-9.

²³ A reference to the Muldoon poem excerpted above. “Each loads...into a covered wagon/and sets out for his Oregon.” Muldoon, “7 Middagh Street,” lines 24-26.

Chapter 1: *What Is My Nation?**The Belfast Group as a Northern Irish Collective Assemblage of Enunciation*

A “literary renaissance” is taking place in Ulster, declared a report on the front page of *The London Times* in 1970.²⁴ The expose focused on a collection of young poets, chief among them Heaney, Mahon, Longley, and James Simmons,²⁵ who published their work in locally-circulated pamphlets and read at public festivals. Many of them honed their craft and shared their work through a writing workshop group led by poet and professor Philip Hobsbaum in his Belfast apartment. At the same time, many of them were also engaged with a series of small literary magazines, including *The Northern Review*, *Phoenix*, and most famously, *The Honest Ulsterman*, which provided a public platform that simultaneously justified and cohered their literary efforts. For a city that had long since registered on the British literary map only through its absence, the poetic ferment seemed remarkable—an incisive and compelling feature story.

The *Times* article began a decades-long struggle over how to characterize the poets of Heaney’s generation. With that 1970 headline, a “pedagogical and critical truism” was born, concluded the Irish poet and critic Gerald Dawe in his analysis of the Northern Irish poetry lineage.²⁶ Academics and literary critics would continue to characterize Heaney’s generation as a coherent collectivity up through the twentieth-first century, even as they deployed a number of different names, from the Belfast ‘Group’ to ‘school’ to ‘coterie.’ In particular, such treatment found traction in the diasporic Irish literary communities. To those prone to assume an easy and stable aesthetic grouping, Northern Irish literary critic Edna Longley rejoins, “Many American academics read Irish poetry naively.”²⁷ Within the Irish and Northern Irish literary communities—whose boundaries are also permeable and fiercely contested—the

²⁴ Quoted in Dawe, “History Class,” 75-86.

²⁵ Through the 1970s and 80s, however, “Simmons fell off the branch a little bit” in comparison with the success enjoyed by Heaney, Mahon, and Longley. Frank Ormsby, Personal interview, 31 July 2013.

²⁶ Dawe, “History Class,” 75-86.

²⁷ Edna Longley, “American Reads on Irish Poetry,” *Southern Review* 31.3 (1995): 757-772.

label proved much more controversial. Poets south of the border criticized the quick and ahistorical translation of partition's geopolitical boundary into the literary realm. In the 1980s, Irish poet Thomas Kinsella lambasted the literary hoopla over the Northern Irish renaissance as "largely a journalistic entity."²⁸ Poets like Heaney, Montague, and Muldoon might share a common geographic space, but they did not embody a coherent aesthetic project that could be delineated as separate from the rest of their Irish compatriots, Kinsella argued.²⁹ As the 1970s passed into the 80s, many of the Northern Irish cohort took a similar stance publicly. Mahon went so far as to describe the idea of a united Northern Irish renaissance as "a whole lot of hooey."³⁰ By the time that poet Frank Ormsby put out another anthology of Northern Irish poetry, the geopolitical delineation had become such a problematic assertion on the island that he went with the ungainly title, *Poets from the North of Ireland*.³¹ Decades later, Heaney would deny that the workshop group had ever thought of itself as an aesthetic unit, declaring that "not for one moment did we think in terms of school or coterie."³² Critic Edna Longley attributes the conflicted views on the existence of a "Belfast group" in part to the politicization of Irish literary criticism. The critical discourse in Ireland and Northern Ireland is permeated by "begrudgery," she argues. "Begrudgery does not only justly rebuke envy of another's merit or success, it can also be used to suggest that all adverse critical comment is darkly motivated by personal or factional or political interest," she notes. The North-South divide finds its own articulation in the literary realm, although Longley is quick to rejoin that it does not follow the usual Catholic-Protestant divide.³³

While the Belfast grouping would increasingly come under fire as a reductionist and ahistorical delineation by the 1980s, academics and poets alike continue to take the literary delineation for granted

²⁸ Thomas Kinsella, introduction, *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). Quoted in Dawe, "History Class."

²⁹ Kinsella, introduction, *Oxford Book of Irish Verse*.

³⁰ Quoted in Heather Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance* (Oxford, Oxford University Press,): 3-4.

³¹ Dawe, "History Class."

³² Michael Longley, interview with Jody Allen Randolph, 2003. Quoted in Clark 3-4.

³³ "Many American academics read Irish poetry naively." Edna Longley, "American Reads on Irish Poetry" 757.

in most studies of modern Irish poetry.³⁴ And as literary historian Heather Clark argues, with reason. With the proliferation of local little magazines, the spread of public poetry readings and festivals, and the increasing attention from the United Kingdom, 1960s Belfast did see a surge of locally-grown talent. Unlike previous generations, the members of this poetic community were conscious of each other and of their communal sense of the writer's enterprise. "Indeed, the poets themselves must take at least part of the responsibility for promoting and sustaining the 'myth' of an Ulster school."³⁵ Journalists might have been the first to latch onto this phenomenon of the "Northern Irish literary renaissance," but the poets and their critics took part in the construction of this cultural marker, even as they later turned against it. As the decades passed, the moniker became institutionalized within literary historiography—so much so that Emory University in Atlanta, Ga. collected broadsheets and other archival materials related to the Hobsbaum workshop and the poets who emerged out of it. "The participation of so many talented writers ensures that the Group will remain of lasting interest to scholars and literary historians," the collection website notes.³⁶ The infrastructure that enables future studies of the "Belfast Group" is alive and channeling researchers' energies and academics' arguments in its own image. The curating librarians—and those individuals who plumb the archives depths—certainly do not believe they have collated a bunch of "hoey," to borrow Derek Mahon's term, and the ways in which they frame the workshop verses and documents will contextualize the discussion of literary Northern Ireland for years to come.

But this critical debate is perhaps framed in too rigid of terms to be productive. Just reading Paul Muldoon against Seamus Heaney against John Montague against Medbh McGuckian throws any sense of a coherent school to the wind. And so the most interesting questions arise not from debating

³⁴ Dawe, "History Class."

³⁵ Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance* 6.

³⁶ "The Belfast Group—Overview," Emory Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, accessed 9 Sept 2013 <<http://beck.library.emory.edu/BelfastGroup/web/html/overview.html>>.

whether there ever existed something as coherent as a common aesthetic project among the Northern Irish poets of the 1960s and 70s generations; instead, we should explore the particular cultural and political pressures that colluded to make the idea of a “Belfast group” such a resonant literary marker. From the decontextualized perspective of *The Times*’ 1970 feature article, the Ulster poetic community appeared almost fully-formed from what been an economically-depressed, artistically-stunted, and embittered province. What purpose does this new literary convention serve? How did it function? And how does its presence shape our reading of these poets and their work? To borrow from Raymond Williams’ own reflections on the historically-contingent delineations of literary genres:

For a convention could resemble no actual history at all, yet be positively productive by its representation of possible situations. Each convention must be assessed by what it is rooted in and what it does: an assessment that is related to a much more general historical judgment that is also an affiliation—not history as all that has happened, but as where oneself is in it.³⁷

By tracing the construction and, in turn, deconstruction of the “Belfast Group” in literary and critical discourses from the 1960s through the 1980s, I aim to explore how the political turmoil and devolving sectarian tensions impressed themselves and made demands of the poetic. This section is meant to place the poetic convention that is the ‘Northern Irish literary movement’ back into the pressures and underlying topography of its political context.

In 1963, poet and English professor Philip Hobsbaum had formed a workshop group with some of his students and promising young writers in the Belfast area. Seamus Heaney was an early participant. So was Michael Longley. Although they would later contest the notion that the workshop had proved formative for their work, the weekly Monday night meetings would foment new friendships and create a sense of common purpose.³⁸ “What happened Monday night after Monday night in the Hobsbaum's flat

³⁷ Williams, *Politics and Letters*.

³⁸ Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance* 6.

in Fitzwilliam Street somehow ratified the activity of writing for all of us who shared it," Heaney recalled.³⁹ Over the course of the next nine years, the meetings would welcome a slew of burgeoning young writers, a preponderance of whom would go on to dominate the Northern Irish literary landscape. The attendance lists read like the pages of an Irish literary journal (which is a whole other connective tissue): Heaney; Michael and Edna Longley; Harry Chambers; Arthur Terry; Paul Smyth; James Simmons; Bernard MacLaverty; Norman Dugdale; Michael Allen; Paul Muldoon; Ciaran Carson. For a statelet with a population of little over a million and a half people in 1981, a surprising and significant proportion of those poets would go on to enjoy an international reputation.

As the 1960s came to a close, the workshop writers stepped further and further onto the public stage. Heaney, Longley, Mahon, and Simmons published their first collections, to widespread critical acclaim, and the larger coterie participated in readings and literary festivals throughout the province. Two members of the older generation, John Montague and John Hewitt, embarked on a joint reading tour funded by the Northern Ireland Arts Council dubbed 'The Planter and the Gael' in 1970.⁴⁰ The Arts Council had published an anthology under the same title, and the collaboration went over well around the province.⁴¹ In decades past, the province had existed as little more than a literary backwater. Those writers it did produce looked to London's literary community for their aesthetic model and publishing platform. Most of the region's home-grown literary work did not circulate locally. "Belfast has always been short of magazines and publishers with literary ambitions: the writers sent their work to London," Simmons wrote.⁴² That export-based mentality was changing in the 1960s and 70s. Simmons founded his own literary magazine, *The Honest Ulsterman*, in 1969 and gave it the subtitle, "A Handbook for

³⁹ 'The Belfast Group: A Symposium': *The Honest Ulsterman*, No. 53 (Nov/Dec 1976)

⁴⁰ Timothy Kearney, "Beyond the Planter and Gael: Interview with John Hewitt and John Montague on Northern Poetry and The Troubles," *The Crane Bag* 4.2 (1980/1981): 85-92.

⁴¹ Kearney, "Beyond the Planter and Gael" 85-92; Letter from Michael Longley to Tom McLaughlin, 3 Sept 1973, Frank Ormsby papers, circa 1967-2004, Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁴² Quoted in Dawe, "History Class" 78.

Revolution."⁴³ Running an assortment of poems, fiction, critical reviews, essays, and editorials, the first 19 issues of *The Honest Ulsterman* seemed to "capture so perfectly the Zeitgeist of the times."⁴⁴ His nonconformist magazine joined with several other little publications and broadsheets that fed Ulster's literary circles during the 1960s, including Harry Chambers' *Phoenix*, Philip Hobsbaum's *The Northern Review*, and the Lyric Players Theatre's *Threshold*.⁴⁵ Through the mid to late 1960s and beyond, these volumes provided a local platform for young poets like Heaney, Longley, and Muldoon. In the pages of *The Northern Review* and *The Honest Ulsterman*, they could build confidence and access the mailboxes of prestigious London editors.⁴⁶ As Clark persuasively argues, such a vibrant dialogue existed between the little magazines, the workshop, and the wider literary community during the 1960s that it would seem impossible for this generation of poets to have developed independently of one another's influence. Literary Belfast provided "an essential forum for critical approbation, appropriation, and dissent...the coterie served as a space within which the poets could define themselves against each other."⁴⁷ Longley made reference to such a group-awareness when speaking to *Hibernia* in 1969: "When I am asked to write or talk about myself I quite naturally mention Mahon and Heaney, not because they are colleagues and close friends, but because, as Ulstermen, we share a complex and confusing culture: they help me to define myself."⁴⁸ Instead of merely producing a smattering of individual writers, Ulster appeared to have been experiencing something more coherent, more unified, in its literary output.

The political and cultural climate during the early to mid-1960s bolstered the establishment of a literary community. Heaney remembered the first half of the decade as a time of liberalism and a relaxation of sectarian tension: "there was for a while, I think, a sense of discovery and exhilaration

⁴³ ed. James Simmons, *The Honest Ulsterman* 1 (May 1968): front cover.

⁴⁴ Tom Clyde, *Irish Literary Magazines: An Outline History and Descriptive Biography* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003): 254.

⁴⁵ Clyde, *Irish Literary Magazines*.

⁴⁶ Clyde, *Irish Literary Magazines*.

⁴⁷ Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance* 7.

⁴⁸ Michael Longley, 'Strife and the Ulster Poet,' *Hibernia*, 33.21 (7 Nov. 1969): 11.

among my generation that we were moving an inch or two past the old pieties, and rigidities, and the old divisions."⁴⁹ But clouds were gathering on the Northern Irish horizon. As the 60s came to a close, the nonviolent civil rights movement provoked an increasingly aggressive response from the Unionist community. And on August 12, 1969, a Catholic civil rights march was attacked by Unionists and off-duty police officers. That night, riots erupted in the Derry, and the Catholic residents of the Bogside erected "Free Derry"—a system of barriers to keep out the Protestants and the police.⁵⁰ On August 14, the British armed forces landed in Derry to restore order after days of fighting.⁵¹ What had begun as a civil rights movement had devolved into an extended and violent conflict between two ethno-nationalist communities and the British army that attempted to control them.⁵² With Belfast erupting in violence, the workshop found it harder and harder to meet. In 1972, Heaney would move out of the city to Wicklow south of the border, and its collectivity fell apart. As poets John Hewitt and John Montague recall, the talk on their 1971 reincarnation of the "Planter and the Gael" tour centered on emigration. "We began again in Newry (which had been badly bombed). The discussions afterwards centered largely on...clearing out of a situation which had become in the eyes of many almost intractable," Montague said.⁵³ Parents began to think of sending their kids to boarding schools out of the province.⁵⁴ The cross-cultural friendships formed between the Protestant and Catholic poets during the 1960s stability now strained and, sometimes, tore.⁵⁵ Instead of stressing their commonalities, the 60s generation focused on the stylistic differences that set them apart from and, at times, against one another.

⁴⁹ James Randall, "An Interview with Seamus Heaney," *Ploughshares* 18 (1979), accessed on online, *Ploughshares*, 12 Sept 2013 <<https://www.pshares.org/read/article-detail.cfm?intArticleID=9476>>.

⁵⁰ John J. Kane, "Civil Rights in Northern Ireland," *The Review of Politics*, 33.1 (Jan. 1971): 69.

⁵¹ Kane, "Civil Rights in Northern Ireland" 67.

⁵² Niall Ó Dochartaigh and Lorenzo Bosi, "Territoriality and Mobilization: The Civil Rights Campaign in Northern Ireland," *Mobilization* 15.4 (December 2010) 416.

⁵³ Kearney, "Beyond the Planter and Gael" 85-92.

⁵⁴ Letter from John Cronin to Frank Ormsby, circa 1972-73, Frank Ormsby papers, circa 1967-2004, Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁵⁵ Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance*.

And so I return to Williams' demand that we examine what the literary convention of the "Belfast group" did during the 1960s that allowed it to gain currency among the poets' themselves before its eventual disavowal in the 1970s and 80s. A great many factors came into play here, from the social to the economic to the cultural. As young poets trying to make themselves known to literary editors and publishing houses, Heaney, Mahon, and Longley (as well as those that followed) benefited from amassing each other's respective followings at public readings and events. When trying to position their work within the Northern Irish context, they charted their own proclivities and aesthetic tendencies against their contemporaries. And when the Northern Irish "poetic renaissance" began to catch the interests of British and American readers, these poets worked to insert themselves into the literary collective. Editors at both publishing houses and well-regarded literary magazines were looking for strong "Ulster" writers; it is no coincidence that the British publishers Faber and Faber, Oxford University Press, and Macmillan put out the first collections of Heaney, Mahon, and Longley, respectively. The international attention on the province and its poets would only continue as the images of bombed-out Belfast circulated through living rooms worldwide. But now it came with an implicit pressure that asked the poets to speak for their respective communities rather than merely as individual artists. "BBC TV's Late Night Line-Up seems to be interested in mounting a programme about the Ulster artists' response to 'The Situation.'--Ugh! I hear you say: but no publicity is bad publicity, as the fella said."⁵⁶ One American critic lambasted the apolitical fripperies of contemporary American poetry for not engaging in the uneasy world we live in. "For to judge from most recent American poetry, we stick to flowers and sidestep the rage, ignoring what we know or turning it to metaphor merely," Terence Des Pres wrote in *Harper's* in 1980. "What we need is what [Heaney] gives--a poetry that allows the spirit to face and engage, and thereby transcend, or at least stand up to, the murderous pressures of

⁵⁶ Letter from Michael Longley to Frank Ormsby, Frank Ormsby papers, MARBL, Emory University.

our time.”⁵⁷ That pressure to speak for Ulster’s Catholic community would ultimately send Heaney south into the republic, where he hoped to escape the demands of public spokespersonship.⁵⁸ With their names already established and books of their work on the store shelves, the Ulster poets no longer needed the swaddling band of their literary collective which lapped and tightened “Till [they] were braced and bound/Like brothers in a ring.”⁵⁹ What had been a literary support for the fledgling writers now constrained and confined their creative output, particularly when placed in the hands of ambitious literary critics who set out to study their work.

What the Belfast poetic community cohered around was not a common aesthetic sensibility, but a collective attempt to articulate structures of feeling that adequately engaged with what it felt like to live in such a divided society. “What is/My name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going?”⁶⁰ The question these poets consistently asked through their work: What did it mean to be an Ulster poet in contradistinction to an Irish or a British one? Better yet, was there even such a thing?

After all, partition had created the geopolitical entity of “Northern Ireland” only 40 years before. And for the bulk of the 20th century, the persona and work of W.B. Yeats had dominated the island’s literary topography, casting a shadow over the efforts of those writers who deigned to represent the Irish situation. “You know, Goethe one described Shakespeare (to Eckermann) as a wildly overgrown tree that—for two hundred years straight—had stifled the growth of all English literature.”⁶¹ Likewise, Yeats would stifle the poetic imaginary through the 1920s and 30s. While he articulated and, in part, catalyzed the sense of an Irish nationalism that would prefigure the political movement for a free Irish Republic, his legacy and perspective would find themselves on contentious ground in divided Ulster. The

⁵⁷ Terrence Des Pres, “Emblems of Adversity: Seamus Heaney, Politics and Poetics,” *Harper’s* (March 1981): 74.

⁵⁸ Randall, “An Interview with Seamus Heaney” (1979).

⁵⁹ Seamus Heaney, “Casualty,” *A Rage for Order* (1992): lines 59-59.

⁶⁰ Carson, “Belfast Confetti,” lines 8-9.

⁶¹ Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, *The Letter Killers Club*, translated by Joanne Turnbull with Nikolai Formozov (New York: New York Review of Books Classics, 2011): 4.

incommensurability of the two nationalist projects with their respective theological banners did not allow for the new Irish nation to “come build in the empty house of the stare.”⁶² Poet and critic W.J. McCormack went so far as to catalogue Yeats’ influence as “entirely harmful.” Writing in 1972, he concluded that “Sometime during the last decade--it is impossible to be quite precise about these things--it became clear that Irish culture was recovering from the death of W.B. Yeats. In a sense this involved recovery from Yeats himself.”⁶³ Seamus Deane, a good friend of Heaney’s and a poet himself, would plot the liberation from a Yeatsian imaginary a decade earlier with the rise of the poets Patrick Kavanagh in the South and John Montague in the North.⁶⁴ This is not to say that no one wrote in the aftermath of Yeats. The Irish literary consciousness simply did not register voices unless it could map them in relation to his particular fusion of Celtic mythos and nationalist investment in the land. “For a young [Irish] poet in 1920 or 1930, the question was how not to write like Yeats and how to find areas not already dominated, or exhausted, by him,” an Irish literary critic wrote in 1981.⁶⁵ Yeats—both his aesthetic and his mythologized sense of the Irish past—drew the literary grid of intelligibility, so to speak.⁶⁶ Writers were always working around the margins and reacting against him, but it would take several generations before their work could emerge from his shadow. As the younger poets, including

⁶² A stare is an Irish word for “starling.” W.B. Yeats, “Meditations in a time of civil war,” *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (New York: Scribner, 1996).

⁶³ W.J. McCormack, “Straight Lines Becoming Circles: The Poetry of Seamus Heaney and Derek Mahon,” *Acorn* (Spring 1972). Accessed in the Seamus Heaney papers, Manuscript, Archive and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁶⁴ “[Montague and Kavanagh] modified the sensibility of Irish poetry to such an extent that the over-riding influence of Yeats was reduced. They liberated the new generation into the realization that poetry could transcend provincial narrowness, that the experience of living in County Derry could, at a sufficient level of intensity, become available to many people as a characteristic human and modern experience.” Seamus Deane, “Seamus Heaney,” *Ireland Today* 977 (June 1981): 2. Accessed in the Seamus Heaney papers, MARBL, Emory University.

⁶⁵ Maurice Harmon, introduction, *Irish Poetry After Yeats: Seven Poets* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1981).

⁶⁶ Here I point to Raymond Williams’ concept of the preemergent: “In certain socio-historical circumstances, there are things which could not be said, and therefore, in any connecting way, not thought,” Williams reasons. “This may help to explain the very common cultural phenomenon of an extraordinarily shocking innovation of discourse—Freud himself is an example of this—which yet produces elements of recognition.” Williams, *Politics and Letters*.

those of the Belfast group in the 1960s and 70s, demonstrate, Yeats still influences their work, yet he is no longer the sole point of affiliation.⁶⁷

For ultimately, Yeats' Irish nationalism could not hold up to the fierce divisions that fractured the insular, economically-depressed province of Northern Ireland. Without a literary progenitor as a fixed point in the literary topos, the 1960s generation had to locate themselves. The material rift between the ideological communities of Northern Ireland's Catholic Republicans and Protestant Unionists had much deeper historical roots, and its contest became embodied in the territorial struggle over the six Ulster counties. Both Protestant and Catholic poets attempted to articulate the lived experience of an individual within a fierce nationalist conflict, one that had previously figured as pre-emergent.⁶⁸ As Heaney notes, identifying as Catholic signifies much more than a religious affiliation in Northern Ireland:

It's almost a racist term, a label for a set of cultural suppositions. I think if you look at my poems with that in mind then you will see that when I think about my territory and my hinterland and my past, I am thinking in terms of Ireland as a whole and the history of the famine and the rebellion. Within Northern Ireland having that set of myths for yourself and your nation is what it means to be a Catholic.⁶⁹

Likewise, growing up in Ulster's Unionist communities imparted its own set of culturally-inflected rituals, myths, and imaginaries, many buried as subtext within the words themselves. Its resonances tended to inhere in the historical and mythic rather the material. "The culture I grew up in was devoid of barraka," Mahon said in a 1980s interview. By 'barraka,' he references a concept from the Islamic Sufism tradition that regards certain physical objects as vessels for an infusion of divine grace. Mahon continues, "I was

⁶⁷ For instance, several critics have traced the Yeatsian influences in Heaney's poetry.

⁶⁸ A number of poets had arisen out of the Ulster counties through the years, but—like Louis MacNeice—they had not existed as a "Northern Irish" poet concerned with the region's distinctive structure of feeling. Williams argues that the temporality of a structure's articulation varies can be at odds with its actual emergence within a populace: "It is obvious that there is also a temporal unevenness in the formation and evolution of these structures." *Politics and Letters*, 140.

⁶⁹ Interview with Seamus Heaney, *The Guardian* (2 Nov. 1974), accessed in the Seamus Heaney papers, MARBL, Emory University.

brought up deprived of a sense of the holiness of things. Protestantism is a rejection of barraka. The historical sources of Protestantism are rooted in a fear of disease, syphilis and plague. Cleanliness is next to Godliness or, rather, Cleanliness is Godliness.”⁷⁰

While these two communities cohered around different affective positions and drew their own imaginative maps, they were each familiar with the vocabulary and cultural markers of the other. Catholics saw the Unionist fraternal organization, the Orange Order, and its commemoration parades as triumphant assertions of their own territorial dominance; in turn, Unionists opposed to the Anglo-Irish agreement crafted the slogan “Ulster says no,” playing off the fact that the Irish language does not have words for ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ The Catholics could not say yes, even as the Protestants said no. And so while we can divide the Belfast poets into Catholic and Protestant cultural imaginaries (but not political stances!), they share a common problematic—namely, how to locate themselves as individuals within or against a strong nationalist community, particularly given the deaths being inflicted in its name.

Both Republicanism and Unionism act as what Aaron Kelly describes as “rusticative ideologies.” “By this I mean that Irish Nationalism and Unionism literally ground themselves on a pastoral conservatism which has profound implications for the representation of place and social relations in Irish culture.”⁷¹ These ideological communities grounded their identity in imaginative landscapes, particularly the rural—“the Antrim hills, the bog meadows, the heaped/graves of [their] fathers.”⁷² Exerting their control over the land required staking out a territory and populating it; these communities continuously maintained territorializing rituals and markers, from the Unionist parades commemorating the Battle of the Boyne to the Republicans’ public funerals for fallen Catholic martyrs. Regardless of their religious affinity, the Belfast poets had to figure out where they fit into this territorial dispute, what hold

⁷⁰ Liam Murphy, “Immortalised in poetry but not by the poets,” *Belfast Media Group*, 12 Oct 2012, accessed online, 6 Oct 2013, <<http://belfastmediagroup.com/immortalised-in-poetry-but-not-by-the-poets/>>.

⁷¹ Aaron Kelly, *The Thriller in Troubles Ireland* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2005) 83.

⁷² Derek Mahon, “Ecclesiastes,” *A Rage for Order* (1992): lines 15-16.

their native communities had over them, and in what space—if any—they could find “somewhere, well out, beyond” the sectarian politics. “A dialectic between roots and mobility has always structured the imaginative topography, the aesthetic options, of Northern Irish poets,” Edna Longley notes.⁷³

Such a reading of the Ulster writers returns the aesthetic to a general functioning of a perceptual field rather than isolating it into a conventionally artistic space that welcomes only ruminations on an abstract beauty.⁷⁴ And it makes a strong case for a particular Northern Irish assemblage of enunciation with its own system of references, implicit presuppositions, and subjectivizing claims. To use the word “Ulster” is to always-already internalize a Protestant identity. To reference the potato famine not simply identifies you as a Catholic, but locates you within a particular imaginative framework. “In this Irish past I dwell.”⁷⁵ Even the linguistic sounds insert themselves into the Northern Irish bodies and subjectivize them in particular ways. “We are to be proud/of our Elizabethan English:/ ‘varsity’, for example,/is grass-roots stuff with us;/we ‘deem’ or we ‘allow,’” Heaney writes, speaking from the position of a middle-class Catholic. “Not to speak of the furred/consonants of lowlanders/shuttling obstinately/between bawn and mossland.”⁷⁶ This collective assemblage of enunciation is not first a collection of individuals whose voices cohere; as Deleuze and Guattari note, often times these speakers do not agree. Instead, it takes root in an “indirect discourse” held in common. By indirect discourse, Deleuze and Guattari mean the statements, implicit assumptions, and connotative resonances present within the various individuated moments of speaking that enable a collectivity to communicate with one another.⁷⁷ From that collective enunciation, individuated voices

⁷³ Edna Longley, “American Reads on Irish Poetry.”

⁷⁴ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 49-50.

⁷⁵ Seamus Deane, “Return,” *A Rage for Order* (1992): line 11.

⁷⁶ Seamus Heaney, “Traditions,” *Wintering Out*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1972) lines 13-17; 21-24.

⁷⁷ They note, “Indirect discourse is the presence of a reported statement within the reporting statement, the presence of an order-word within the word.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 84.

can then separate themselves out⁷⁸ “The collective assemblage is always like the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which I draw my voice.”⁷⁹

And so while Catholics and Protestants belong to different territories and different rusticative ideologies, they can both be situated within the same indirect discourse. Their voices are set up against one another, but the subjectivizing claims and presupposed references are understood by both groups—even if Catholics only stake a claim over the Unionist indirect discourse by attempting to negate it. The unstated promise: If your Orange Order chapters parade through our streets, we will throw stones.

For the poets themselves, they too could reckon with the discursive framings used by their peers across the ethno-national divide. They could identify themselves and their contemporaries as either “Catholic” or “Protestant” poets, even as such designations would pass unnoticed by a general audience outside of the Northern Irish collective assemblage. One interviewer talking to Heaney asked him if he was surprised that most Americans could not tell that he was a Catholic poet. “Poetry works by association and subtlety and the cultural load implicit in a word,” Heaney replied. “I would think that the cultural, rather than the religious load, implicit in that term Catholic is in my work, [but] no, it would not surprise me that someone outside Ireland didn't know I was a Catholic.”⁸⁰ And their work too constituted its own body of indirect discourse. Edna Longley notes, “Tradition is constituted by the intercourse between poems.”⁸¹ As inflected pieces of discourse, the verse is social first and foremost as opposed to evocative of any individual poet's identity. Deleuze and Guattari would say that these poems have become expressive. “Expressive qualities or matters of expression enter shifting relations with one another that ‘express’ the relation of the territory they draw to the interior milieu of impulses and

⁷⁸ In our linguistic engagements, “we are all latecomers.” Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁷⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 84.

⁸⁰ Interview with Seamus Heaney, *The Guardian* (2 Nov. 1974).

⁸¹ Edna Longley, “American Reads on Irish Poetry.”

exterior milieu of circumstances.”⁸² They articulate a particular imaginative field, or territory, and convey the individual’s social and affective relation to it. In the Northern Ireland of the Troubles, identifying with or belonging to either nationalist community admitted a complicity and sense of guilt. To return to Muldoon, “we are all now dispossessed” and the Catholic and Protestant poets alike are busy provisioning their wagons to set out for their respective Oregons. “There is a whole art of poses, postures, silhouettes, steps and voices...How very important it is, when chaos threatens, to draw an inflatable, portable territory. If need be, I’ll put my territory on my own body.”⁸³

This collective assemblage of enunciation can be traced along a number of literary axes: within the verse of the poets themselves; within the critical readings and discursive responses penned by their critics; in the curation and promulgation carried out by magazine and anthology editors; and in the acts of reclamation that retooled past Irish writers into their literary forbearers.⁸⁴ And so I will next turn to the structures of feeling that the young Belfast poets first took up during the 1960s as potential articulations of their own lived experiences—first, by turning to the Protestant and “rational humanist,” John Hewitt, and then, by way of the ironic wit of Louis MacNeice. As Heaney notes, “the irony is so important. In the north, northern irony has allowed people to stand at the edge of the rift and shout across to each other.” Ultimately, the poets will have to revise and retool—sometimes discarding entirely—the structures of feeling embodied in Hewitt’s and MacNeice’s work as the violence destabilizes their sense of place, their sense of community, and the connective tissue between the two.

⁸² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 326.

⁸³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 320.

⁸⁴ “It was necessary to show that all kinds of writing produce meaning and value—to use that shorthand again—by modes of composition and deep conventions of stance or focus.” Williams, *Politics and Letters* 309.

Chapter 2: *'We Shall Not Be Outcast upon the World:'*
John Hewitt and the Protestant Colonial Predicament

Frank Ormsby, a former editor of the renowned little magazine, *The Honest Ulsterman*, and a poet in his own right, faced a daunting task: compiling an anthology of poetry that engaged with the latest eruption of the Northern Irish Troubles. As part and parcel of his project, Ormsby didn't simply want to draw from his contemporaries, those individuals who published during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s; he endeavored to look backwards, to put the renowned writers like Heaney and Longley into dialogue with those Irish poets who had come before. After all, he concluded, "Troubles poetry (like the Troubles themselves) did not originate in 1968."⁸⁵ In the generations since partition, a number of writers—Roy McFadden and Robert Greacen, to name a couple—attempted to engage the Northern situation through the literary, yet their work never made much of an impact beyond the region. As the 1960s generation cohered and rose to international prominence, they sifted through their elders for models and influences.

Navigating and drawing together an imagined community requires a genesis story, a literary lineage specific to Ulster out of which the contemporary writers sprang. In 1960s Northern Ireland, this process involved more than simply harkening back to those who came before; Ormsby and his contemporaries engaged in an active process of staking their claim on older writers and remaking their legacies to reflect the present. The poets and particular poems that they dug up says more about them—about their aesthetic project and their sense of life in a divided society—than it does about the jumble of individuals who were writing in Northern Ireland in the decades prior. Many writers, including big names like Heaney and Longley as well as the more regionally-bounded voices like Michael Foley, engaged in this process of historical revisionism as they set out to locate themselves and their peers within the Irish literary tradition. In doing so, they latched onto writers whose work resonated with the

⁸⁵ Ormsby, introduction, *A Rage for Order* xvi.

Northern Irish structure of feeling, whose affective register seemed to embody their own relationship with the sectarian divide. Explaining his affinity for Belfast-born poet Louis MacNeice, Nick Laird wrote, "He made it ok to be yourself, and he made it okay to be immensely angry. I think I read his Irish poems as almost like contemporary commentary on what we were then living through."⁸⁶

But mapping an Ulster literary tradition was clearly as contested as the label itself, and the process highlights how divisive the construction of a literary canon can be. For instance, in one attempt, Ormsby wrote an essay in which he included Hewitt but left out Robert Greason when describing the so-called 1940s generation of Ulster writers.⁸⁷ A few weeks later, McFadden sent Ormsby a strongly-worded letter to correct what he saw to be misapprehensions: "I don't understand this rewriting of history by omission and silence."⁸⁸ Ormsby did not print a retraction.

But most of the literary historiography took hold through the vehicle of the anthology. As the national and international profile of the Northern Irish poets swelled—in part on the coattails of Heaney's unexpected fame—a series of anthologies appeared that claimed to collate the best of Northern Irish poetry. Each anthologist, who was usually a member of the poetry cohort to begin with, had to make difficult decisions as to where to draw the delineating boundaries, both in geographic and in generational terms. The Belfast-born but New-York-raised poet, Padraic Fiacc, ran with work from almost everyone, it seemed, who was writing directly about the Troubles in his 1972 *The Wearing of the Black*. His curatorial attempt met with a fairly critical response for its blunt, unsparing engagement with the violence.⁸⁹ (The cover of the anthology, which pictured a split orange and green heart whose fragments were held together by a black band, sparked quite a bit of controversy at the time; a

⁸⁶ Nick Laird, "The Seal and the Cat," *Incorrigibly Plural: Louis MacNeice and His Legacy*, ed. Fran Brearton and Edna Longley (Manchester, UK: Caracanet Press, 2012): 245.

⁸⁷ Letter from Roy McFadden to Frank Ormsby, 10 May 1979, Frank Ormsby papers, circa 1967-2004, MARBL, Emory University.

⁸⁸ Letter from Roy McFadden to Frank Ormsby, 10 May 1979.

⁸⁹ James Simmons, "The Man Most Touched," rev. of *The Wearing of the Black*, ed. Padraic Fiacc, *The Honest Ulsterman* 46-47 (Nov 1974 – Feb 1975) 66-71.

“tasteless” decision, notes Dawe.)⁹⁰ Anthologies that purported to represent the best of Irish verse became fiercely politicized along North-South lines, with critics counting up how many writers were represented from each camp. In the 1974 *Faber Book of Irish Verse*, John Montague included a substantial body of work from Northern poets, ranging from Heaney and Mahon to the newcomers Muldoon and Carson. Even when drawing from the same poet’s opus, anthologists and poets alike could narrow their gaze on very different facets of his work. But even for their differences, it quickly became clear that anthologists, the editors who supported them, and the critics who reviewed them had accepted the existence of such a thing as a “northern voice” in Irish verse. Brian Kennelly first declared – “presciently” notes poet and critic Gerald Dawe – the emergence of a “Northern voice” in his introduction to the *Penguin Book of Irish Verse*, released in 1970.⁹¹ As the decade unspooled, anthologists of Irish verse began to reflect greater and greater awareness of a delineated “Northern contingent” revolving around the now-established Ulster writers, namely Heaney, Mahon, Longley, Montague, and Simmons. Dawe notes a number of collections that take the designation as an unproblematic term of the Irish poetry lineage: Montague’s *Irish Poets in English* (1972), Mahon’s *The Sphere Book of Irish Verse* (1972), Heaney’s *Soundings, 72* (1972), Montague’s *The Faber Book of Irish Verse* (1974), James Simmons’ *Ten Irish Poets* (1974), Fiacca’s controversial *The Wearing of the Black* (1974), and Simmons’ *Anthology of New Irish Writing* (1976). These anthologies lay the critical foundations for a Northern literary canon “These anthologies of the 1970s were conscious of national and cultural identity, but not to the extent they were to receive in Ireland and elsewhere in the decades ahead,” poet and critic Gerald Dawe reflected. “Anecdotally, so to speak, awareness had grown about why and how a group of writers should be considered together and read from a shifting yet coherent generational and regional perspective.”⁹²

⁹⁰ Dawe, “History Class.”

⁹¹ Brian Kennelly, introduction, *The Penguin Book of Irish Verse* (London: Penguin, 1970).

⁹² Dawe, “History Class.”

Two writers in particular appeared again and again as the literary forefathers of the 1960s and 70s poets—the regionalist, John Hewitt, and W.H. Auden’s contemporary, Louis MacNeice. These two poets served as “one of the sort of bedrocks of Ulster poetry.”⁹³ Hewitt, who had not made much of an impact outside of Ulster, tended to focus on the province’s rural cadences. MacNeice, on the other hand, did enjoy an international reputation but as a second-tier British poet when compared to the likes of Auden. Both Protestants, they plumbed the discomfiting affective situation of existing over and against a Catholic minority. Ormsby saw the work of these two writers as prefiguring the affective resonances and tensions that dominated the region during its most recent devolution into sectarian conflict. In his introduction, he refers to several instances of their work as “source poems” for the generations of writers that would follow on their heels and reclaim their footsteps as their own. A number of critics have noted that the revitalized interest in Hewitt and MacNeice alike dovetailed with the emergence of a seemingly-coherent poetic community in Belfast during the 1960s. Edna Longley, wife of the poet Michael Longley and a burgeoning literary critic in her own right, focused much of her critical energy on MacNeice.⁹⁴ In the first few years of its existence, *The Honest Ulsterman* ran a number of critical pieces on the work of MacNeice and Hewitt alike, as did several other Ulster publications, including *Fortnight* and *Phoenix*. “The appearance of Louis MacNeice’s *Collected Poems* (1966) and John Hewitt’s *Collected Poems 1932-1967* (1968) confirmed these poets as exemplars and influences,” Ormsby concludes.⁹⁵

The Ulster writers built the literary legacies of Hewitt and MacNeice not merely on the grounds that these poets served as formal influences, although Hewitt’s sensuous attention to words and MacNeice’s obsession with the constraints of British forms certainly did provide channels for their own

⁹³ Frank Ormsby, Personal interview, 31 July 2013.

⁹⁴ Edna Longley published a volume of her work on MacNeice (*Louis MacNeice: A Study*) with Faber and Faber in 1988.

⁹⁵ Ormsby, introduction, *A Rage for Order* xvi.

poetic craft to follow. Both poets also explored and articulated the Northern Irish experience in ways that resonated with the younger generations. Hewitt espoused a particular attachment to the soil; his notions of identity and community were inherited in place, considered both as a demarcating name and as an invocation of a particular landscape. MacNeice, on the other hand, wrote from a sense of perpetual displacement. For him, identities—and the territories that ground them—should be treated as hybrid. Individuals can and do traverse them, moving between one to the other sequentially and spatially and even simultaneously. Hewitt mobilized the perceptual and affective technique of rootedness. MacNeice, the parallax. The 1960s generation's reclamations and critical readings are part and parcel of their attempt to identify particular Northern Irish structures of feeling that predominated in Ulster in the middle of the 20th century.

Given that Hewitt did not enjoy as much of an international reputation as did MacNeice, it is easy to overlook and understate his importance to the Ulster literary topos. But the poet, who was born and raised in Belfast, served as a fatherly figure for multiple generations of the province's writers. He could be "sort of crusty and awkward" in person, but he continually supported the aspiring poets; "every time I met Hewitt, he continued to furnish my house" with spare pieces of furniture he had lying around, Ormsby remembers.⁹⁶ Hewitt began publishing poetry seriously in the 1930s and, except for a dry spell during the 1950s, he remained prolific through the 1980s until his death in 1987. Even by the time the 1940s generation—loosely grouped around McFadden and W.R. Rodgers—had taken off, Hewitt had already become an old hat.⁹⁷ But they did look to him for his regionalist stance. A self-described "rational humanist" and socialist within the Protestant community, Hewitt advocated for overcoming the fierce sectarian divide by focusing on Ulster as its own territory. In one interview, he described his sedimented layers of communal affiliation in the following order of importance: Ulster, Irish, British,

⁹⁶ Ormsby, Personal interview, 31 July 2013.

⁹⁷ Letter from McFadden to Ormsby, 10 May 1979.

European.⁹⁸ Throughout his career, Hewitt touted a distinctly regionalist identity, both through his own verse and through his academic scholarship. During the 1970s, Hewitt published several books collating the work of as well as documenting the Ulster poets from the 19th century. Notably, he made a strong case for reclaiming a group of “rhyming weavers” who worked in the Ulster linen industry and also submitted work regularly to newspapers for publication; their verse, which appeared contemporaneously as the Scottish poet Robert Burns, was motivated by regionalist concerns and spoke in the distinctive working-class idiomatic.⁹⁹ As the Troubles quickened in Derry and Belfast, Newry and Dungannon, the political efficacy of Hewitt’s regionalism became increasingly discounted as ahistorical and a tacit endorsement of Unionist hegemony.¹⁰⁰ But his work remained closely tied to the regional landscapes and to this problematic of belonging/not-belonging, and as such, any poets that followed after him into this new literary designation of a “Northern Irish” renaissance looked back to his influence—even if only to turn on their heel and head in the opposite direction. Hewitt “broke the repressive silences of the North in a way that had long-term repercussions.”¹⁰¹

But to move to the structure of feeling embodied in his work: Hewitt was a rusticative poet. His verse invoked a strong connection to rural life and the Ulster landscape. Again and again, he looked for inspiration to “this rich earth [that can] so enhance the blood/with steady pulse.”¹⁰² Many of his poems,

⁹⁸ Quoted in Eavan Boland, “The Clash of Identities,” *The Irish Times* (4 July 1974). Cited again in Terence Brown, *Northern Voices* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1975): 230.

⁹⁹ John Hewitt, introduction, *Rhyming Weavers and Other Country Poets of Antrim and Down* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1974) vii.

¹⁰⁰ “Hewitt’s regionalism suited the feeling of possession and independence of the empowered Protestants with their own Parliament and fail-safe majority at Stormont more than it could ever suit the sense of dispossession and political marginalization of the Catholics.” Seamus Heaney, “The Frontiers of Writing,” *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber 1995) 195.

“Besides, what is all this about “the Ulster writer”. What about the Munster writer, the East Anglian writer, the Scottish writer? ... I fail to see why his chosen region should have been Ulster rather than Ireland as a whole: a point on which we stuck more than once, myself sitting forward in my chair, himself puffing pugnaciously at his pipe.” Derek Mahon, *Journalism: Selected Prose 1970-1995* (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1996) 94.

¹⁰¹ Edna Longley, “Between the Saxon Smile and the Yankee Yawp’: Problems and Contexts of Literary Reviewing in Ireland,” *Grub Street and the Ivory Tower: Literary Journalism and Literary Scholarship from Fielding to the Internet*, ed. Jeremy Treglown and Bridget Bennett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 200-223.

¹⁰² John Hewitt, “Once Alien Here,” *A Rage for Order* (1992) lines 21-22.

rather than focusing on his city home, took as their backdrop the lonely images of bog and rock. But these landscapes were affectively inflected; through their territorial claims, the individual takes on an identity and belongs to a given territory. "Because of rock and glen/and mist and cloud/and quality of air/as native in my thought as any here," Hewitt states.¹⁰³ This belonging-to-the-land, however, is a social act first and foremost. The community has turned and made this space into a place; it has located itself within a territory whose spatiotemporal extension it has constructed through its own territorializing labor. "This is my country; my grandfather came here/and raised his walls and fenced the tangled waste/and gave his years and strength into the earth."¹⁰⁴ Hewitt, in turn, marked the land as his own by mapping its surfaces in his poetry. "Tyrone, Fermanagh... I stand by a lake,/and the bubbling curlew, the whistling plover/call over the whins in the chill daybreak."¹⁰⁵ His early work drew a firm line connecting the Irish names of places and the territories they evoke. "The names of a land show the heart of the race;/ they move on the tongue like the lilt of a song./ You say the name and I see the place."¹⁰⁶ After all, to name is to delineate, to mark, to overcode undifferentiated physical space with a socially-constructed sense of place. Robert Pogue Harrison explores the territorializing process that turns an anywhere into a somewhere with his theorizations of the burial marker:

For what is a place if not its memory of itself—a site or locale where time turns back upon itself? The grave marks a site in the landscape where time cannot merely pass through, or pass over. Time must now gather around the sema and mortalize itself. It is precisely this mortalization of time that gives place its articulated boundaries, distinguishing it from the infinity of homogeneous space.¹⁰⁷

In much the same way, the Irish name translates the rock and glen of anywhere into the place where memory latches and doubles back on itself. Rarely did Hewitt contest this stable relationship that he had

¹⁰³ Hewitt, "Once Alien Here," lines 14-16.

¹⁰⁴ John Hewitt, "Bloody Brae: a dramatic poem," *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, ed. Frank Ormsby (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1992) lines 1-4.

¹⁰⁵ John Hewitt, "Ulster Names," *A Rage for Order* (1992) lines 27-30.

¹⁰⁶ Hewitt, "Ulster Names," lines 11-13.

¹⁰⁷ Harrison, *Dominion of the Dead* 23.

posited between territory, community, and identity as enacted through forms of territorializing expression, whether that be planting or naming. But he did worry in some of his later work that this triangulation ultimately only served as an ideal and unrealizable state. In "The search," Hewitt writes of the experience of living in exile in London; the poem takes what had previously been treated as a stable and essential claim to place-based identities and casts it in a more uncertain light:

The Search
for Shirley and Darryl

We left the western island to live among strangers
in a city older by centuries
than the market town which we had come from
where the slow river spills out between green hills
and gulls perch on the bannered poles.

It is a hard responsibility to be a stranger;
to hear your speech sounding at odds with your neighbours';
holding your tongue from quick comparisons;
remembering that you are a guest in the house.

Often you will regret the voyage,
wakening in the dark night to recall that other place
or glimpsing the moon rising and recollecting
that it is also rising over named hills,
shining on known waters.

But sometimes the thought
that you have not come away from, but returned,
to this older place whose landmarks are yours also,
occurs when you look down a long street remarking
the architectural styles or move through a landscape
with wheat ripening in large fields.

Yet you may not rest here, having come back,
for this is not your abiding place, either.

The authorities declare that in former days
the western island was uninhabited,
just as where you now reside was once tundra,
and what you seek may be no more than
a broken circle of stones on a rough hillside, somewhere.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ John Hewitt, "The search," *A Rage for Order* (1992).

In the first stanza, Hewitt sets up the rusticative territory against the strange urbanity that London presents to the speaker. In the “market town,”—already an attenuation of Belfast that both makes it more manageable and links it to the bucolic—the rural continues to intrude. “The slow river spills out between green hills/and gulls perch on the bannered poles.” In London, the speaker and his family figure as strangers, uprooted and displaced. Here, it is telling that Hewitt does not focus much on the perils of an unfamiliar landscape, but instead on the acts of dwelling and inhabitation that no longer feel comfortable. The speaker is no longer immersed in a social grid that is known and familiar, and his family’s speech sounds at odds with the neighbors’. A territory is more than a geopolitical delineation for Hewitt; it is created and maintained through the rituals of co-habitation. And so with that quotidian displacement comes the social burden of not remarking on every “quick comparison” between life in the market town and life in the city. What is new and known to you only by difference; remember that you are a guest in the house.

The landscape figures again when the speaker reflects on his sense of loss. The other place is captured and held in the memory through its names and through its images. “Glimpsing the moon rising and recollecting/that it is also rising over named hills,/shining on known waters,” the speaker feels his distance from his hearth. And yet, Hewitt reflects, the English cityscape should not feel like exile for a Protestant, given that “you have not come away from, but returned,/to this older place whose landmarks are yours also.” The beginning of the fourth stanza marks a singular turn in the poem’s argument. Here, Hewitt complicates the structure of feeling by revealing the territory’s artifice—and thus opens ground for revised or new ideas of an Ulster place. Taking the Unionist rusticative ideology as the object of his gaze, he ruminates on the ephemerality of these place-based constructions. After all, Northern Ireland’s Protestant community lays claims to their British roots and occasionally, the sedimented traces of that territory set off frissions of recognition in the speaker as he walks the unfamiliar streets looking at the building facades or passes through England’s carefully-ordered wheat

fields. The Protestant settlers took the name of “planter,” and Hewitt cannot mistake the similarities between his community’s acts of dwelling and place-making and those of his British ancestors—even if they do not register as personally familiar. Yet the Protestants who settled Ulster in the 17th and 18th centuries do not belong to the same territory that the 20th century speaker does; the land has changed them as they have changed it into a belonging-together of field and dweller. As Hewitt writes of the Protestant structure of feeling in another poem: “The use, the pace, the patient years of labour,/the rain against lips, the changing light,/the heavy clay-sucked stride, have altered us;/we would be strangers in the Capitol.”¹⁰⁹ And so the speaker’s sense of dislocation continues: “Yet you may not rest here, having come back,/for this is not your abiding place, either.” Throughout his career, Hewitt wrestled at length with the in-between and disjointed existence of Ulster’s ruling minority. Did they belong to the Irish tradition or the English? What did it mean to speak for a group “lacking skill in either scale of song,/the graver English, lyric Irish tongue?” He sought his answer in the rich Ulster soil.

In “The search,” Hewitt does not answer the problem of displacement by returning to the Ulster ground. Instead, he questions the phenomenon of emplacement altogether by introducing geologic time back into the spatial logic of the ethno-nationalist communities. Centuries ago, the speaker notes, all of this contested and constructed place was “uninhabited”—even Britain “was once tundra.” For all the literary and popular mythologizing, the sacred grove of one group does not always remain so, nor is it for those who merely pass through. What is it that separates the geological terrain from the affectively-invested and subjectivizing territory? Speaking to himself and more broadly to his soil-obsessed community, he closes by destabilizing the ethno-nationalist investment in place: “what you seek may be no more than/a broken circle of stones on a rough hillside, somewhere.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ John Hewitt, “The colony,” *A Rage for Order* (1992) lines 135-138.

¹¹⁰ Hewitt, “The Search” lines 26-27.

For all of his focus on fostering a regionalist perspective, Hewitt made his most radical contribution to the Ulster literature in 1939 when he published a poem that compared the planters to Roman colonists. A substantial work, "The colony" explored the Protestants' acts of colonization through the allegory of a Roman colony a few centuries after its founding.¹¹¹ Its speaker, a descendent of the original colonists, relates the historical relationship between his community, the natives, and the land as well as sets up the political problem of "the native question" that plagues the province to this day. The fictional setting gives Hewitt enough distance to explore the fraught relations between the Protestants and the Catholics in Ulster, yet it was still a controversial claim for a Protestant to make about his own community—at least in the late 1930s. "Hewitt's move was original and epoch-making, a significant extension of the imagining faculty into the domain of politics," noted Heaney, "but it could not wholly reconcile the Unionist mystique of Britishness with the Irish nationalist sense of the priority of the Gaelic inheritance."¹¹² Introducing a colonialist framework rearticulated the nature of Protestant hegemony and legitimized the Catholics' sense of victimhood and marginalization. It assigned blame to the English and Scots settlers, even as Hewitt also staked a Protestant claim to share the territory in the 20th century.

Hewitt's astute identification of the Ulster province with other anticolonial struggles and post-colonial locales prefigures much of the critical scholarship in Irish area studies in the second half of the 20th century. Today, entire issues of academic journals promise to excavate the colonial legacy from Ireland's political and cultural fields. Yet the question of Ireland, and more specifically Ulster's, colonial past is not a simple one. The length of its colonization process and the distortions of its partial decolonization bucks the generic model of postcolonial thought. Even using the label of colonialism

¹¹¹ Ormsby argues that Hewitt's decision to speak about Northern Ireland indirectly through the displacement of the Roman analogy would serve as a model for later generations of Belfast poets, including Heaney himself. Ormsby, introduction, *A Rage for Order* xvi.

¹¹² Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* 195.

became another front in the conflagration between the Unionists and the Catholics in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, as one scholar notes: "Ireland's location within debates on postcoloniality has always been—and will no doubt remain—contested, yet its inclusion is vital because of that very contestation."¹¹³ There is no denying, however, that many anticolonial struggles around the world looked to the Irish context for conceptual and political guidance; in a 1999 interview, leading postcolonial theorist Edward Said attributed much of his own theoretical development to his familiarity with the Irish experiences at the hands of the British settlers.¹¹⁴

At the close of the 1960s, the poetry community would revisit Hewitt's colonist and bring his affective map back into the conversation. The National Arts Council of Northern Ireland had commissioned Hewitt, a Protestant, and his Catholic corollary, John Montague, to participate in a public reading tour around the province in 1970. Known as 'The Planter and the Gael,' the tour visited a number of towns around the nine counties and took as its explicit project promoting reconciliation through the arts.¹¹⁵ Speaking about the decision to read under such a delineation, Hewitt characterized it as a gesture reminiscent of an olive branch:

In the community I come from we never call ourselves the planters. That is an aspect of our history which we have forgotten about. By calling myself a planter I make the admission that my people began to colonize. But when I make that recognition I am more acceptable to the Gael because I let him know where I stand.¹¹⁶

Hewitt saw himself as a rational and egalitarian Protestant, and the first step towards reconciling with the Catholics involved admitting their historical wrongs. And in "The colony," he attempts to do just that by mapping the colonization topographically. "First came the legions, then the colonists" and with them,

¹¹³ "Likewise, the escalation of the nationalist-republican violence in the North of Ireland was figured as a late-colonial crisis by many Irish postcolonial scholars, and thus the field of postcolonial studies within the Irish context became embroiled in a very real ideological, and no less military, conflagration." Eoin Flannery, "Irish Cultural Studies and Postcolonial Theory," *Postcolonial Text* 3.3 (2007).

¹¹⁴ Kevin Whelan, "Interview with Edward W. Said," *Postcolonial Texts* 3.3 (2007).

¹¹⁵ Sarah Ferris, *Poet John Hewitt and Criticism of Northern Irish Protestant Writing* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002) 18.

¹¹⁶ Kearney, "Beyond the Planter and Gael" 85.

“young law clerks skilled with chart and stylus,/their boxes crammed with lease-scrolls duly marked/with distances and names, to be defined/when all was mapped.” The map: the tool that the colonizer uses to stake out his territory and wrest its contours from the natives who have known it longer and more intimately. When the settlers had finished their maps, there remained some land not amenable to their settlements or agriculture. To find the Irish people, the speaker instructs, look to the “marshy quarters, fens, the broken hills, and all the rougher places where the whin still thrust from limestone with its cracking pods.”¹¹⁷ In their stead, the Protestants have taken “the kindlier soils.”¹¹⁸ On top of claiming the land by coding it on a map, the Ulster Protestants made it their own by reshaping it to their own mode of dwelling. The Roman speaker tells us that his ancestors claimed, drained, and gave the land the shapes of use. The landscape the Unionist community remembers fondly is not natural, but constructed. “We planted little towns to garrison/the heaving country, heaping walls of earth/and keeping all our cattle close at hand;/then, thrusting north and west, we felled the trees.”¹¹⁹

As the Catholic clans are pushed off their territory, so too the land loses the look of their inhabitation. They were smoked out of their nests, “clan by clan,” and occupied instead the wild peripheries of the Protestant settlements. Every once in a while, “biding chance,/till, unobserved, they slither down and run/with torch and blade among the frontier huts.”¹²⁰ The Protestant settlements model themselves after the bunker, and their inhabitants espouse a deep fear of the barbarian who paces in the unknown outside. The speaker recounts one episode of a particularly violent year when “huddled in our towns,/my people trembled as the beacons ran/from hill to hill across the countryside,/calling the dispossessed to lift their standards.”¹²¹ The criticism lodged against the Roman colonists is made direct here, yet it also inhabits the voice and perspective of the native populations. *We*

¹¹⁷ Hewitt, “The colony” lines 79-81.

¹¹⁸ Hewitt, “The colony” line 48.

¹¹⁹ Hewitt, “The colony” lines 18-21.

¹²⁰ Hewitt, “The colony” lines 25-27.

¹²¹ Hewitt, “The colony” lines 30-33.

the dispossessed are called to lift our brutal standards. It does not assign agency to the colonizers, but again focuses on the victimhood of the colonized. But the native population's occasional uprisings—coupled with the colonists' sense of guilt over the wrongs they have perpetrated against them—combine to lock the Protestant minority into an affective position of deep fear, precarity, and distrust of the Catholic "Other." For "the terror dogs us; back of all our thought/the threat behind the dream, those beacons flare."¹²² But his speaker is critical of such a structure of feeling—as is Hewitt. Referencing the colonists' propensity to shear the land of its forests so as to create more farmland, Hewitt writes:

I could invent a legend of those trees,
and how their creatures, dryads, hamadryads,
fled from the copses, hid in thorny bushes,
and grew a crooked and malignant folk,
plotting and waiting for a bitter revenge
on their despoilers. So our troubled thought
is from the enchantments of old tree magic,
but I am not a sick and haunted man...¹²³

To take as truth and obsess over these images of Catholics as a "crooked and malignant folk/plotting and waiting for a bitter revenge" is to mimic the same sickness that Unionists assign to the natives.

This section of the poem raises the spectre of the "native question" for the colonists' descendants. For unlike the British's later attempt in America, the Planters had not eviscerated the Irish population completely; instead they "multiplied and came with open hands/begging a crust because their land was poor/and they were many."¹²⁴ The Irish set up ragged homes around the gates of the Protestant towns, and then "our towns grew and threw them hovelled lanes/ which they inhabit still."¹²⁵ And so today's Roman descendants live with a constant sense of the fragility of their appropriation of the island. As the colonist notes, the natives "breed like flies. The danger's there;/when Caeser's old and

¹²² Hewitt, "The colony" lines 37-38.

¹²³ Hewitt, "The colony" lines 59-66.

¹²⁴ Hewitt, "The colony" lines 82-84.

¹²⁵ Hewitt, "The colony" lines 85-86.

lays his scepter down,/we'll be a little people, well-outnumbered."¹²⁶ His assertion here is a direct reference to the Unionist logic that led the Northern Protestants to arm themselves against the possibility of a free Ireland—and ultimately, to win for themselves the partition and consolidated control over Ulster. But the numbers game could one day push the Protestants out of their dominance. The question preoccupies the speaker and his community, intellectually and affectively: what should be done with the Catholics who remain, who no longer remain solidly on the outside but now live in the adjacent neighborhoods? The speaker lays out a number of political possibilities:

Some of us think our leases have run out
but dig square heels in, keep the roads repaired;
and one or two loud voices would restore
the rack, the yellow patch, the curfewed ghetto.
Most try to ignore the question, going their way,
glad to be living, sure that Caesar's word
is Caesar's bond for legions in our need.
Among us, some, beguiled by their sad music,
make common cause with the natives, in their hearts
hoping to win a truce when the tribes assert
their ancient right and take what once was theirs.
Already from other lands the legions ebb
and men no longer know the Roman peace.¹²⁷

The speaker ultimately rejects all of these options because, as he says, "I think these natives human, think their code,/though strange to us, and farther from the truth,/only a little so."¹²⁸ For Hewitt, the Catholics do not pose an irreducible Other; instead, they have suffered from decades of injustice, poverty, and marginalization, which he thinks are all inequities that can be alleviated. "I know no vices they monopolize,/if we allow the forms by hunger bred,/the sores of old oppression."¹²⁹ Hewitt hopes to make amends and to reconcile with the natives through making peaceful social contact, "fraternizing, by small friendly gestures." Instead of relinquishing the land back to the dispossessed, he argues instead for

¹²⁶ Hewitt, "The colony" lines 96-98.

¹²⁷ Hewitt, "The colony" lines 99-111.

¹²⁸ Hewitt, "The colony" lines 113-115.

¹²⁹ Hewitt, "The colony" lines 121-123.

co-inhabitation, "as goat and ox may graze in the same field and each gain something from proximity."¹³⁰ Unlike the "loud untamed [voices]/seasonal as tawdry pantomime,"¹³¹ Hewitt presented a tempered and progressive Protestant voice. His aesthetic attachment to the terrain did not merely reflect an affinity for pastoralism. For Hewitt, the local presented a viable alternative to the nationalist conflict.¹³² By stressing the historical bonds of Ulster's nine counties—and its shared love for the land—he promoted an identity that traversed the Unionist-Catholic divide. "Regionalism is based on the conviction that as man is a social being, he must, now that the nation has become an enormously complicated organisation, find some smaller unit to which to give his loyalty," Hewitt wrote.¹³³ Likewise, Montague described his 1970 reading tour with Hewitt as "trying to make some kind of gesture, trying to reach out to a common audience."¹³⁴

While Hewitt's verse broke with the traditional Unionist canon and its self-image, many Catholics would ultimately find the structure of feeling embodied in his work and his regionalist agenda itself to be politically unpalatable. Heaney remarked:

Hewitt's regionalism suited the feeling of possession and independence of the empowered Protestants with their own Parliament and fail-safe majority at Stormont more than it could ever suit the sense of dispossession and political marginalisation of the Catholics...In his imaginings he could not include the Irish dimension in anything other than in an underprivileged way... What I am saying does not take away from the artistic strength of Hewitt's poetic achievement. It merely questions the adequacy in present circumstances of his particular planter's myth... His poems are best read as personal solutions to a shared crisis, momentary stays against confusion.¹³⁵

Another look at "The colony" demonstrates that the verses do not simply acknowledge the past violence of the Protestant colonization; the poem speaks from a Protestant vantage point. As Fiacc

¹³⁰ Hewitt, "The colony" lines 132-133.

¹³¹ Hewitt, "Ulster Names: Postscript, 1984" lines 3-4.

¹³² Fellow poet Robert Greacen notes that Hewitt believed "the common ideal of regionalism - a nine-county Ulster - would solve the tribal problem of identity." Robert Greacen, rev. of *Lapsed Protestant*, by Glenn Patterson, *Books Ireland* (Nov. 2006).

¹³³ Quoted in Robert Greacen, rev. of *Rhyming Weavers*, by John Hewitt, *Books Ireland* (Dec. 2004) 261.

¹³⁴ Kearney, "Beyond the Planter and Gael" 86.

¹³⁵ Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* 195-198.

notes, “Ironically, Hewitt is the very good poet who articulates most essentially the Protestant territorial mentality.”¹³⁶ For Catholics like Heaney, Hewitt was willing to admit the Catholics into the Protestant order of things, but he was unwilling—or unable—to consider them as a radically different but equally valuable community. The British tradition stood obviously preeminent; the historical wrongs could be acknowledged, but the still-continuing Unionist dominance that made “Ulster” into what it was today remained unquestioned. “The colony,” for instance, falls back on a number of its tropes: the Protestant claim to the land through their labor; the reduction of the Catholic population to traditional stereotypes; and the ultimate attribution of legitimacy and agency to the Protestant minority. Most directly, Hewitt attempts to negotiate his sense of the historical wrong wrought by his ancestors while also emphasizing the labor they had spent to make the land in their own image:

We took it from them.
We labored hard and stubborn, draining, planting,
Till half the country took its shape from us.¹³⁷

Hewitt argues that there is more than one way to stake a claim to land, more than one way to become native to a territory. By investing themselves in Ulster over the centuries and expending their own sweat into the soil, the Protestants too have changed and been changed by the land. They too have “rights drawn from soil and sky;/the use, pace, the patient years of labour.”¹³⁸ Legitimacy is tied to the labor-hours soaked into the land, not to origin. Hewitt’s stance echoed the larger Protestant sense of ownership in Ulster during the mid-20th century. While the allegory of a Roman colony offered an oversimplified portrayal of both the Ulster Catholic and the Ulster Protestant, the position of the colonists’ descendants certainly resonated with the affective positioning of the Unionist community. Their guilt tempers but ultimately does not displace their investment in the land and in their own political privilege. The moderate Protestant majority might be open to treating Catholics better and

¹³⁶ Padraic Fiacc, “An Ulsterman’s Search for Identity,” *Hibernia* (26 April 1974) 11.

¹³⁷ Hewitt, “The colony” lines 52-54.

¹³⁸ Hewitt, “The colony” lines 134-135.

providing them with more opportunities for advancement. Yet they too held their ground, both literally and figuratively. As the Roman colonist closes:

we would be strangers in the Capitol;
this is our country also, nowhere else;
and we shall not be outcast on the world.¹³⁹

As Heaney also charges, the “natives,” so to speak, are portrayed in “The colony” along familiar and politically inoperative fault lines. “They gathered secret, deep in the dripping glens,/ chanting their prayers before a lichened rock.” They clung to an “old tree magic.” “They breed like flies.”¹⁴⁰ You will know them as not our kind, the colonist assures us as he characterizes their Otherness. “They worship Heaven strangely, having rites/we snigger at, are known superstitious,/cunning by nature, never to be trusted,/ given to dancing and a kind of song/ seductive to the ear, a whining sorrow.”¹⁴¹ Hewitt does not offer any positive image of the Catholic. If only the natives would “rise up against the spells/and fears their celibates surround them with”¹⁴² and cast off the roots of their identity, then perhaps they can be brought into the fold, the speaker reckons. There may be elements of their beliefs and culture in which the speaker can find value when he walks “in the dark places of the heart,” but these emblems or concepts cannot be named so as not to invite misunderstanding from his Protestant neighbors. Likewise, the natives are given little sense of political force. It is the Protestants who “admit our load of guilt” and “make amends/ by fraternizing, by small friendly gestures,/ hoping by my patient words I may convince/ my people and this people we are changed.”¹⁴³ Hewitt’s solution to the sectarian crisis is a reconciliation that proceeds from Protestant beneficence rather than from a Catholic-led movement. “John Hewitt has had some very definitive ideas about what his Protestant people should do as outlined in his long poem

¹³⁹ Hewitt, “The colony” lines 138-140.

¹⁴⁰ Hewitt, “The colony” lines 46-47; 65; 96.

¹⁴¹ Hewitt, “The colony” lines 91-95.

¹⁴² Hewitt, “The colony” lines 116-117.

¹⁴³ Hewitt, “The colony” lines 126-129.

The Colony, written in 1949," Montague noted. "But of course they didn't do it and they are not going to do it."¹⁴⁴

The "Planter and the Gael" tour intended to make an explicit political statement about identity in divided Ulster in hopes of starting a productive conversation. "Our use of the labels planter and Gael cannot be seen outside of our intended exercise in community relations," Montague said. "And that exercise briefly assumed the two terms as limiting masks which it was then hoped would prompt others to examine their identity more deeply."¹⁴⁵ And in 1970, Hewitt and Montague did read to large, receptive crowds around the province. Only twelve months later though, the tour failed to inspire as much support. "It was interesting that when we began again in Newry (which had been badly bombed) the discussions afterwards centered largely on the question of emigration -- and of clearing out of a situation which had become in the eyes of many almost intractable," Montague remembered. As the initial eruption of violence in 1969 continued into 1971 and the Northern Irish situation devolved further and further into political incoherence, the valve of cross-cultural dialogue shut off. Hewitt described the shift in the discursive frame thusly:

In my case I was living in England in '68-'69 when the troubles broke out, and I wrote my political poems *The Ulster Reckoning* at that time. Since I've come back to live in Ulster in '72 I've written very few of them. But what I wrote then was rhetoric, politic rhetoric. It was polemical stuff made possible by my distance from the situation as a resident of Coventry. But now I find you can't write about the troubles -- they're too immediate.¹⁴⁶

As Hewitt found when he inserted himself back into the Belfast conjuncture, the raw violence and political incommensurability of the Troubles demanded a new imaginary and new labels than the tired configurations that he and Montague had paraded beneath just a year before. Although he hoped to replace the tribal identities of Nationalist and Unionist with the place-anchored regionalist label, the wrongs suffered by the Catholics at the hands of their colonizers and the insecurity of the Unionist

¹⁴⁴ Kearney, "Beyond the Planter and Gael."

¹⁴⁵ Kearney, "Beyond the Planter and Gael."

¹⁴⁶ Kearney, "Beyond the Planter and Gael."

minority would block the formation of such a shared territory. For in Hewitt's model, the civil rights struggle launched by the Catholics and more moderate Protestants in the early to mid-1960s should have eased tensions and brought the natives into the fold. But ultimately, the sectarian divide overtook such an inclusive political project, and the cycles of death and retaliation made the thoughts of reconciliation more and more substance-less. And as I will argue, the struggle to articulate a new structure of feeling—one that did not speak simply to the hegemonic Protestant minority or the marginalized Catholic majority, but one that made of co-habitation and conciliation a serious project—would impress itself upon the Belfast poets through the 1970s and 80s. It would be a consuming, contentious, and often unsuccessful task. Mahon despaired of this rationalist, educated mindset's ability to locate a solution: in his poem, "Afterlives," he writes, "what middle-class cunts we are/To imagine for one second/That our privileged ideals [of peace and nonsectarian schools]/Are divine wisdom."¹⁴⁷ But they would attempt it, poem by poem, because the times seemed to demand it of them. As Heaney put it in 1972, "I disagree that 'poetry makes nothing happen'. It can eventually make new feelings, or feelings about feelings, happen, and anybody can see that in this country for a long time to come a refinement of feelings will be more urgent than a re-framing of policies or of constitutions."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Derek Mahon, "Afterlives," *A Rage for Order* (1992) lines 19-22.

¹⁴⁸ Seamus Heaney, introduction, *Soundings* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1972). Quoted in Dawe, "History Class."

Chapter 3: 'Her Name Keep Ringing Like a Bell in an Underwater Belfry:'
Recovering Louis MacNeice, Émigré, into the Northern Irish Literary Canon

For a long time it seemed that Louis MacNeice was Irish only by an accident of birth, but in recent years his reputation, never at the highest in Britain, has come to rest in the country he could never quite bring himself to disown. This is particularly the case in the North, where his example has provided a frame of reference for a number of younger poets in much the same way as [Patrick] Kavanagh's has done in the South. There is now, what there never was before, a vital and original body of work issuing from that once, birdless, if still benighted province.¹⁴⁹

In the introduction to his 1972 anthology, Derek Mahon firmly situates MacNeice as the literary forefather of contemporary Northern Irish verse.¹⁵⁰ A contemporary of the 1930s generation that cohered in the impressive wake of W.H. Auden, MacNeice had figured as a lesser British poet in the literary topography for most of his career.¹⁵¹ Compared to Hewitt, who was a well-known figure around Belfast, it took more effort to transplant MacNeice into the Northern Irish literary canon, for all that he had been born and raised in the province. But he did not settle in Ulster; instead, he lived most of his life in England or, later on, in Dublin. Hewitt belonged to and in the six northern counties; "because of rock and glen/and mist and cloud/and quality of air," Hewitt declares, I am "as native in my thought as any here."¹⁵² Yet it is not clear what equivalent ground one would find for MacNeice. He shifted homes, and his verse moves flexibly between the imaginative logics of his homelands. As Heaney put it, MacNeice made use of British formalism, often took as his subject a Northern Irish childhood, engaged politically with Europe, and looked to his Irish past for his imagery.¹⁵³

Yet MacNeice represents the second major progenitor of the Northern Irish poets working in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Arguably, he proved the more potent influence, particularly for the Protestant poets

¹⁴⁹ Derek Mahon, introduction, *The Sphere Book of Irish Verse* (London: Sphere, 1972).

¹⁵⁰ While he might be wary of attempts to brand his peers as the "Belfast Group" or "Hobsbaum's Group," Mahon found enough of a common cause among his generation to consider their output under the geographic specificity of "Northern Irish poetry."

¹⁵¹ Edna Longley, preface, *Louis MacNeice: A Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) x.

¹⁵² Hewitt, "Once Alien Here" lines 14-16.

¹⁵³ Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* 198-199.

like Longley and Mahon as well as the later generations of Catholics like Muldoon and Carson. MacNeice's work too dealt with the Protestant structure of feeling articulated by Hewitt, namely the anxiety of the community's in-between status and the guilt brought on by the long-term mistreatment of the Catholics. But instead of attempting to solve the ethno-nationalist conflict by embracing a new sense of place—as did Hewitt—MacNeice makes himself at home in a perpetual state of dislocation and transience. He subverts the stable relationship that the rusticative ideologies posit between place, community and identity both through his poems' content and through his formal choices. For he writes with a black, black Belfast humor that makes statements only to simultaneously hollow them out; his sarcasm makes the reader aware of the space between the spoken statement and the statement enunciated within it. "What is spoken is never, and in no language, what is said."¹⁵⁴ His ironic play on accepted poetic forms and his propensity towards a dialectical imagery allows MacNeice a sort of bifocal vision wherein he can contain radical opposites without reducing their differences into a pale semblance of equivalence. And this aporetic sight is key to his politics—a commitment that rejects propaganda and all forms of totalizing rhetorical claims. Unlike Hewitt, who "is completely sure in most of his poems of where he stands and where he doesn't stand,"¹⁵⁵ MacNeice doesn't take a stand in his poems, but remains transient. He rejects the territorial rigidity and instead traverses a complex and multifaceted world. "O fill me/With strength against those who would freeze my/humanity, would dragoon me into a lethal automaton,/would make me a cog in a machine, a thing with/one face, a thing."¹⁵⁶

Louis MacNeice—who "was born in Belfast between the mountain and the gantries/To the hooting of lost sirens and the clang of trams"¹⁵⁷ – spent his early years in Carrickfergus across Belfast

¹⁵⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins, 1971) 11.

¹⁵⁵ Seamus Heaney, "My Favourite John Hewitt Poem," *Culture Northern Ireland*, 18 July 2012, accessed online 28 Oct 2013, <<http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article/5109/my-favourite>>.

¹⁵⁶ Louis MacNeice, "Prayer Before Birth," *Louis MacNeice-Selected Poems*, ed. Michael Longley (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) lines 28-32.

¹⁵⁷ Louis MacNeice, "Carrickfergus." *Louis MacNeice-Selected* lines 1-2.

Lough where his father served as a Bishop in the Anglican Church. He credits those years for establishing a substratum of landscape and affectively-resonant images from which he would continue to draw in his writing for the rest of his life: "Sea (i.e., the grey Lough fringed with scum and old cans), fields (i.e., the very small, very green hedged fields of Northern Ireland), factories (i.e., those small factories dotted throughout the agricultural patchwork), and gardens (i.e., my father's medium-sized lush garden, with a cemetery beyond the hawthorn hedge)."¹⁵⁸ His mother's death, which swept across the family when he was only five, also came to color his earliest experiences in Northern Ireland with anxiety, guilt, and insecurity.¹⁵⁹

The young MacNeice migrated to England for the requisite preparatory school education and would then stay on to study the classics at Oxford; the bulk of his writing life would unfold across the channel from his native soil.¹⁶⁰ Unlike Yeats in his tower, MacNeice remained attuned to the crisis looming over England and the rest of Europe during the 1930s and 40s. While safely ensconced in America during the outbreak of World War II, he decided in 1940 to return to London so as not to "miss so much history." Defending his decision in 1941, MacNeice wrote, "From June on I wished to return, not because I thought I could be more useful in England than in America, but because I wanted to see these things for myself. My chief motive thus being vulgar curiosity."¹⁶¹ ¹⁶² From his precarious perch in the midst of the war, MacNeice criticized the Irish neutrality in what he saw as a war whose political exigency could not be denied, no matter what one's opinion might be on Lord Chamberlain.¹⁶³ After the war, MacNeice shifted out of an academic space into the BBC's features department where his love of

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Louis MacNeice, *Selected Literary Criticism of Louis MacNeice*, ed. Alan Heuser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 158-59.

¹⁵⁹ Peter McDonald, "The Pity of It All," *Incorrigibly Plural* 10.

¹⁶⁰ Brearton and Longley, preface, *Incorrigibly Plural* 4.

¹⁶¹ Louis MacNeice, Letter to Dodds, February 1941, quoted in *Incorrigibly Plural*.

¹⁶² He would later volunteer as a Fire Brigade leader in London during the German airstrikes, which provided fodder for several poems. Neil Corcoran, "Repetitions," *Incorrigibly Plural*.

¹⁶³ Edna Longley, *MacNeice* 25.

sound and his attention to descriptive detail found an easy outlet. Until his death, Ireland remained on the horizon of his quotidian routine: a place to visit as a tourist on holiday; an experiential substratum to plumb for images; a complicated knot of political tension to tug at in his writing; an imagined and mythic space to escape to, for a time. MacNeice's relationship to Northern Ireland was not historical, but geological:

Whatever then my inherited or acquired
Affinities, such remains my childhood's frame
Like a belated rock in the red Antrim clay
That cannot at this era change its pitch or name –
And the pre-natal mountain is far away.¹⁶⁴

Ireland permeated his aesthetic approach, his affective register, the "deep sedimentation of his political awareness."¹⁶⁵

Although MacNeice "could not deny the past to which my self is wed,"¹⁶⁶ his first critics certainly could –and for the most part did – ignore his Irish upbringing.¹⁶⁷ Instead, most chose to lump him in with the rest of the directly-political poets who congregated around Auden in 1930s England. "The very titles of the following books marginalize MacNeice [by foregrounding Auden]," notes Longley in her preface to a full-length study of the Belfast Group's adopted father, "Francis Scarfe's *Auden and After* (1942), Samuel Hynes' *The Auden Generation* (1976), and the MacMillan Casebook *Thirties Poets: 'The Auden Group'* (1984)."¹⁶⁸ MacNeice certainly considered the likes of Auden, Cecil Day Lewis, and Stephen Spender to be his contemporaries; he interacted with them and followed their work. Yet he was a poet apart. Aesthetically, he gravitated towards sound and made use of a different register of imagery; his formal engagements mirrored an interest in Yeats more so than they did an affinity with Auden.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ MacNeice. "Carrick Revisited." Lines 26-30.

¹⁶⁵ Edna Longley, *MacNeice* 17.

¹⁶⁶ "But I cannot deny the past to which my self is wed./The woven figure cannot undo its thread." Louis MacNeice, "Valediction," *Louis MacNeice-Selected* (1988) lines 43-44.

¹⁶⁷ Brearton and Longley, preface, *Incorrigibly Plural* xi.

¹⁶⁸ Edna Longley, *MacNeice* vii.

¹⁶⁹ Paul Muldoon, "The Perring Birch: Yeats, Frost, MacNeice," *Incorrigibly Plural* 139.

During the 1930s and 40s, critics tended to view MacNeice's political approach as, at best, naïve, and at worse, evasive. Compared to the intensities of pre-war Auden and his Marxist-sympathizing cohort, MacNeice played with verse, British critics asserted.¹⁷⁰ His devotion to the quotidian, to detail, to documentation represented "the path of least resistance."¹⁷¹ The general thesis of British literary criticism for decades: MacNeice appeared to be a poet of surfaces who refused political depth.

But what if MacNeice's reluctance to advocate directly for a particular political arrangement stemmed not from a lack of political concern, asked Irish literary critics in the late 20th century, but from a fear of the black-and-white propaganda statement?¹⁷² MacNeice does not evade the political questions, the 1960s Northern Irish literary community argued. As a writer forged in sectarian and rent Belfast, he knew all too well the dangers of ideology and political propaganda, of simple and neat encapsulations of political theories. The greatest dangers lingered in the abstractions, in the inability to negotiate a world "that is crazier and more of it than we think/incorrigibly plural."¹⁷³ In 1935, MacNeice glibly raised concerns about what he saw to be the two conceptual poles of 1930s European politics, neither of which he advocated: "The individualist is an atom thinking about himself ('Thank God I am not as other men); the communist, too often, is an atom having ecstasies of self-denial ('Thank God I am one in a crowd)."¹⁷⁴ This angle of MacNeice's work – the deep skepticism for clean political solutions he brought from the Irish context – dropped out of the conversation when British scholars read him next to Auden and his declaration that "Yesterday [was for] the classic lecture/On the origin of Mankind. But to-

¹⁷⁰ Edna Longley, preface, *MacNeice* x.

¹⁷¹ Stephen Wall, "Louis MacNeice and the line of Least Resistance," *The Review* (1964) 11-12.

¹⁷² Brearton and Longley, preface, *Incorrigibly Plural*; Edna Longley, *MacNeice*; McDonald, "The Pity of It," *Incorrigibly Plural*.

¹⁷³ Louis MacNeice, "Snow," *Selected Poems* (1988): lines 5-6.

¹⁷⁴ Edna Longley, *MacNeice* xiv.

day [it is] the struggle.”¹⁷⁵ “Anglo-Irish double vision, often as little noticed in England as appreciated in Ireland, gains in critical insight for not being wholly affiliated in either country,” Edna Longley rejoins.¹⁷⁶

But the literary record had yet to pass its final judgments on the 1930s icons. Starting mid-century, a number of Northern Irish poets led the way back to the Irish MacNeice. They began a project of rewriting his legacy—particularly as the ferment provoked by the rise of the Belfast Group and the rekindling of the Troubles put political pressure once more on the literary. One poet after another writing in Northern Ireland began to find something resonant about MacNeice’s approach to his own Irishness and to his particular sense of the poetic. In the 1950s and 60s, he did not belong yet to any sense of the Irish canon, which was still recovering from Yeats, so to speak. And so they ran into his best known work in anthologies of British verse, which Northern Irish schools still foregrounded in their curricula. Mahon and Michael Longley – Ulster Protestants who found in each other a kindred soul for poetry at Trinity College – led the initial reengagement. As one third-generation Belfast poet remembers it, the pair of them served as the catalyst for many other young writers to read MacNeice. “Later, MacNeice became the Godfather of an Irish poetry I had been only dimly aware existed,” Leontia Flynn wrote. “Through Derek Mahon and Michael Longley’s close identification with the poet, I read back to ‘Valediction’ and *Autumn Journal XVI*, astonished by MacNeice’s passionate, angry, and unpoetic encounters with place.”¹⁷⁷ While students in Dublin, Mahon and Longley even chanced to meet their literary idol in a pub.¹⁷⁸ He “acknowledged us with a polite snarl and a sidelong flash of the horsy teeth,” remembers Mahon. Although MacNeice paid little heed to the aspiring poets, his manner did little, if anything, to dim their appraisal of his work. “He seemed like his later work, grim and sardonic, scored by

¹⁷⁵ W.H. Auden, “Spain 1937,” *Another Time* (1940): lines 19-20.

¹⁷⁶ Edna Longley, *MacNeice* 35.

¹⁷⁷ Leontia Flynn, “On MacNeice on Trains,” *Incorrigibly Plural* (2012) 70.

¹⁷⁸ Mahon, “Eclogues between the Truculent,” *Incorrigibly Plural* (2012) 101.

long experience...If the world he loved so much had let him down, the long head rose above it," Mahon concludes, "as his best work now rises above that of his contemporaries."¹⁷⁹

Given that MacNeice –like Hewitt – spoke from the vantage point of an Ulster Protestant, it stands to reason that the reclamation would begin with Mahon and Longley. But his legacy did not remain solely in the hands of poets with Anglican guilt to assuage; the younger generations of Catholic writers, from Muldoon to Carson and after, took him in hand as well. Heaney, while not fully engaged with MacNeice's aesthetic and easy urbanity, found the poet intriguing as well; when he graduated Queens University in Belfast in 1961, one of the first books Heaney purchased was a collection of MacNeice's verse. When Longley moved to Belfast to teach at Queens University, Heaney remembers being intimidated by him and Mahon alike – in part because "they had met Louis MacNeice and W.R. Rodgers, they read contemporary poetry, they had collected slim volumes. I didn't have any of that."¹⁸⁰ Heaney too found something resonant in MacNeice, in his approach towards Irish politics, in his love of sound and form. During the mid-1960s, Mahon, Longley, and Heaney formed close ties as promising writers in the Belfast literary topography; fellow poet Michael Foley would refer to them as the "tight-assed trio."¹⁸¹ The friends eyed their self-proclaimed predecessor with reverence; in 1965, a year after his death, they journeyed together to his grave in County Down where they all pledged to write their own elegy for him. As Longley remembers it, Mahon's draft definitively edged out both of his peers.¹⁸² The rekindled interest in MacNeice would rise alongside the literary fortunes of the young poets who

¹⁷⁹ Mahon, "Eclogues between the Truculent" 102.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance*.

¹⁸¹ Ormsby, Personal interview, 31 July 2013.

¹⁸² Cliodna Ni Anluain, *Reading the Future: Irish Writers in Conversation with Mike Murphy* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2000), 123. Fittingly, Edna Longley would later describe Mahon as the "heir and disinheritor of MacNeice" when reviewing his first collection, *Midnight's Crossing*. "Mahon's roots are unwillingly in Ulster...He reacts to and against an environment which is the antithesis of poetry and therefore compels it at a deep level...Like MacNeice Mahon answers darkness with light. But just as his darkness is blacker and bleaker so his light is steadier and more complex." Edna Longley, "Review of *Night Crossing*," *The Honest Ulsterman* 8 (Dec 1968).

had adopted him. By 1974, Montague would also describe MacNeice as a “father figure” for the new Northern poets, although he left Heaney out of that sphere of influence.¹⁸³

Ulster’s academic critics would follow the Belfast Group down the rabbit hole. They too began to approach MacNeice on his own merits, as an Irish émigré who should be considered apart from Auden and the like. Their renewed interest fed and fed off of the release of MacNeice’s collected verse in 1966. The release sent a wave of critical acclaim coursing through the pages of Ulster’s little magazines. When putting together the first issue of *The Honest Ulsterman* two years later, Simmons still wanted to review a copy of MacNeice’s *Collected Works*, even though his publishers had closed the review list for the volume sometime prior.¹⁸⁴ The *HU* would also feature a headshot of MacNeice on the first edition’s cover next to Ulster’s well-known landmark, the Antrim Tower.¹⁸⁵ The editor of *Hibernia* pushed Ormsby to review literary critic Terence Brown’s new book on the poet who was providing “a frame of reference” for the cohort now writing.¹⁸⁶ Even the *Irish University Review*, which tended to focus more on the Republic’s home-grown tradition, ran two special issues on MacNeice.¹⁸⁷ This critical attention did a great deal to solidify the literary relationship between the older poet and the Ulster talents now writing.

But MacNeice’s position within the Irish literary canon stabilized when editors began to include him in anthologies of Irish verse. The curated anthology – a genre less ephemeral than a magazine and more accessible than an individual volume – promised the authoritative stamp of a critical authority that knew good verse. Through their pages, poets would find their lines immured into the literary canon. “All

¹⁸³ The self-described “Gael” approved of the poetic bloodline, complimenting the continuation of what he saw to be MacNeice’s “roaming photographic eye,” but with reservations over the Northern poets’ lack of experimentation. John Montague, introduction, *The Faber Book of Irish Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974).

¹⁸⁴ Letter from James Simmons to Rosemary Goad, Reviews Manager at Faber and Faber, 3 April 1968, Frank Ormsby papers, circa 1967-2004, MARBL, Emory University.

¹⁸⁵ ed. James Simmons, front cover, *The Honest Ulsterman*, 1 (May 1968).

¹⁸⁶ Letter from the editor of *Hibernia* to Frank Ormsby, 16 Jan 1975, Ormsby papers, MARBL, Emory University.

¹⁸⁷ Clyde, *Irish Literary Magazines*.

anthologies have agendas, as you know," notes Paul Muldoon, Belfast poet and the anthologist behind the seminal *Faber Book of Irish Verse*. "To be at all interesting they have to have them. People don't usually admit to that. But then most anthologies are particularly boring."¹⁸⁸ As the Belfast literary group began to cohere as a distinctive entity within Irish anthologies in the 1970s, they pulled MacNeice out of British anthologies and into his "native" context. By 1979, Ormsby's awkwardly-named anthology, *Poets from the North of Ireland*, had crossed some sort of liminal threshold—Northern Irish poetry had been born, and it definitively claimed MacNeice as its ancestor.¹⁸⁹ MacNeice's positioning within the Northern Irish context seemed obvious in the 1990s – at least to those who familiar with Northern Irish verse. Attempting to introduce an American audience to "poets besides Seamus Heaney" in a 1996 essay, Edna Longley pointed to MacNeice and his close link with Derek Mahon, both of whom were "virtually unread in the US." She locates him both with regard to Yeats and the Belfast Group: "The fact that MacNeice has been reread both as the most significant Anglo-Irish successor to Yeats and as a forerunner of Northern Irish poetry indicates that he was misread for years as exclusively an "English '30s poet" supposedly overshadowed by Auden."¹⁹⁰

In 1960s and 70s Belfast, the Northern poets provoked greater interest in MacNeice among their peers through their own conversations in pubs and through letters; they yoked his legacy and his work to their poetic identity through their anthologies and their writings, both poetry and prose. But MacNeice did not figure as merely an archaeological relic to be pointed to as a precursor; he still exerted an active presence in Belfast through the work of poets like Mahon and Longley, Muldoon and Carson. As Mahon directs in his now-famous elegy for the horsy-toothed poet, "This plot is consecrated, for your

¹⁸⁸ Earl G. Ingersoll and Stan Sanvel Rubin, "The Invention of the 'I': A Conversation with Paul Muldoon," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 37.1 (Winter 1998) accessed online, 21 Sept 2013, < <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=mqr;c=mqr;c=mqrarchive;idno=act2080.0037.106;rgn=main;view=text;xc=1;g=mqrq>>.

¹⁸⁹ Dawe, "History Class."

¹⁹⁰ Edna Longley, "American Reads on Irish Poetry."

sake,/To what lies in the future tense.”¹⁹¹ Through their careers, the Northern Irish poets interrogated MacNeice and drew from his work. Muldoon penned an elegy to MacNeice, and many have made direct or indirect allusion to “Snow,” MacNeice’s well-known¹⁹² poem. MacNeice might have died in 1963, but his poetic project, his imagery, and his concern for Northern Ireland flourished in the intertextual conversation circulating through the Belfast magazines and anthologies. In a literary sense, MacNeice lives in both the present and future tenses.¹⁹³

All of this attention to the repositioning of MacNeice as a seminal Irish poet and a literary forefather to the Northern Irish generations that would arise in the late twentieth century begs the question: what did MacNeice bring to the table, so to speak, that warranted this intense burst of literary attention and activity? What about MacNeice provoked the Belfast writers to situate him not merely as an aesthetic influence (like Robert Frost) or as an Irish antecedent (like Yeats) but at the particular conjunction of the aesthetic, the political and the personal embodied by the Northern Irish poet? After all, MacNeice had only spent his childhood in Ulster; for the bulk of his writing life, he lived as an émigré from his native soil—so much so that British critics considered him as one of their own almost exclusively for generations.

While poets and critics alike may dispute the homogeneity and unity of an Ulster Renaissance from an aesthetic standpoint during the 1960s and 70s, the collective turn toward Louis MacNeice suggests a common cartography: I argue his work encapsulated a particular structure of feeling as well as proposed aesthetic and political responses that resonated with the Belfast writers. On the most direct level, MacNeice wrote explicitly about his mixed views on Ireland, which he lambasts as the “land of scholars and saints:/Scholars and saints, my eye, the land of ambush,/Purblind manifestoes, never-

¹⁹¹ Derek Mahon, “In Carrowdore Churchyard,” *A Rage for Order* (1992) lines 3-4.

¹⁹² And well-anthologized, thanks to their own advocacy and curatorial work.

¹⁹³ His collected works was finally published in the United States in August of this year.

ending complaints.”¹⁹⁴ There is no romantic mythologizing here, only a realist approach to violence and a deep vein of anger.

“What ish my nation,” asks Captain MacMorris, one of Shakespeare’s few Irish characters, in *Henry V*.¹⁹⁵ Northern Irish poets have continually wrestled with this question, pulled by both the English literary tradition that informs their work and their Irish histories. As was the case with Flynn, many Northern Irish poets were first attracted to MacNeice for his tension-ridden and conflicted relationship to Ireland. MacNeice could not escape his Irish roots as much as he might wish to. Here, he diverged from Yeats, who wrote to a mythical place that was as much of his own fashioning as it was historical. Yeats had “overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth” and dragged Cathleen ni Houlihan “violently out of the soundless Nothing” and clapped her “down like cards upon a table beneath the up-palm immobile and pontific, creating” Ireland, “the Be-Ireland like the oldentime Be Light.”¹⁹⁶ MacNeice, writing from his childhood in the fiercely-divided Ulster province and from his contemporary exposure to Ireland’s insularity and self-absorption in the face of world affairs, could not advocate such a simple understanding of and allegiance to the island. Instead, he engages with the darker side of Irish nationalism formulated by Yeats and his contemporaries during the Irish Literary Revival of the 1910s and actualized by the Republic in the decades after. “Let the school-children fumble their sums/In a half-dead language,” He writes. “Let the games be played in Gaelic./Let them grow beet-sugar; let them build/A factory in every hamlet.”¹⁹⁷ And yet for all of the distress and anger he ladles on Ulster and Ireland more broadly, MacNeice cannot loosen its claim upon him or his upon the isle. “Her name keeps ringing like a bell/In an under-water belfry.” MacNeice can leave for the British academy or

¹⁹⁴ Louis MacNeice, *Autumn Journal XVI, Selected Poems* (1988) lines 33-35.

¹⁹⁵ William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, III, ii, lines 124-126.

¹⁹⁶ William Faulkner, *Absalom Absalom* (New York: Vintage International, 1990): 4.

¹⁹⁷ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal XVI*, lines 81-86.

the American sojourn, yet he cannot give up the possessive: "Why should I want to go back/To you, Ireland, my Ireland?"¹⁹⁸

MacNeice challenges Ireland and its accounts of itself in several poems, but the Northern Irish writers encounter this tension in MacNeice most explicitly in section XVI of his long work, *Autumn Journal*. Released in 1939, the piece captures a Europe poised on the brink of war.¹⁹⁹ In *Autumn Journal*, MacNeice attempted to explore his disparate and dislocated selves through each section, playing across both geography and time to ground himself for a moment. In its 24 cantos, "[*Autumn Journal*] contains reportage, metaphysics, ethics, lyrical emotion, autobiography, nightmare," MacNeice told T.S. Eliot in a letter.²⁰⁰ Although its panoramic reel runs the gamut, the entirety of the poem exudes a sense of foreboding, of dark clouds gathering fast on the horizon. In section 15, MacNeice details the vehement energy of revelers; yet a haunting awareness of death dogs the poem's frenetic pace. Next to the "songs of Harlem" and the "rounds of drinks" where "there is only a present tense," MacNeice throws up the image of the dead raised and walking "among the skeletons of bog-oak/ following the track from the gallows back to the town."²⁰¹ No matter how hard the personas in this segment dance and drink, they cannot evade the specters of violence, perpetrated in a past that is always-already every past: "Where have we seen them before?/Was it the murderer on the nursery ceiling/Or Judas Iscariot in the Field of Blood/Or someone caught at Gallipoli or in Flanders/Caught in the end-all mud?"²⁰² The killed have returned to the town; MacNeice writes of a past that presences and that looms too in the future tense, challenging the quipped logic of 'You can't step in the same river twice so there can't be/Ghosts; thank God that rivers always flow.'²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, lines 59-60; 105-106

¹⁹⁹ Brearton and Longley, preface, *Incorrigibly Plural* x.

²⁰⁰ Quoted in Edna Longley, *MacNeice* 56.

²⁰¹ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XV, lines 65; 56; 76; 37-38.

²⁰² MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XV, lines 48-52.

²⁰³ Here, the off-set of "Ghosts" breaks the line too soon, collapsing the end-rhyme and calling into question the authority of the statement. MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XV, lines 71-72.

This prophetic sense of recurring violence is brought to bear on the Irish context in Section XVI, where the Nationalist ethos romanticizes such logic into the martyr narrative. MacNeice attempts to deal with Ireland—not merely his Northern Irish childhood in Carrickfergus, or the “city of mud” across Belfast Lough, but with the Republic and the image of nationhood it clove to. It is only fitting that he begins with Yeats, who can be read as the progenitor of the current epoch in Irish literary self-consciousness. He addresses the newly-articulated Ireland and ironically works across nationalist stereotypes and idealistic self-portraits; it begins with a direct allusion to and subversion of Yeats’ political project:

Nightmare leaves fatigue:
 We envy men of action
 Who sleep and wake, murder and intrigue
 Without being doubtful, without being haunted.²⁰⁴

In his articulation of Ireland as a nation, Yeats put heavy import on the “man of action,” an individual who is engaged in the political sphere and works to effect meaningful change. Yet for MacNeice, the questions of politics are not so simple, not so black-and-white as to be actionable. Here, he substitutes the “dream,” which coursed through Yeats and supplied much of the logic of his imagery, with the “nightmare.”²⁰⁵ And the poem continues on into nightmare; it depicts Ireland’s past as that is yet present, draws its “iron net through darkest Ulster/Flailing the limbo lands:”²⁰⁶

Scholars and saints my eye, the land of ambush,
 Purbblind manifestoes, never-ending complaints,
 The born martyr and the gallant ninny;
 The grocer drunk with the drum,
 The landowner shot in his bed, the angry voices
 Piercing the broken fanlight in the slum,
 The shawled woman weeping at the garish altar.
 Kathleen ni Houlihan! Why
 Must a country, like a ship or a car, be always female,
 Mother or sweetheart? A woman passing by

²⁰⁴ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, lines 1-4.

²⁰⁵ In her 1988 study of MacNeice, Edna Longley reads him as the poet of “nightmares” standing in contradistinction to Yeats as the poet of “dreams” and symbols. *MacNeice* 9.

²⁰⁶ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, lines 26-27.

We did but see her passing.
 Passing like a patch of sun on the rainy hill
 And yet we love for ever and hate our neighbor
 And each one in his will
 Binds his heirs to continuance of hatred.
 Drums on the haycock, drums on the harvest, black
 Drums in the night shaking the windows:
 King William is riding his white horse back
 To the Boyne on a banner.
 Thousands of banners, thousands of white
 Horses, thousands of Williams
 Waving thousands of swords and ready to fight
 Till the blue sea turns to orange.
 Such was my country and I thought I was well
 Out of it, educated and domiciled in England,
 Though yet her name keeps ringing like a bell
 In an under-water belfry.
 Why do we like being Irish?²⁰⁷

As opposed to viewing Cathleen ni Houlihan as a personification of Ireland worth dying for—the romantic emblem of sacrifice—MacNeice settles her into a particular historical moment. This Ireland was seen “but in her passing/Passing like a patch of sun on the rainy hill.” MacNeice threads a critique of Irish nationalism as a phenomenon that is historically-contingent and bounded; yet its propagators “love for ever” this image of Ireland against which their neighbors appear as little more than shades. Irishness is associated with the feminine; the embodiment of Ireland is the figure of Cathleen ni Houlihan, “the shawled woman weeping at the garish alter.” Many critics have drawn the analogy between a feminine Ireland and a masculine, dominating England.²⁰⁸ That resonance certainly could be read here, but it misses MacNeice’s ironic and destabilizing humor. For the verse also points out how tying Ireland to a feminine figure catalyzes a particular romantic narrative. First, we objectify her into little more than a vehicle, he tells us, and then we locate her as the telos for a romantic martyr plotline. Like in the tales of

²⁰⁷ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, lines 34-61.

²⁰⁸ Northern Irish poets have as well. Most notably, Seamus Heaney deploys this analogy in his work. See his poem, “Exposure,” for a direct utilization of this logic.

courtly love, the Irishmen dedicate their love forever. Through *Autumn Journal*, MacNeice recognized that Republican nationalism also plays an important role in their perpetuation.

This image of Ireland and the myths it weaves replaces any sense of historicity. Generations rise and fall, time passes, yet still the narrative repeats with little changed in terms of plot, characters, setting, theme. MacNeice writes this affective sense of endless recurrence directly into the poem; using formal elements like repetition and meter, he catches us too in a cycle that is illogical but no less powerful for its irrationality. The word 'drum' enacts itself through its repetition, made even more prominent by the short parallel clauses: "Drums on the haycock, drums on the harvest, black/Drums in the night shaking the windows." We start both lines of the couplet with drums; we end each line with an image associated with darkness. Anyone who has spent time in Ulster will associate the drums immediately with the "voodoo of the Orange bands" and the Unionist marches through Catholic territory.

With the drumming rhythm established, he then transitions into the image sacred to the Orange Order: "King William is riding his white horse back/To the Boyne on a banner," the speaker tells us. By winning the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, William of Orange secured the English throne for the Protestant faith, thereby largely ensuring the security of their compatriots and their plantations in Ulster. Thus the battle occupies a significant place within the Unionist mythology. But MacNeice does not situate this symbol in the past; instead, he opens it to temporal indeterminacy. King William is riding on a banner—we can read this either as a literal reference to a past act or as a figurative reading of a present one. The temporal instability is only quickened when MacNeice turns the image on its head, repeating it and making it over into something akin to nightmare. Instead of one King William riding to the Boyne, we see "thousands of banners, thousands of white/horses, thousands of Williams/waving thousands of swords." The drumming effect continues, but this time it is born alongside the image of a mob always-already present, which MacNeice "can't answer because [it is] still there." And the Unionist bands, he

warns, will be “ready to fight/Till the blue sea turns orange.” The closing image is a haunting one. Not only does it evoke the traditional associations of ‘orange’ with the more rabid Protestant allegiances in Ulster, but also with the echo of water stained red. The sea, which acts both as a foreboding nebulosity that submerges everything and as a route of escape, is blue—it does not take sides. Most tellingly, the sea cannot turn orange—at least not by thousands of King Williams on thousands of banners. MacNeice embeds a twofold critique of the Unionists in these six words: first, he indicates that the Orange bands are wedded to a cause that is doomed to fail, and second, he implies that the Unionists treat their telos as little more than a rationalization for violence and an exhibition of power. Ireland is caught in the logic of the recurring nightmare.

“Such was my country,”²⁰⁹ the poem continues, equating Ireland most directly with the final figure of an impossible and violent project of the Unionists. “What ish my nation?” asks Captain MacMorris. “Drums on the harvest, black/Drums in the night shaking the windows,” answers MacNeice. The poem then details MacNeice’s attempted emigration across the blue sea to England, where he takes up her education and domicile. Yet for all of his exposure to Englishness, its academy, and its landscapes, MacNeice remains “like a belated rock in the red Antrim clay/That cannot at this era change its pitch or name.” Even as “the pre-natal mountain” remains far away.²¹⁰ For MacNeice, his Irishness continues to press itself upon him like the sounding of a bell, but one distorted by seawater. A bell that sounds from a dislocated space, through a medium not its own—much as MacNeice writes his Irishness from a space of dislocation, through the medium of an English tongue. The image of an under-water belfry also echoes with the mythic city of Atlantis; the sound resonates from a mythologized nonplace, and yet acts with no less force on MacNeice. For all of his lambasting and critical awareness, MacNeice does not position himself on a soapbox or at the pulpit; he too is asking questions: “Why do we like

²⁰⁹ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, line 57.

²¹⁰ MacNeice, “Carrick Revisited,” lines 28-30.

being Irish?" and "Why should I want to go back/To you, Ireland, my Ireland?" Throughout the segment, no matter how scathing his tongue, he never relinquishes the first-person or the possessive. Ireland, my Ireland.

Hewitt read the Protestant settlers as a colonial history; MacNeice does not make such clear assertions, but he does rebel against the Unionist project to turn the blue sea orange. And unlike Hewitt, he then turns his eye toward the new Republic and seriously engages with the agenda that the Republicans are espousing. He is disdainful of many of the Republic's stated objectives and their practicality when Europe is on the brink of war, and he enacts that criticism ironically through the anaphora of "Let there be" and its promise of a divine authority:

Ourselves alone! Let the round tower stand aloof
 In a world of bursting mortar!
 Let the school-children fumble their sums
 In a half-dead language;
 Let the censor be busy on the books; pull down the Georgian slums;
 Let the games be played in Gaelic.
 Let them grow beet-sugar, let them build
 A factory in every hamlet;
 Let them pigeon-hole the souls of the killed
 Into sheep and goats, patriots and traitors.²¹¹

Against the backdrop of Nazi aggression and Italian fascism, the Republic stubbornly clings to its insularity, walls itself up in the round tower "aloof/in a world of bursting mortar!" MacNeice censures the Irish Republicans for pushing small details on a nationalist agenda—forcing the children to learn Gaelic in schools, censoring the books, eliminating functional buildings that bear the imprint of British architecture—while the rest of the world is consumed with the prospect of another world war.²¹² But in *Autumn Journal*, MacNeice combines his critique of Irish insularity with the idealistic vision that the

²¹¹ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, lines 79-88. This particular segment also serves as an aesthetic and affective precursor for Mahon's poem criticizing the Unionist mythos, "Ecclesiastes."

²¹² In a later poem, "Neutrality" (Sept 1942), MacNeice would take this theme even further: "The neutral island facing the Atlantic... [is a] bitterly soft reminder of the beginnings/that ended before the end began." MacNeice, "Neutrality," *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 1; 3-4.

Republic is pursuing. “We did but see her in passing,” and no fumbblings in a half-dead language will restore her as we envision. His hesitancy extends outside the cultural sphere to encompass also the economic agenda. “Let them build/A factory in every hamlet.” MacNeice sees it all as futile—playing games that at best are inconsequential and at most disrespectful to those who died in the Irish Civil War. A complaint could be lodged against MacNeice here for not doing enough to understand the politics of a long-oppressed majority who has finally won its autonomy. Although he shows a more nuanced engagement with the Catholic subjectivity than does Hewitt in poems like “The Colony,” MacNeice still inhabits a Protestant perspective.

And then MacNeice turns his gaze to Ulster, where nothing is changed. The drums still beat on in the night, shaking the windows. “And the North, where I was a boy,/ Is still the North, veneered with the grime of Glasgow.”²¹³ His lines do not romanticize the province of his childhood. “Thousands of men whom nobody will employ/ Standing at the corners, coughing./ And the street-children play on the wet/ Pavement—hopscotch or marbles.”²¹⁴ He describes life as it manifests in the North’s industrial cities, from the men who will always be unemployed to the pitiful emblems of financial success—“a sagging tennis-net/ On a spongy lawn besides a dripping shrubbery.”²¹⁵ Instead of focusing primarily on the Protestant colonization of historical Ulster, MacNeice works over the lived-in landscape of “a city built upon mud” and of working class lives in a “culture built upon profit.” In Northern Ireland, the political situation trades in universals: “Free speech nipped in the bud/The minority always guilty.”²¹⁶ This description of Belfast and, more broadly, Ulster resonated with the Northern Irish poets who would tread after MacNeice. “The direct reference to earlier Troubles incidents in the York Street district of Belfast...has a remarkably contemporary ring: its themes of sectarian division and intransigence; the

²¹³ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, lines 89-90.

²¹⁴ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, lines 91-94.

²¹⁵ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, lines 95-96.

²¹⁶ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, lines 103-105.

fear, suspicion and violence that Irish children are heir to; the complex, turbulent relationship between Ireland and Britain; the Irishman's love-hate engagement with his country; the artist's (in this case ironic) 'envy' of the man of 'action.'"²¹⁷ A number of writers have clung to the mudflat imagery and the connotations it brings of mire, of indeterminacy and of viscosity. Not water, not soil. Thick as mud. Unstable. All of these figures will come into play in the city poems of Carson and Mahon. Belfast: "Down there at the end of the melancholy lough/Against the lurid sky over stained water/Where hammers clang murderously on the girders/Like crucifixes the gantries stand."²¹⁸ Whereas Heaney will look for redemption in the bog where "the ground itself is kind, black butter"²¹⁹ as he refigures the imagery through the Nordic historio-mythology,²²⁰ the mud in MacNeice remains a medium of petrification; it submerges and it fossilizes. "The North.../Is still the North."

Where before discontent had simmered in the previous lines of *Autumn Journal's* Section XVI, MacNeice's anger towards the romantic Irish sensibility breaks the surface as the section winds towards its close:

I hate your grandiose airs,
 Your sob-stuff, your laugh and your swagger,
 Your assumption that everyone cares
 Who is the king of your castle.
 Castles are out of date,
 The tide flows round the children's sandy fancy;
 Put up what flag you like, it is too late
 To save your soul with bunting.
Odi atque amo:
 Shall we cut this name on trees with a rusty dagger?²²¹

MacNeice leads off with the blunt predicate, "I hate," and then begins the list: Ireland's inflated sense of self, its affiliation with martyrhood, its obliviousness to outside conflicts. He retorts, glibly, "Castles are

²¹⁷ Ormsby, introduction, *A Rage for Order* xvi.

²¹⁸ MacNeice, "Belfast," *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 5-8.

²¹⁹ Seamus Heaney, "Bogland," *A Rage for Order* (1992) line 16.

²²⁰ See a fleshed-out description of this movement in Chapter VI.

²²¹ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, lines 109-118.

out of date.” Again, the poem questions the nationalist project as one that was temporally-constituted and whose witching hour has long since passed the island by. This fight over bunting is little more than a child’s “sandy fancy.” The derision here is palpable. It is the most direct and directed assertion of MacNeice’s problems with his native ground. And yet then comes the turn, the lynchpin that holds the entirety of Section XVI together—the quote from Catullus. *Odi atque amo*. I hate and I love. Within himself, MacNeice holds the two forces in tension, and like Catullus, he is overwhelmed.²²² In the original verse, Catullus addresses his tumultuous feelings for his lover—a contextual detail that MacNeice would have been well aware of, given his classical education.²²³ The speaker in the poem falls back into the trap of addressing Ireland as a feminine counterpart, the appropriate object of courtly love or the marriage narrative; MacNeice acknowledges and subverts this logic with the ironic quip of his next line: “Shall we cut this name on trees with a rusty dagger?”

Section XVI does not end with the intertwining of love and hate; it ends with weariness, with a weary and disillusioned sense of the legacy that Ireland bestows on all her children. While the Irish landscape may still possess a certain allure, MacNeice notes, “she is both a bore and a bitch.”²²⁴ He takes the feminine archetype of the “shawled woman weeping at the garish altar” and inverts it; from the romanticized object of desire, Ireland takes on the cast of the negatively-construed female figures. MacNeice rejects, he patronizes, he writes off Ireland and then advises us to ignore the idealistic hopes she fosters. “Better close the horizon,” the speaker warns. “Send her no more fantasy, no more longings which/Are under a fatal tariff.”²²⁵

²²² The couplet from Catullus 85 reads, “I hate and love. And why, perhaps you’ll ask./ I don’t know: but I feel, and I’m tormented.” *Catullus: The Poems*, trans. A.E. Kline, 2001, accessed online, 29 Sept 2013 <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Catullus.htm#_Toc531846812>.

²²³ Michael Longley, introduction, *Selected Poems* (1988) xiii.

²²⁴ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, line 121.

²²⁵ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, lines 122-124.

At the close, MacNeice pinpoints Ireland's woes on ideology, on the projection of nationalistic fervor, on the privileging of the "fantastical" image of Cathleen ni Houlihan over the real and textured interactions of neighbors. Even in diaspora, the Irish "slouch around the world with a gesture and a brogue/ And a faggot of useless memories."²²⁶ What use are the markers of Irish pride, the culture and the history, if her children exist on the margins economically and politically? The final line, "and a faggot of useless memories," could be read as resentment; it certainly contains the idea of a wasted potential for the Irish people.²²⁷ Such an affective stance resonated with young Ulster writers. "I identified with his frustration with Ireland," remembers poet Nicholas Laird. "Growing up in mid-Ulster in the eighties and early nineties, you were subject to certain received narratives, from your school or the church or the news, and MacNeice challenged those. I felt his disenfranchisement."²²⁸

If MacNeice had solely provided a cogent articulation of their vantage point, he would have remained merely an antecedent, an icon of sorts to harken back to. Yet, as Derek Mahon stresses in his elegy for the older poet, MacNeice lives in "the future tense" in Ulster. His influence, both on an aesthetic and a political plane, was felt in the work of those poets working in the 1960s and continues to be felt in a number working today. To see how MacNeice imprinted himself on the younger generation in Belfast, we can turn to the "definitive elegy"—the poem composed by Mahon.²²⁹ "In Carrowdore Churchyard" lays out the continuing role Mahon sees MacNeice playing within the Ulster literary

²²⁶ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, lines 127-128.

²²⁷ Yet taking a closer look at the closing quatrain complicates the matter. The speaker begins, "For common sense is the vogue/And she gives her children neither sense nor money." The proposition is set up in the first equation—common sense is vogue; it is the common currency, but only for a time. Common sense, as a telos, appears temporally-limited, transient, at the whim of popular approval. And then we hear that Ireland has provisioned her children with neither financial beneficence nor much of this culturally-determined fad of common sense. Yet must we limit our normative frameworks to that of capitalism (the economically-productive) and of liberalism (the rational actor)? Are there no other logics that can be appealed to? These questions open themselves to the possibility of a radical critique of the European model that Ireland has come to be regulated by. Unfortunately, MacNeice does not explore further any of those potentialities in *Autumn Journal*. His politics, which embraces the world as radically plural and irreducible, materializes more fully in other work, and it will be the Northern Irish poets—not his British critics—who recognize the force of his political argument.

²²⁸ Laird, *Incorrigibly Plural* 245.

²²⁹ Quote from Michael Longley cited in Ni Anluain, *Reading the Future* 123.

context. Mahon's elegy functions as a perceptual grid. Out of the "incorrigibly plural" spread of MacNeice's oeuvre, he casts light on facets of his work that resonate with 1960s and 70s Belfast:

In Carrowdore Churchyard

Your ashes will not stir, even on this high ground,
 However the wind tugs, the headstones shake.
 This plot is consecrated, for your sake,
 To what lies in the future tense. You lie
 Past tension now, and spring is coming round
 Igniting flowers on the peninsula.

Your ashes will not fly, however the rough winds burst
 Through the wild brambles and the reticent trees.
 All we may ask of you we have; the rest
 Is not for publication, will not be heard.
 Maguire, I believe, suggested a blackbird
 And over your grave a phrase from Euripides.

Which suits you down to the ground, like this churchyard
 With its play of shadow, its humane perspective.
 Locked in the winter's fist, these hills are hard
 As nails, yet soft and feminine in their turn
 When fingers open and the hedges burn.
 This, you implied, is how we ought to live.

The ironical, loving crush of roses against snow,
 Each fragile, solving ambiguity. So
 From the pneumonia of the ditch, from the ague
 Of the blind poet and the bombed-out town you bring
 The all-clear to the empty holes of spring,
 Rinsing the choked mud, keeping the colors new.²³⁰

MacNeice appears in this poem in a number of ways: through his literal ashes that "will not stir" and "will not fly;" through the absence demarcated by his grave; through the "pneumonia of the ditch" that killed him; through the resonances of landscape and sound; through a gamut of intertextual references drawing water up from the well of his own oeuvre; through the argument being advanced on the political role of the poem; through the speaker's use of the second-person pronoun. "The plot is

²³⁰ Mahon, "In Carrowdore Churchyard," *A Rage for Order* (1992).

consecrated," Mahon assures MacNeice as he stands with Heaney and Longley atop the wind-scoured hill, "for your sake." The Belfast generation is writing – and will continue to write – in your vein, "however the rough winds burst/Through the wild brambles and the reticent trees." Here, Mahon presages the coming violence that will work to rend the Catholic poets from their Protestant counterparts.²³¹ But the poem promises, MacNeice's ashes, his literal remains, will not quit the high ground which they have taken up, not before the violence of the conflict. "However the wind tugs, the headstones shake."

Already, Mahon is occupying this plot of ground in MacNeice's stead. "In Carrowdore Churchyard" consciously communicates with a number of his poems, including "Brother Fire," *Autumn Journal* XVI, and, perhaps most blatantly, "Snow." In all three works—and throughout the bulk of his oeuvre—MacNeice plays with double-edged imagery, formal subversion, and sound to push against and strain poetic conventions and the mimetic impulse. In "Carrowdore Churchyard," the fire imagery pulls most easily from MacNeice's "Brother Fire." As critic Hugh Haughton teases out, Mahon's choice of "All-Clear" draws directly from the verses that his literary idol penned while acting as a volunteer firefighter in World War II London. Add to that the fire imagery of "spring coming round/igniting fires" and "the hedges burn." Mahon does not merely copy the diction of MacNeice's poem. He also engages with MacNeice's obsession with the dialectical image and its vehicle, the tidal swing effected by the line break. In "Carrowdore Churchyard," the images turn/and then turn again between the benign and the nightmare. Spring does not cultivate or breed flowers; it comes round/igniting flowers. "Locked in winter's fist, the hills are hard/As nails," Mahon tells us. The line break already turns the soil for the opposite impulse; we associate the nails of a hand with the feminine. And then the seasons turn, and these self-same hills (can we make that claim?) are "yet soft and feminine in their turn/when fingers open and the hedges burn." The image moves like a pendulum between hardness and softness,

²³¹ Written in 1965 while tensions were rising in Belfast.

between the asceticism of a winter landscape and the abundance of spring, between the dark and the light.

The verse's momentum is augmented, the ripples cast outward, by Mahon's use of rhyme and a strong sonic patterning. Like the wind tugging at the hilltop and its headstones, the first verse is reverberating with rhyme, both at the end of the lines and internally. He sets off with the fast repetition of the long 'a' vowel: "The headstones shake/this plot is consecrated, for your sake." And then the poem breaks into the line that does not terminate in a rhyming pair:

This plot is consecrated, for your sake,
To what lies in the future tense. You lie
Past tension now, and spring is coming round
Igniting flowers on the peninsula.

He bookends the second line with the same word, "lie," whose sound will be picked up at the close of the stanza with "igniting." Interspaced between the lies, he inserts his dominant claim: MacNeice, you exist for us in the future tense. Then he immediately repeats the sound, "tens," in a direct—and perhaps envious—nod to the past: "You lie/Past tension now." As his predecessor often did, Mahon has taken the traditional ABAB rhyme pattern, condensed it, and then broken it over two lines. We read Lies-Tense-Lie-Tension, and then we pull out of the intensity of that moment, both sonically and argumentatively, to spring "coming round" and taper out with the unrhymed and polysyllabic term, "peninsula." Throughout the poem, Mahon plays with rhyme and assonance to draw connections between particular images and assertions; the common sounds keep time, a metronymic device that paces the reader as we spin out and over the line breaks and turns he introduces.

In his elegy, Mahon draws directly from the best of MacNeice—his mastery of the line break with its turn and its ambiguity, the double edges of his imagery, his fierce attention to sound and rhythm. Yet the fierceness of Mahon's position demands the question—why? Why will his ashes remain anchored on the hill? What is at stake in commanding such a position? Is this act of reclamation merely

an aesthetic one? Or is it also a political act, a statement of intent to carry on with the political project to which MacNeice had set himself? "In Carrowdore Churchyard" provides MacNeice's answer:

This, you implied, is how we ought to live.
The ironical, loving crush of roses against snow,
Each fragile, solving ambiguity

Mahon is making a statement: MacNeice, this plot is consecrated for your sake, and in the future tense, your politics will guide and resonate in our politics. We too will dwell before "each fragile, solving ambiguity," in this world that is crazier than we think. Instead of trying to draw firm delineations, to mark things as black or white, we will let our vision take in both, not as differing interpretations, but objectively, as incorrigibly plural.

To look more broadly than Mahon: MacNeice's legacy remains vital to the Belfast writers because of his aesthetic allegiance to form and his "restless photographic eye,"²³²—both of which attempted to mediate and intervene in the petrification found in that "city of mud." The mid-1960s in Northern Ireland were still quiet, but the sense of impending conflict had not abated. The Protestant-Catholic divide still occupied much of society's attention, and Prime Minister Terence O'Neill's signal of relaxing the strict anti-Catholic policies had catalyzed rumblings of discontent in the Protestant working-class neighborhoods.²³³ Yet in many ways, meaningful change still felt possible on the political level. Simmons' *The Honest Ulsterman* embodied "the Zeitgeist of the times," critic Tom Clyde remembers — an upbeat, albeit naïve, idealism about the ability of Northern Ireland to transcend sectarianism and systemic discrimination. MacNeice, who had been criticized in the 1930s for his unwillingness to make grand political statements, offered a more nuanced and pragmatic opposition to the "thousands of Williams waving thousands of swords." And his verse mapped that complicated reading of Northern Irish society. Through its formalism, its imagery, and its loyalty to description, no matter how mundane the

²³² Montague, introduction, *The Faber Book of Irish Verse* (1974).

²³³ Letter from Patricia MacCluskey to Prime Minister Harry Wilson, dated 4 Feb 1969, Harold Wilson papers, Modern Political Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

scene, his poetry articulated primary aspects of the Ulster structure of feeling—the instability felt before the overwhelming surge of historical wrongs and the double vision, or parallax, of the Ulster perceptual regime. In order to better articulate this structure of feeling found in MacNeice and to lay the groundwork for a close reading of two poets from the 1960s generation, I will now take a closer look at several facets of MacNeice’s verse: his subversive attachment to English formalism; his ability to write out of a place of contradiction; his rejection of political rhetoric and other clean-cut declarations; and his commitment to life as the basis for both politics and art.

**“Somewhere beyond the scorched gable end and the burnt-out buses
there is a poet indulging
his wretched rage for order-
or not as the case may be; for his
is a dying art,
an eddy of semantic scruples
in an unstructurable sea.”²³⁴**

Mahon’s lines connect the formal obsession of the poet to the “unstructurable sea” of the Troubles in 1972 Ulster. Many critics, including the writers themselves, have remarked on the intensive formal allegiances of the Northern Irish poets; yet they fall into a literary lineage that takes off with Yeats and continues through to MacNeice. Although MacNeice broke with Yeatsian style in a number of ways—from his dedication to the mundane to his inversion of the dream-figure into nightmare to his complicated relationship to his native land—he “truly assimilated the forms, structures, and genres of the later Yeats.”²³⁵ MacNeice had certainly familiarized himself with Yeats’ work; in 1941, he wrote a critical primer on the poet and his opus, which Irish literary critic Neal Corcoran still calls “a matchless introductory study.”²³⁶ MacNeice largely diverged from Yeats’ problematic—that of constituting an Irish national sensibility and history—but he possessed immense respect for his elder. “Yeats avoided the

²³⁴ Derek Mahon, “Rage for Order,” *A Rage for Order* (1992) lines 1-7.

²³⁵ Brearton and Longley, preface, *Incorrigibly Plural* xiii.

²³⁶ Corcoran, *Incorrigibly Plural* 260.

world thoroughfares," MacNeice wrote, referring to Yeats' insular take on Ireland. "It would be a disaster if all poets were to imitate him. In his own case the great refusal was justified."²³⁷ Today, Irish critics have plotted MacNeice firmly in Yeats' wake as a disinheritor rather than a literary foil.²³⁸

MacNeice remained a highly formal poet throughout his career; yet his attention to Yeatsian form did not involve mere mimicry. (In this way, he avoided the pitfalls that befell cadres of his Irish peers who were unable to break out of the Yeats' aesthetic and his nationalist imaginary.)²³⁹

MacNeice addressed this creative tension between traditional forms and original verse in his critical writings: "A poem, to be recognizable, must be traditional; but to be worth recognizing, it must be something new." He took this position to heart in his approach to poetry's structured past. Rather than remain comfortable within the constraints imposed by various forms vis-à-vis their meter and their rhyme, MacNeice would often work against them. His long, convoluted syntax, prone to fragmentation and the heedless rush of too many phrases jammed into each other without the benefit of an article or even a conjunction, strained the neat patterns of formal verse almost to their breaking. This approach took root early in MacNeice's work; "River in Spate" pushes the syntax and the line to the maximum extension, yet still achieves a rapid beat through its internal rhyme and assonance:

So all they will hear is the fall of hooves and the distant shake of harness,
And the beat of the bells on the horses' heads and the undertaker's laughter,
And the murmur that will lose its strength and blur at length to quietness,
And afterwards the minute heard descending, never ending heard,
And then the minute after and the minute after the minute after.²⁴⁰

Sound repetition and rhyme percolates through the verse. The end rhyme of "harness/quietness" and "laughter/after" is foregrounded by MacNeice's use of the parsing line. Each break occurs in a natural place syntactically, yet the internal rhyme of "strength/length" and "descending/ending" offers the

²³⁷ Quoted in Muldoon, "The Perring Birch," *Incorrigibly Plural* 140-141.

²³⁸ Brearton and Longley, preface, *Incorrigibly Plural* xiii.

²³⁹ Quoted in Edna Longley, *MacNeice* 28.

²⁴⁰ MacNeice, "River in Spate," *Selected Poems* lines 12-16.

ghost of a line break or caesura within the lines themselves. And then in the final line, the orderly effect of the parsing line is completely submerged by the fast-paced rhythm brought through the conjunction: “And then the minute after and the minute after the minute after.” All of these conflicting and overlapping formal tendencies—the line against the syntax, the rhyme against its failure—give the poem its pace. The river in spate is spilling “the coffins of cold funerals” over and over the cliff’s lip, and MacNeice works to situate the imagery within a cadence that substantiates it. As poet Glyn Maxwell notes, “form is how poetry expresses time.”²⁴¹ It sets the metronymic impulse of the poem.

The later MacNeice also relished the tension between the formal constraints and the syntax as well, and he began to engage more fully with the poetic refrain. Corcoran reads his final collection of poems as almost a complete inversion of the traditional structure; “among so much returning and repeating, refrain in this volume becomes destabilized, self-deconstructing and altogether anxiety-inducing,” he comments.²⁴² For instance, take MacNeice’s 1940 poem, “Autobiography.” The form appears simply constructed—rhyming couplets interspersed with a refrain, akin almost to a nursery rhyme.²⁴³

In my childhood trees were green
And there was plenty to be seen.

Come back early or never come.

My father made the walls resound,
He wore his collar the wrong way round.

Come back early or never come.

My mother wore a yellow dress;

²⁴¹ Glyn Maxwell, “Turn and Turn Against: The Case of *Autumn Journal*,” *Incorrigibly Plural* 183.

²⁴² Corcoran, *Incorrigibly Plural*.

²⁴³ “But MacNeice is a quite remarkable poet, particularly later MacNeice and even posthumous MacNeice—I mean the poems published after he’d died—absolutely, extraordinarily nightmarish nursery rhymes, poems like “The Taxis” and “The Introduction.” Quite extraordinary poems, really nothing like them. And they’re poems that have been, to some extent, influential in some of the things I do. There’s a tone, a strain in what I do that belongs to that same strand of slightly disturbing, nightmarish activity.” Ingersoll and Rubin, “The Invention of the ‘I’: A Conversation with Paul Muldoon.”

Gently, gently, gentleness.

Come back early or never come.

When I was five the black dreams came;
Nothing after was quite the same.

Come back early or never come.

The dark was talking to the dead;
The lamp was dark beside my bed.

Come back early or never come.

When I woke they did not care;
Nobody, nobody was there.

Come back early or never come.

When my silent terror cried,
Nobody, nobody replied.

Come back early or never come.

I got up; the chilly sun
Saw me walk away alone.

*Come back early or never come.*²⁴⁴

The first three couplets begin innocently enough; they set the scene as it were and situate the reader firmly within the child's landscape where "there was plenty to be seen." The first hint the reader gets of the abnormality of this rhymed narrative comes in the fifth line when the child describes his father as wearing "his collar the wrong way round." Such a description literally references his father's role as an Anglican bishop, yet it also signals something is off—particularly when read against the opening line of the next couplet: "My mother wore a yellow dress/ Gently, gently, gentleness." The refrain is amorphous; at this point, it could be either parent addressing the child, reminding him to return home early, or it could be the child directly addressing the father or the mother. But the direct repetition of

²⁴⁴ MacNeice, "Autobiography," *Selected Poems*.

“Come back early or never come” takes on an increasingly haunting cast as the stanzas unfold. The poem pivots when the speaker is five and “the black dreams came.” With the pivot comes an inversion of the imagery from sound to silence, from color to darkness. The child trades the green trees and the yellow dress for black dreams and a dark lamp, resounding walls for silent terror.

As each refrain passes, its message becomes more urgent. To stress this theme of abandonment, MacNeice adds another layer of repetition by structuring two parallel couplets that begin with a situational statement of abandonment (“When I woke they did not care” and “When my silent terror came”) and end with the doubling of “Nobody, nobody.” The refrain now echoes as desperate cry from a terrified child, and it becomes increasingly clear that it will go unanswered. And then finally, the speaker shifts the poem back into the light, but this “chilly sun” bears little resemblance to the green trees and gentleness of childhood. Here, MacNeice “walks away alone.” Although the darkness has evaporated, the nightmare has not. It has merely become the speaker’s mundane. He repeats the refrain a final time, and it is no longer immediate but full of bitterness. The addressed has not come early and now will not come at all.

“Autobiography” returns the nursery rhyme to its origins as a prescriptive lesson rather than a sunlit bit of comfort, and MacNeice achieves it by exploiting “the moments caught between heart-beats”²⁴⁵ of the refrain. In each instance, the reader encounters an identical parade of words, but they carry a different resonance. “It is the difference that is rhythmic, not the repetition, which nevertheless produces it: productive repetition has nothing to do with reproductive meter.”²⁴⁶ MacNeice turns form into a means of fostering productive repetition rather than contenting himself with mere reproduction; it is the difference that he finds most interesting, after all.²⁴⁷ For him, the formal constraints are that

²⁴⁵ MacNeice, “Coda,” *Selected Poems* (1998) line 5.

²⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 316.

²⁴⁷ Under this reading, I am aware that MacNeice sounds like Deleuze and Guattari. While I am certainly reading their work alongside MacNeice’s verse, I do not believe I am imposing it without warrant. MacNeice’s work and his

which organize and dispel energy; it is a means of encountering and ordering flux.²⁴⁸ “Life will have her answer...When the winsome bubble/ Shivers, when the bough/Breaks, will be the moment.”²⁴⁹

Mahon’s poem, “Rage for Order,” indicates how important formal concerns were to the Belfast poets. For the most part, his generation (speaking mainly of Heaney, Longley, and Simmons)²⁵⁰ wrote in a more formalist style, leading poets like John Montague to criticize their lack of experimentation in the face of modernists like Ezra Pound.²⁵¹ “For [the formalist’s]/is a dying art.” Yet in the tumult of Ulster’s sectarian crisis, the traditional poetic forms (as opposed to the radical nature of free verse) brought stability “to the unstructurable sea.” Ulster challenges:

Now watch me as I make history. Watch as I tear down
to build up with desperate love,
knowing it cannot be
long now till I have need of his
desperate ironies.²⁵²

Mahon decries the poet for taking up a stance “far from his people.” To do so, he cites a line from Albert Camus’ novel, *The Fall*, when he writes “and this in the face of love,/death, and the wages of the poor...”

In the novel, the narrator is torn between the pleasure he takes in games—when “there was a rule of the game, which was not serious but which we enjoyed taking as if it were”—and the real problems

letters substantiate his interest in flux, in pure difference, in contradiction and subversion, in hybrid and mobile identities.

²⁴⁸ ““The expressive is primary in relation to the possessive; expressive qualities, or matters of expression, are necessarily appropriative and constitute a having more profound than being. Not in the sense that these qualities belong to a subject, but in the sense that they delineate a territory that will belong to the subject that carries or produces them. These qualities are signatures, but the signature, the proper name, is not the constituted mark of a subject, but the constituting mark of a domain, an abode....How very important it is, when chaos threatens, to drawn an inflatable, portable territory.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 314-316.

²⁴⁹ MacNeice, “Cradle Song for Eleanor,” *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 15, 17-19.

²⁵⁰ The generation that would follow on Mahon’s heels (thinking here of Muldoon, Carson, and Medbh McGuckian) also remained obsessed with form, but they spent more time deconstructing it. Muldoon has famously written long poems composed of an exploded sestina form. (Ingersoll and Rubin, “The Invention of the ‘I’: A Conversation with Paul Muldoon.”) Reflecting on a collection of his sonnets, Carson once said, “The sequence, again, is about the dangers of formalism, which is why I have written it in a deliberately formal form. All these sonnets are self-destructive.” (Letter from Ciaran Carson to Frank Ormsby, late 1972, Ormsby papers, MARBL, Emory University.)

²⁵¹ Montague, introduction, *The Faber Book of Irish Verse*.

²⁵² Mahon, “Rage for Order,” lines 23-27.

individuals face. And so in a move of literary cooptation, Mahon questions the legitimacy of playing with poetry's formal concerns "in the face of love, death, and the wages of the poor."²⁵³ His fast adherence to the rules of rhyme and meter exposes the poet to criticism from the men of action, particularly during a conflict that seemed hyper-saturated with acting and devoid of meditative thought.

For the Ulster poets (Mahon included), formalism might be a game, but it was a productive one. As Michael Longley would later put it, the form served as "a map and compass showing you the way" when the writer ventured into uncharted waters.²⁵⁴ Members of the 1970s generation, including Medbh McGuckian and Ciaran Carson, also put high stock in form's ability to lead the poet to revelation. "Form informs," Carson said.²⁵⁵ Form forces the poet to traverse other routes than the one he or she may have taken in prose; along the way, there are a great many things to discover.²⁵⁶ And so traditional poetic forms not only provided a nexus of order in the midst of Ulster's "confusing and complex culture,"²⁵⁷ but they also gave MacNeice and other Northern Irish poets new aesthetic tools. MacNeice's relation to form was not one of fixity and rootedness, but of metastability against the chaos of the sentence fragment and the jumbled world composed in fragments "in the minute heard descending, never ending heard,/And then the minute after and the minute after the minute after."²⁵⁸ The lines he wrote in "Version of Heraclitus" could very much describe his own formal prowess: "Nor need you be troubled to pin me down in my room/ For the room and I will escape."²⁵⁹

**"And one read black where the other read white, his hope
The other man's damnation."²⁶⁰**

²⁵³ Albert Camus, *The Fall* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) 88.

²⁵⁴ Michael Longley, Interview with Siobhan McSweeney. Quoted in Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance*.

²⁵⁵ Ciaran Carson, Personal interview, 3 July 2013.

²⁵⁶ Carson, Personal interview, 3 July 2013.

²⁵⁷ Michael Longley, "Strife and the Ulster Poet," *Hibernia*, 7 Nov 1969.

²⁵⁸ MacNeice, "River in Spate," lines 15-16.

²⁵⁹ MacNeice, "Versions of Heraclitus," *Selected Poems*, (1988) lines 20-21.

²⁶⁰ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal XVI*, lines 29-30.

MacNeice's double-sided imagery, his aporetic sight, resonates with the lived experience of Belfast's sectarianism. "The war in Northern Ireland is also a war of images...This is not to say that there are no 'real' events. But their interpretation—and perpetration—often depends on conditioned reflexes, on images or camera angles already in place."²⁶¹ The controller of BBC Northern Ireland noted how media outlets often tended to reduce the conflict into "a simple dichotomy [which] is to take the political polarization and to allow it to appropriate a far more diverse cultural group."²⁶² Over and over again, the disconnect between the Protestant and Catholic perspectives was treated as a staple of Ulster life. As Mahon put it in his poem, "Ecclesiastes," you could "close one eye and be king" in Belfast, no matter which eye you closed. The Protestant minority and the Catholic majority were not fighting over subjective interpretations of reality; they presented two objectivities of the real, "soundlessly collateral and incompatible."²⁶³ The sectarian conflict extended and permeated down even to the perceptual; North Ireland splintered into two before the parallax.

MacNeice teases out the phenomenon of the parallax throughout his work. "MacNeice had an ability to live in contradictory states, and write out of them," Laird noted in his tribute to the poet.²⁶⁴ At the close of MacNeice's "Brother Fire," the speaker cries out directly to that "delicate walker, babbler, dialectician Fire" with a recognition of this double-faced relationship: "O enemy and image of ourselves!"²⁶⁵ Through his dialectic imagery, he takes up a philosophical orientation that he has explored in the past, most memorably in "Snow"—the reading of the concept of a pure (rather than negative) difference. "The room was suddenly rich," MacNeice begins, "and the great bay-window was/Spawning snow and pink roses against it/Soundlessly collateral and incompatible." These two, the snow and the

²⁶¹ Edna Longley, John Hewitt Summer School 2007, accessed online.

²⁶² Pat Loughrey, quoted in Robin Wilson, "The Media and Intrastate Conflict in Northern Ireland," *Democratic Dialogue*, accessed online 4 Oct 2013 <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/dd/papers/media.htm>>.

²⁶³ MacNeice, "Snow," line 3.

²⁶⁴ Laird, *Incorrigibly Plural* 276.

²⁶⁵ Louis MacNeice, "Brother Fire," *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 13-14.

roses, incompatible, incorrigibly plural in a room suddenly rich with the sight of them together in the bay window. "And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world/Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes," MacNeice tells us.²⁶⁶ The fire image again turns between two seeming incongruities and somehow contains them. He finishes: "There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses."²⁶⁷ What in one light joins two positions, in another rends and sets them apart. "O enemy and image of ourselves!"

Writing out of a conflicted perceptual system would obviously pose a challenge for the so-called Troubles poets as well. As Carson would put it, "If there's one thing certain about what was going on [during the Troubles], it's that you don't know the half of it. The official account is only an account, and there are many others."²⁶⁸ He continued: "Anything can be told this way or that way. There's no final way of telling a story, or explaining the totality of whatever it was that happened at any given time...I've lived in Belfast my whole life, and I still couldn't tell you a fraction of what is going on. All I can do is tell you stories."²⁶⁹ There were not simply two communities operative in Northern Ireland throughout its long and fraught history; in fact, before partition, the island itself had been regarded as a pluralistic society. Yet the Nationalist and Unionist territorial visions did provide the dominant narratives, and their ideological force only became heightened as the paramilitaries on both sides began to take lives under the influence of their respective logics. As Heaney so aptly notes, this experience of straddling two worlds, of seeing double, was not exclusive to the writers: "the whole population are adepts in the mystery of living in two places at one time. Like all human beings, of course, they would prefer to live in one, but in the meantime they make do with a constructed destination, an interim place whose foundations straddle the areas of self-division, a place of resolved contradiction, beyond confusion."²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ MacNeice, "Snow," lines 9-10.

²⁶⁷ MacNeice, "Snow," line 12.

²⁶⁸ Rand Brandes, "Ciaran Carson-Interview," *The Irish Review* 8 (Spring 1990) 77-90.

²⁶⁹ Brandes, "Ciaran Carson."

²⁷⁰ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* 190.

And so it is not surprising that MacNeice's dialectical imagery, his emphasis on antimonies, would resonate in 1970s Ulster with its spatially- and discursively-mapped divides between Catholics and Protestants. His verse is resonant because it encapsulates a particularly Northern Irish structure of feeling—that of the parallax. MacNeice's project is negotiating this seeming aporetic couplet: "The world is what was given/The world is what we make."²⁷¹ There is more than a line break in between these two assertions.

**"But I will not give you any idol or idea, creed or king
I give you the incidental things which pass
Outward through space exactly as each was."²⁷²**

MacNeice faced significant criticism from British academics in the 1930s for refusing to take a political stance; his politics were of evasion rather than a serious engagement with revolutionary theories.²⁷³ He wrote of things like "crepe-de-chine" and "Dunlop tires;"²⁷⁴ he did not advocate for Marxist solidarity or against the Churchwellian coterie like Auden and others. Yet, as Longley and others have argued, MacNeice's poetry moved under a different star—the muddled political aggrandizement of the Protestant and Catholic rabble-rousers. He had no faith in the politics of an "idol or idea, creed or king;" any neatly tied system of thought, whether it be liberalism or Marxism or Republican nationalism, provided a dangerous image for individuals to swear "love for ever" to, even if they only saw it in passing. "Nothing was simple, nothing was plain, but obfuscation or 'theory-venders' would get one nowhere."²⁷⁵ And so he took the journalist's route. "Description is revelation; isn't that marvelous?"²⁷⁶ As long as he did not allow the journalist capacity for observation to subsume and overpower the poet's

²⁷¹ MacNeice, "London Rain," *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 51-52.

²⁷² MacNeice, "Train to Dublin," *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 28-30.

²⁷³ Edna Longley, *MacNeice* x.

²⁷⁴ MacNeice, "Bagpipe Music," *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 3; 14.

²⁷⁵ Anthony Thwaite, "On Louis MacNeice," *New Statesman* (10 Mar 1972).

²⁷⁶ Michael McLaverty to Seamus Heaney. Georgina Mills, "Interview with Seamus Heaney," *Strawberry Fare-St. Mary's College Literary Magazine* (Autumn 1980) 18, accessed in Heaney papers, MARBL, Emory University.

imagination, MacNeice reasoned, then his verse would be in good shape. Against “the purblind manifestoes” and the “continuance of hatred,” MacNeice pushed for a radical devotion to the everyday, to the textures of life lived in multiplicity rather than caught in a rigid double-bind. A poet should not be afraid of reading newspapers or examining lives at the granular level.²⁷⁷

Yeats tried to bind poets to images he saw as deserving of poetic virtue. MacNeice blatantly ignored such a pronouncement. He characterized Irish poems that followed in this particular Yeatsian vein as “rarely [having] much meat.”²⁷⁸ Instead, his verse encompasses the minutia of bourgeois life in Birmingham during the economic depression of the 1930s; reading *Autumn Journal* brings a host of unorthodox images, from “bacon and eggs in a silver dish for breakfast” to the “ladder in her stocking” to a “windscreen-wiper/In an empty car/Wiping away like mad.”²⁷⁹ Philip Larkin, a British poet by birth who nevertheless lived many years in Belfast, identified this signature within MacNeice’s oeuvre in a 1963 article for *The New Statesman*. “His poetry was the poetry of our everyday life, of shop-windows, traffic policemen, ice-cream soda, lawnmowers, and an uneasy awareness of what the newsboys were shouting,” Larkin remembered. “We were grateful for having found a place in poetry for these properties, for intruding them in the ‘drunkenness of things being various.’”²⁸⁰ Why should poetry ignore the things of this world?” MacNeice asked. “Why neglect the objects that we compose our lives around?

MacNeice’s poetry breaks with the abstract symbolism and “pure imagery” fostered in the lines of modernists like Pound and Eliot; in its stead, he pushed for what he described as “impure poetry,” for verse that engages with things or ideas in relation to their context rather than considering each in isolation. To study something in its pure form was to abstract it. He wanted poetry that would get in the mud rather than write from behind the “high window.”²⁸¹ After all, MacNeice noted, pure form is only a

²⁷⁷ MacNeice. Quoted in Michael Longley, introduction, *Selected Poems* (1988) xviii.

²⁷⁸ Louis MacNeice, *The Poetry of W.B. Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) 179-180.

²⁷⁹ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* I, lines 11; 54; and VII, lines 45-47.

²⁸⁰ Philip Larkin, “Louis MacNeice,” *The New Statesman* (6 Sept 1963).

²⁸¹ Mahon, “Rage for Order,” line 9.

distribution in homogenous space; the liminal encounter of two spaces, of two cultures, of two logics, is the most intriguing zone to explore. “The shore of the sea is far jollier than the middle.”²⁸² The academic might thrive in the pure space of philosophy, but the ordinary man was engaged with the seemingly-trivial details of living—and that record could act as the source for a vital poetry. “We can build art out of those tangible odds and ends,” a young MacNeice wrote in a 1927 letter. “The day of the chameleon who feeds on air is over. Ordinary man is more like an ostrich. He thrives on broken glass and rusty nails.”²⁸³

MacNeice’s commitment to concrete and sedimented description allows him to work against the instability of Ulster life and the rigid masks figured in the Catholic-Protestant caesura. His verse anchors itself in details rather than trading on abstractions or grand pronouncements. “I do not want to be a tragic or philosophic chorus/But to keep my eye only on the nearer future/And after that let the sea flow over us.”²⁸⁴ Almost the entirety of *Autumn Journal* could be read through the following lens: in times of uncertainty and the chaos of impending war, the tangible is the rock to which we cling. He records August 1939 in Britain through the limber ligature of “and” with its acausal synthesis:

And August going out to the tin trumpets of nasturtiums
 And the sunflowers’ Salvation Army blare of brass
 And the spinster sitting in a deckchair picking up stitches
 Not raising her eyes to the noise of the planes that pass
 Northward from Lee-on-Solent. Macrocarpa and cypress
 And roses on a rustic trellis and mulberry trees
 And bacon and eggs in a silver dish for breakfast
 And all the inherited assets of bodily ease
 And all the inherited worries, rheumatism and taxes,
 And whether Stella will marry and what to do with Dick
 And the branch of the family that lost their money in Hatry
 And the passing of the Morning Post and of life’s climacteric²⁸⁵

²⁸² MacNeice in a letter to his college roommate. Quoted in Edna Longley, *MacNeice*.

²⁸³ MacNeice, Letter 169.

²⁸⁴ MacNeice, “Wolves,” *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 8-10.

²⁸⁵ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* I, lines 5-16.

The imagery threads the current of war through the bourgeois setting; even as the poet refuses to raise his eyes to the noise of the planes, the awareness of them is palpable in the frenetic recitation of normalcy. In the flowers, we find “tin trumpets” and “Salvation Army brass.” But the rest of the details are merely coats of paint, thrown one atop the other. As if the poem were running a magic trick, distracting the reader—and the speaker himself—by layering on the action in the foreground.

Suffusing his verse with the concrete also helps MacNeice break through the paralysis of Ulster sectarianism. By training his sight on a more granular level of description, he reveals the flimsiness of the strict categorical divide. Instead of describing Belfast as a city rent into two camps, he looks to people, the “faces balanced in the toppling wave –/ His glint of joy in cunning as the farmer asks/Twenty percent too much.”²⁸⁶ As Montague admonishes in his interview with Hewitt, the labels “planter” and “gael,” like Protestant and Catholic, are oversimplifications of the fragmented socius; they function as visual aids only when the conflict is viewed from far away (from, say, the London newsstands). This political attachment to the plurality in place of a dualistic grid is best approached through MacNeice’s poem, “Snow:”

The room was suddenly rich and the great bay-window was
 Spawning snow and pink roses against it
 Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:
 World is suddener than we fancy it.

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
 Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
 A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
 The drunkenness of things being various.

And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world
 Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes –
 On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one’s hands—
 There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ MacNeice, “Train to Dublin,” lines 41-44.

²⁸⁷ MacNeice, “Snow,” *Selected Poems* (1988).

The speaker succumbs, suddenly, to the vitality of an incompatible and pure difference—the snow as the white nullification of difference and the rose as the emblem of a pure and individual love, but also snow as the cacophony of individual flakes and roses as the riot of individual blossoms. In this work, MacNeice lays down his claims: “World is suddener than we fancy it.” “World is crazier and more of it than we think.” “World/is more spiteful and gay than one supposes.” He characterizes the world, this in-betweenness of things, in terms more attuned to energy flows. This world exhibits a speed, it exhibits plurality and excess, it exhibits intensity, both with a negative and positive valence. Its abundance and movement prevents us from grasping the world intellectually. Instead, MacNeice wants to foreground the sensory experience as a valid means of interacting with one’s surroundings, which predictably leads his verse to concrete imagery and landscapes. Do not discount the slices of world that one encounters “on the tongue on the eye on the ears in the palms of one’s hands,” for it makes the room “suddenly rich.” This cleaving to the multifaceted and plural sensory knowledge works against the difference-eliding calibrations and measurements of a traditional cartographer. And it allowed for maps to be made of a Northern Ireland that did not enact the logic of discrimination and violent resistance. As critic Neal Alexander notes of Carson’s work: “The reality of the city is not to be accessed simply by stripping back the layers of prejudice and distortion that concealed it from view, but its lineaments are to be glimpsed fleetingly from within the shifting constellations of sensory perceptions and material details he arranges and records.”²⁸⁸

“Life will have her answer”²⁸⁹

MacNeice’s commitment to life, “life will have her answer,” and its excess put him at odds with the empty rhetoric and self-aggrandizing discourses that flowed fast and heavy in 1970s Belfast. Against

²⁸⁸ Neal Alexander, *Ciaran Carson: Space, Place, Writing* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2010) 75.

²⁸⁹ MacNeice, “Cradle Song for Eleanor,” line 15.

the promises and panderings of politicians, poetry refused to offer up pre-fashioned conclusions or make universal claims. Instead, it recorded the city and allowed the space for imaginative retoolings of a normal scene viewed from the great bay window. No longer merely roses and snow, but the “drunkenness of things being various” and also tangerine. MacNeice certainly thought that art, including poetry, could make things happen. “Other philosophies have described the world; our business is to change it,” he wrote to Auden in a letter praising his latest poems. “Add that if we are not interested in changing it, there is really very little to describe. There is just an assortment of heterogeneous objects to make pure form out of.”²⁹⁰

For MacNeice, poetry may not exert political force through the traditional conduits, but it could shift the perceptual lens just enough to make a difference. Virginia Woolf lambasted the ‘30s poets for writing big while accomplishing little politically; MacNeice responded in turn, noting that “we were right to throw mud at Mrs. Woolf’s old horses and we were right to advocate social reconstruction and we were even right—in our more lyrical work—to give personal expression to our feelings of anxiety, horror, and despair.”²⁹¹ Many of the Northern Irish writers would take up his standard in the generations to come, including Heaney, Muldoon, and Carson. In his final volume of verse, MacNeice appears to echo Mahon’s concern with playing poetic games in times of trouble. In his rejoinder to the speaker in Camus’ *The Fall*, MacNeice argues that while poetry may seem a marginal craft, it is the textual that draws the boundaries within which these games take place. In “Sports Page,” he closes:

Till we remember
The lines of print are always sidelines
And all our games funeral games.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ MacNeice quoted in Jonathan Allison, “Pure Form, Impure Poetry, and Louis MacNeice’s Letters,” *Incorrigibly Plural* (2012) 48.

²⁹¹ MacNeice, *Selected Literary Criticism* 123-124.

²⁹² MacNeice, “Sports Page,” *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 14-16.

Camus' speaker worries at how an individual can play formal games when serious matters have to be addressed; MacNeice answers that the poet is always working at the boundaries of the most serious of games—those of life itself.

MacNeice died in 1963 after contracting pneumonia while in a cave recording sound for one of his BBC shows. The next year, three budding Belfast writers—Heaney, Longley, and Mahon—would make the trip to his grave in Carrowdore churchyard, adopting him and facets of his poetic project as their own. Rather than sit comfortably in the literary annals, MacNeice resonated with the 1960s generation and beyond. Muldoon notes that a reader cannot understand Mahon, Longley, or Carson without exposure to MacNeice and his problematic.²⁹³ “[Your literary antecedents] enable you, and they provoke you, and they provide touchstones of phrases and new slants on the world,” Laird concludes. “For me, MacNeice expanded the possibilities of language, and therefore, of thought.”²⁹⁴ And while writers borrowed different elements from MacNeice, he mapped out Northern Irish structures of feeling—as well as possible poetic interventions—that would challenge the writers as they attempted to wrestle with the Troubles. Ormsby describes him as a “source poet;”²⁹⁵ Michael Longley as a “progenitor.”²⁹⁶ But MacNeice’s legacy was secured for Ireland in 1986 when Muldoon gave him more space than any other writer in *The Faber Collection of Irish Verse*. In Northern Ireland at least, “MacNeice is now properly recognized as the presiding genius of twentieth-century poetry in Ireland alongside his contemporary Patrick Kavanagh (who survived him by a mere four years) and as poetic equal to the all-powerful Auden,” concluded Northern Irish poet Gerald Dawe.²⁹⁷ Hewitt, on the other hand, remains located firmly within a regionalist tradition where his heart and verse took root.

²⁹³ Ingersoll and Rubin, “The Invention of the ‘I’: A Conversation with Paul Muldoon.”

²⁹⁴ Laird, *Incorrigibly Plural* 276.

²⁹⁵ Ormsby, introduction, *A Rage for Order* xvi.

²⁹⁶ Michael Longley, introduction, *Selected Poems* xxiii.

²⁹⁷ Gerald Dawe, “The Lives We Live,” *Incorrigibly Plural* (2012) 169.

This predominance of MacNeice's literary influence might also be ascribed to the salience of his political vision through the Troubles and then beyond. As critics Edna Longley and Fran Brearton note in their 2012 volume of essays on the poet, "if MacNeice's literary moment has come, perhaps – with the Northern Ireland peace process – his political moment has also come."²⁹⁸ As the 1970s began and Ulster began to unravel at its sectarian seams, the poets would have to negotiate—as MacNeice did—what it meant to write from the midst of conflict, to write about violence without clinging to the twin poles of evasion and exploitation.

And soon, my friend,
We shall have no time for dances...

We are dying, Egypt, dying

And not expecting pardon,
Hardened in heart anew,
But glad to have sat under
Thunder and rain with you,
And grateful too
For sunlight on the garden."²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Brearton and Longley, preface, *Incorrigibly Plural* xiii.

²⁹⁹ MacNeice, "The Sunlight on the Garden," *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 11-12; 18-24.

Chapter 4: *'We are closed in, and the key is turned on our uncertainty:'*
A Historical Account of the Civil Rights Movement and the Outbreak of the Troubles, 1963-1975

"If Hewitt was the projector of a Northern Ireland that failed to develop, Louis MacNeice is the sponsor of one struggling to be born," Seamus Heaney stated in a lecture at Oxford in 1993.³⁰⁰ Both poets offered up distinctive maps of Northern Ireland—Hewitt as the poet of territory who espoused an Ulster that gave primacy to regional boundaries rather than national ones, MacNeice as the poet of dislocation who mastered the parallax by pushing the conjunctive synthesis to its limits. And both served as aesthetic influences for the writers emerging in Northern Ireland during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Although each hailed from Ulster, their work brought to bear different representations, thereby mobilizing different social geographies. Hewitt imagined Northern Ireland as imbued with its own distinctive history, agency, and autonomy. Instead of viewing the region as the zone of encounter between two larger nationalisms—that of the Republic and of the United Kingdom—he gave primacy to the newly-defined boundaries. Yet Hewitt's regionalism, while attractive during the 1960s, ultimately fell short in the face of the nationalist insurgency and Unionists' vigilantism; Heaney and others discarded his politics as a salient and viable avenue to political coherence in Northern Ireland. In his stead, the literary community turned towards MacNeice as a progenitor. MacNeice traced a different imaginative geography, one in which opposites could be held together, not through an evisceration of their differences, but from a recognition of their radical incompatibility. Mahon signals, "This, you implied, is how we ought to live./The ironical, loving crush of roses against snow, /Each fragile, solving ambiguity."³⁰¹

"When we launched our Campaign in January 1964, our inexperience led us to believe that all we had to do was bring the true facts of the situation in Northern Ireland before the leaders of British public opinion, and their sense of fair play (of which we had heard about for years!) would impel them to act. We were convinced that if they even dreamt

³⁰⁰ Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* 198.

³⁰¹ A reference back to Mahon's elegy for MacNeice, "In Carrowdore Churchyard."

of the calculated injustices being done to the underprivileged poor of Dungannon and elsewhere, the British would be up in arms. Things have not proved as simple as this.” (Patricia MacCluskey writing for the Committee on Social Justice in June 1969)³⁰²

The Ulster of the early- to mid-1960s certainly contained the seeds of Hewitt’s province. The last outbreak of sustained sectarian violence had receded over the lip of the immediate horizon, and a civil rights movement –inspired largely by the successes of the American Civil Rights Movement—was gaining momentum in Northern Ireland’s predominantly-Catholic enclaves. Under pressure from Westminster to control the visible protests and marches, the Protestant government had begun to relax some of the anti-Catholic policies and regulations. For the first time since the 1921 partition cleaved Ireland in two and isolated a significant Catholic minority inside UK territory, the Northern Ireland “situation” appeared to have positive vectors directed away from the sectarian quagmire. Might it be possible for the Protestant minority and the Catholic majority to transition “if not to kin, to co-inhabitants/as goat and ox may graze in the same field/and each gain something from proximity?”³⁰³

The 1960s brought optimism, a sense that the political environment had turned over new ground with the launch of the civil rights struggle in 1963. And in some ways, the movement had. The conflict in Ulster between the native and the settler had been articulated and conceived in numerous ways over its centuries’ long history. From the famous “Flight of the Earls” in 1607 and the subsequent settlement of Ulster by Protestant planters to the 1921 creation of the Republic of Ireland and, at the same time, the British-administered territory of Northern Ireland, the rift has declared itself in religious terms. But the scale, the sides and the teleological ends of the conflict continued to shift. For the divide between the Catholic and Protestant populations is as much cultural as it is religious, and the strategic controls that the Protestant minority has exercised over their Catholic counterparts has institutionalized and made systemic the broader economic and political differences. As historian John J. Kane notes,

³⁰² Letter from Patricia MacCluskey to British Prime Minister Harry Wilson, dated 15 June 1969, Harry Wilson papers, Modern Political Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁰³ Hewitt, “The colony” lines 131-133.

“Only if the term religion is employed as a label to conceal the deep cleavages between Protestants and Catholics economically, socially, politically, and educationally can this be called religious strife.”³⁰⁴

The most recent installment, brought to the fore by the 1921 partition of the island into two distinct political entities, had situated Northern Ireland as a nationalist battleground. “Close one eye and be king.”³⁰⁵ Afraid of the prospect of minority status in a free Irish state, the Protestant population concentrated in six northern counties vowed to oppose the Irish republic, no matter what the means. During World War I, the Ulster Volunteer Force formed and started to stockpile weapons in preparation to defend their territorial claims against the threat of home rule (or “Rome rule,” as Unionists came to call it). The British army refused to disarm the Ulster Protestants, and when the ink dried on the truce to end the Irish War of Independence, the six northern counties remained part and parcel of the British Commonwealth. For the next three decades, the political narrative in Northern Ireland would be defined in nationalist terms: the Irish Catholics wanted to unite the island beneath the bunting of the Free Republic³⁰⁶ whereas the Protestants in Ulster defended their connection to the United Kingdom (and through that ligature, their position of privilege). As the first prime minister of Northern Ireland told the Stormont during a 1934 session, “I have always said that I am an Orangeman first and a politician and Member of this Parliament afterwards....all I boast is that we are a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant State.”³⁰⁷

Yet the 1960s brought a number of critical interventions in the traditional political discourse. Anti-colonial struggles around the globe were fighting for autonomy, both politically and culturally, from

³⁰⁴ John J. Kane, “Civil Rights in Northern Ireland,” *The Review of Politics* 33.1 (Jan 1971) 54-77.

³⁰⁵ Derek Mahon, “Ecclesiastes,” *A Rage for Order* (1992) line 18.

³⁰⁶ In Catholic schools, the history of Ireland is taught “as a story of national feeling expressing itself in virtually every generation since the 18th century as a revolutionary act to drive the English out of Ireland.” Denis Donoghue, “Now and In Ireland: The Literature of the Trouble,” lecture, 1978, abridged version published in *Hibernia*, accessed in the Seamus Heaney papers, MARBL, Emory University.

³⁰⁷ James Craig, speech before Stormont, 24 April 1934, *Parliamentary Debates, Northern Ireland* Vol. XVI, 1091-1095.

their imperial overseers.³⁰⁸ And so Catholics in Northern Ireland began to protest, not their existence within, but their less-than-equal inclusion in the Northern Irish political territory.³⁰⁹ “Scale shift changes the balance of forces in contention by changing the outer boundaries of contention, the boundaries within which concepts such as majority and minority, right, justice, public opinion, and “the people” are defined.”³¹⁰ As Kane documented in a 1970 account of the Northern Irish civil rights struggle, the discursive and tactical shift was spearheaded by a Mrs. Patricia MacCluskey in County Tyrone after she began protesting inequities in the public housing allocations.³¹¹ “My husband and I were warmly applauded when we stated that we accepted the Constitution of Northern Ireland, and that we would regard it as a social injustice to attempt to alter it without the approval of the majority of the people,” MacCluskey remembers.³¹² But as the civil rights activists in the American South realized, an effective struggle could not look at one or two sectors in isolation; systemic and institutionalized discrimination imbricated all different aspects of the socius, from housing and education segregation to employment opportunities to political representation. Specifically, they narrowed their focus to the discriminatory policies Catholics faced in housing, voting, and employment as well as the state’s suspension of certain legal protections. But this imaginative shift did not simply require changes in Catholics’ discursive techniques; the civil-rights paradigm—with its normative orientation towards equality and fairness—also jumpstarted a particular form of knowledge production. To make cogent and convincing arguments about anti-Catholic discrimination, the civil rights leaders had to provide more than merely anecdotal evidence if they endeavored to be heard in the age of population-based policy-making. And so they set

³⁰⁸ Niall Ó Dochartaigh and Lorenzo Bosi, “Territoriality and Mobilization: The Civil Rights Campaign in Northern Ireland,” *Mobilization* 15.4 (December 2010) 406.

³⁰⁹ The anti-Unionists were referred to, at times, as the “white negroes of Ulster.” Letter from Patricia MacCluskey to British Prime Minister Harry Wilson, dated 9 Jan. 1969, Harry Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³¹⁰ Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi 418.

³¹¹ Kane 65.

³¹² Letter from Patricia MacCluskey to Harry Wilson, dated 7 Dec. 1968, Harry Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

about systematically documenting the inequities and marginalization that Catholics suffered at the hands of the current political regime: "At first [MacCluskey] investigated the distribution of housing, and later of jobs and other discriminatory practices and compiled statistics to support her point."³¹³ These statistics, when promulgated in formal pamphlets and reports, could then be circulated in the government sphere of memorandums and commissioned statements as a legitimate and authoritative source. MacCluskey, for one, made sure that copies of the movement's work found their way to the British Prime Minister as well as his Home Secretary.³¹⁴

During the 1920s, the Protestant minority had blatantly gerrymandered the voting districts to ensure that the local councils would possess secure Protestant majorities. Half a century later, they still retained a disproportionate share of council seats: "In Londonderry 69 percent of the persons are Catholic but the council consists of 12 Unionists and eight Nationalists³¹⁵...In Armagh 59 percent of the population is Catholic but there are twelve Unionists to eight Nationalists on the council. In Omagh, Catholics are 61 percent of the population but there are only nine Nationalists on the council compared to 12 Protestants."³¹⁶ They also instigated a voting policy based on households rather than individuals; the head of each household as well as his wife could vote in the local elections, but no other voting-age adults. Company owners with property in particular districts were also allowed to vote in proportion to their assets: "For every £10 Poor Law Valuation of premises tenanted by a Limited Company, the Company is entitled to one extra vote up to a limit of six votes, e.g., a firm with 100 branches can control

³¹³ Kane 65.

³¹⁴ Harry Wilson's papers contain a number of the Committee for Social Justice's pamphlets that MacCluskey had sent with her letters.

³¹⁵ "Clever manipulation of electoral boundaries in many areas has deprived the minority of the control to which it is entitled. This is most blatantly exemplified in the case of Londonderry. This—the second city of Northern Ireland—holds a glorious place in Orange-Protestant tradition and, though it has always had more than 60 percent Catholic majority, could not be allowed to fall into majority control. Accordingly, in 1936, Derry was divided into three wards, carefully chosen to yield one overwhelmingly Catholic majority and two Protestant majorities. By a judicious allocation of houses, this situation has not been allowed to alter." MacCluskey sends this clip to Westminster in 1968. Unnamed correspondent, "Discrimination in Northern Ireland," *Tablet* (London), 8 June 1968, accessed in Harry Wilson's papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³¹⁶ Kane 59.

600 extra votes at local elections,” the Committee for Social Justice explained in their pamphlet, *The Plain Truth*.³¹⁷ This served to disenfranchise a significant portion of the Catholic population, which tended to be poor and live in multigenerational or multi-family homes. Some estimates put the number of disenfranchised as high as 250,000 people out of a total electorate of less than one million.³¹⁸ Without proper representation on the local councils, Catholics continued to fare poorly in matters pertaining to housing assistance, education, and health services.³¹⁹ This led the civil rights activists to promulgate the slogan of “One Man, One Vote.”³²⁰ But as MacCluskey from the Committee for Social Justice records in a 1969 letter to the British prime minister, the counties were likely to grant equal access to enfranchisement after they had already gerrymandered a district securely.³²¹ For all intents and purposes, the Northern Irish state was of Protestants, for Protestants, by Protestants. As one Ulster Unionist politician Brian Faulkner would put it as late as 1960, “I have said before and I repeat today – the Orange Order is the backbone of Ulster.”³²²

But as the Catholic birth rate continued to peak well above that of their Anglican counterparts, the Protestant minority began a serious effort to allocate public housing resources so as to preserve voting majorities in Protestant wards.³²³ In some instances, they would give new housing options to young Protestants even while Catholic families continued to stagnate on the waiting lists. “We are going to see that the right people are put into these houses, and we are not making any apology for it,” Unionist alderman George Eliot said in Enniskillen in 1963.³²⁴ The civil rights movement mobilized a number of narratives around housing debates, foregrounding cases of blatant injustice that would catch

³¹⁷ Campaign for Social Justice in Northern Ireland, *The Plain Truth* (5 Feb. 1964) 2.

³¹⁸ Kane 60.

³¹⁹ Kane 59-62.

³²⁰ Kane 60.

³²¹ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 4 Feb. 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³²² Brian Faulkner, interview in the *Irish News* (13 July 1960), quoted in Fionnbarra Ó Dochartaigh, *Ulster's White Negroes: From Civil Rights to Insurrection* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1994) 124.

³²³ Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi 418.

³²⁴ Remarks made at Enniskillen, 7 Nov. 1963. Quoted in untitled newspaper clipping sent to Harry Wilson from MacCluskey. Accessed in Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

in the greater net of the pro-Protestant policies. In one instance, a single Protestant woman in her twenties received a house from the local housing authority, skipping over several large Catholic families who had been waiting for years for assistance. The civil rights movement moved quickly to publicize the case; Austin Currie, a nationalist MP from Northern Ireland, staged a sit-in at the property to draw the attention of several news outlets. "When the house next door to the one from which a family of five has been evicted is occupied by an unmarried girl of 19, we can only conclude that the principles on which the Dungannon Rural Council makes its allocations are neither those of Christian charity nor the plain humanity of the Declaration of Human Rights," the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association declared in a statement on the matter.³²⁵ The Committee for Social Justice then sent the clippings to high-ranking members of the British government in Westminster, including the prime minister.

The de facto segregation in housing owed partly to a conscious Protestant strategy,³²⁶ but also to a generally-felt cultural divide that encouraged like to live next door to like. This cultural divide, which continued to use the common stereotypes, was reproduced from generation to generation through the divided school systems. Rather than have a unified, state-run education system, Northern Ireland provided partial funding to schools that met certain standards of oversight and performance; this allowed the Protestant and Catholic schools to continue to function relatively autonomously. It also made it more difficult for Catholic schools located in poorer communities to find the funds to make up their budget gap.³²⁷ Inside the insular world of their religious schools, the Northern Irish children learned different histories and played different sports; add the residential differences, and many individuals

³²⁵ Statement from the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association following the Caledon incident. Cited in newspaper clipping sent Prime Minister Harry Wilson by Patricia MacCleskey, dated 14 Nov. 1968. Accessed in Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³²⁶ "Cameron makes clear that discrimination by Unionist Councils in jobs and houses was systematic: it was not solely a product of religious prejudice, but a method used by Unionists to maintain power and control in their hands. The charge, often made, that Unionists survived by inspiring and maintaining sectarian disputes is fully borne out." Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association's executive comment on The Cameron Report. Accessed in Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³²⁷ Kane 62.

would know—let alone befriend—a member of the other religious group. This distance in turn perpetuated the cycle of fear, ignorance, and anxiety that characterized the cross-cultural relationship.

As many historians and thinkers have remarked, the cultural gap was particularly acute in the lower socioeconomic classes where the competition for the few unskilled jobs exacerbated tensions. Employers would regularly discriminate against Catholic job applicants, owing either to their own anti-Catholic prejudice or to the potential disruption adding Catholic laborers into a majority-Protestant employee pool would pose.³²⁸ “When will the Protestant employers of Northern Ireland recognize their duty to their Protestant brothers and sisters and employ them to the exclusion of Roman Catholics,” said Sir Joseph Davison, the Orange Order’s Grand Master in Belfast during the 1930s. “It is time Protestant employers of Northern Ireland realized that whenever a Roman Catholic is brought into their employment it means one Protestant vote less. It is our duty to pass the word along from this great demonstration and I suggest the slogan should be “Protestants, employ Protestants.”³²⁹ Protestants tended to own the majority of businesses and made up a disproportionate percentage of the professional class;³³⁰ the few Catholics who reached these forms of skilled labor or capital-intensive entrepreneurship tended to serve only their own communities.³³¹ Given that Catholic students were more likely to drop out of school and to leave sooner, their economic marginalization proved hard to counteract. “Economically Northern Ireland is really a depressed area.”³³² Even the globalizing influences of capital did little to shake up the Protestant-controlled economy; the Protestants tended to be drafted

³²⁸ Kane 60.

³²⁹ Sir Joseph Davison served as the Orange Grand Master of Belfast, was elected as a senator in 1935 and then became deputy leader of Senate in 1941. He made this remark on 28 Aug. 1933 at an Orange Order demonstration. Quoted in Tim Pat Coogan, *Ireland in the 20th Century* (New York: Random House, 2009) 308.

³³⁰ “Together with the documentation of ‘enormous Protestant-Catholic differentials in unemployment’, and an analysis of how Protestant workers dominate key centres of economic and political power in private industry and public employment, the picture of a society in which one set of class alliances enables one community to dominate another is clear and unmistakable.” Richard Chessum, “Review of *Northern Ireland: Between Civil Rights and Civil War*,” by Liam O’Dowd, Bill Rolston and Mike Tomlinson (London: CSE Books, 1980) in *Capital & Class* 6.1 (Spring 1982) 143-149.

³³¹ “The Proper Truth” 2.

³³² Kane 61.

into middle-management positions where as the Catholic unskilled labor continued to stagnate.³³³ In one corporation that the NICRA studied in the late 1960s, “there are 145 Protestants earning 94,004 pounds and 32 Catholics earning 20,000 pounds,” counting all of the wage earners.³³⁴ Once a Catholic possessed a position, he or she still faced on-the-job discrimination and sectarian tensions. “During the riots in Belfast of 1970, Catholics were warned by moderate Protestants to leave their jobs because of danger.”³³⁵

But the Protestants’ most direct mechanism of control rested in the Special Powers Act, which had been introduced during the 1920s to deal with mounting sectarian violence and then was never repealed. Under the act, the Northern Irish state possessed a tremendous amount of power to regulate the movements of Catholic bodies and to discipline them without the usual standards of proof. Many of abridged legal protections in Northern Ireland were long-standing precedents and legal guarantees in other common-law states, including the U.S. The list of permitted acts paints a stark picture of the repressive tactics mobilized against a Republican insurgency:

- 1) arrest without warrant;
- 2) imprisonment without charge or trial and deny recourse to habeas corpus or court of law;
- 3) enter and search homes without warrants, and with force;
- 4) declare curfew or prohibit meetings, assemblies, and processions;
- 5) permit punishment by flogging;
- 6) deny claim to a trial by jury;
- 7) arrest persons desired for examination as witnesses, forcibly detain them and compel them to answer questions, even if the answers may incriminate them;
- 8) any act involving interference with the rights of private property;
- 9) prevent access of relatives or legal advisors to a person in prison without trial;
- 10) prohibit the holding of an inquest after a prisoner’s death;
- 11) arrest a person who ‘by word of mouth’ spreads false reports;
- 12) prohibit the circulation of any newspaper;
- 13) prohibit the possession of any film or gramophone record;
- 14) arrest a person who does anything calculated to be prejudicial to the preservation of peace or maintenance of order;

³³³ Chessum “Review of Northern Ireland” 143-149.

³³⁴ Chessum “Review of Northern Ireland.”

³³⁵ Kane 60.

15) Minister of Home Affairs can create new crimes³³⁶

The Northern Ireland administration deployed many of these techniques almost exclusively against Catholics; during times of increased Republican activity, the number of warrantless searches and internments without charges increased in kind.³³⁷ “There is no real need for this act,” MacCluskey railed in a 1969 letter to the British prime minister. “There are all the legal devices you have in England to uphold the law. The Special Powers is retained here by a nation of bullies to intimidate a subject group.”³³⁸ Under the act, the police forces—the vast majority of whom were Protestant—bore arms and enjoyed quite a bit of power free from oversight.³³⁹ “Please remember that not only are the police here armed, but the ‘B’ Specials are also (these are mostly Paisleyites, and as well, members of the Orange Order.”³⁴⁰ Even in the cases of police aggression during the later 1960s, the commissions constituted to look over police behavior were in-house operations. Even if the police brought a Unionist to trial for agitation or violence against Catholics, the accused would almost certainly walk free. “A great many of the present problems, in our view, stem from the uneven administration of the Law,” MacCluskey wrote. “The jury system is responsible for the largest share of the blame, and the fact that so many of the judges are dyed-in-the-wool Unionists for the remainder.”³⁴¹ To prove her point, she relayed an anecdote involving a Belfast conspiracy trial in which one of the men gave testimony against his compatriots. As a part of his bargain, he was sentenced to 12 years in prison. His co-conspirators, on the other hand, went free because the jury refused to convict Protestants—regardless of what testimony

³³⁶ *The Plain Truth* 11-12.

³³⁷ Robert W. White, “Comparing State Repression of Pro-State Vigilantes and Anti-State Insurgents: Northern Ireland, 1972-75,” *Mobilization* 4.2 (1999) 189-202.

³³⁸ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 4 Feb 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³³⁹ “We may be held incommunicado, flogged without limit, and, should we die under torture, an inquest on our bodies may be refused. This magazine may be banned tomorrow, and its editors and contributors subjected to the all-embracing power of ‘the most discredited politician in the British Isles’--Mr. William Craig.” Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁴⁰ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 4 Feb. 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁴¹ Letter from Campaign for Social Justice to Wilson, dated 10 March 1970, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

and evidence was offered against them. During another trial, “an explosion took place in the courthouse, presumably to remind the jury how they should bring their verdict,” MacCluskey notes. “Since they were a most carefully selected group of Protestants, this was hardly necessary.”³⁴² At each juncture in the Northern Irish criminal justice system, the vast majority of those in positions of adjudicating privilege were Protestant, and they could not be counted upon to give Catholics brought before the court system a fair hearing.³⁴³

The Committee for Social Justice, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, and several other groups banded together to hold the first “civil rights march” in August of 1968, borrowing from the model deployed in the American Civil Rights movement. The protestors made their way from Coalisland to Dungannon in County Tyrone; even though Unionists had promised to mobilize a counterdemonstration, the march reached the end of its route without any complications or antagonism. Its success sparked several other direct-action protests around the region in the months that followed, and several other towns expressed interest in setting up their own civil rights committees to bring pressure on the local councils.³⁴⁴ Yet only a few months later, a similar demonstration would not fare quite so well. Planned for the 5th of Oct, the march ran into its first obstacle a few days before when the Minister of Home Affairs, William Craig, denied the protestors a permit. The civil rights activists continued on as scheduled, ignoring the official order. When they reached the city center, the marchers encountered a line of RUC officers and police; several police members used their batons on the protestors, who then proceeded to congregate and sit in the public square and give speeches.³⁴⁵ The RUC members then moved in to break up the protests, beating individuals over the head. A Labour MP,

³⁴² Letter from Campaign for Social Justice to Wilson, dated 10 March 1970, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁴³ Letter from Campaign for Social Justice to Wilson, dated 10 March 1970, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁴⁴ Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi, “Territoriality and Mobilization.”

³⁴⁵ Kane 65.

Gerry Fitt, along with other British MPs, had attended the march, which originally only attracted around 400 participants.³⁴⁶ Tagging along after the MPs, a number of news outlets had been on the ground and managed to capture the RUC-led violence; the next day, images of police brutality circulated in the international media coverage, drawing the attention of the British government.³⁴⁷

The violence sparked two days of rioting in Derry, where Catholic residents and Protestants ransacked the streets and threw stones at one another. Several petrol bombs were detonated.³⁴⁸ The Cameron Commission, which Northern Ireland would set up (after several more incidents) in January 1969 under pressure from Westminster, begrudgingly admitted that the RUC and police members had broken with acceptable behavior, yet its findings attempted to white-wash much of the Oct. 5 events. In a telling reflection on the pressures that catalyzed the commission in the first place, the report concludes, "It was doubly unfortunate that during these events, in the heat of action, a senior police officer temporarily lost control of himself in an incident which received wide coverage by the television cameras present at the time."³⁴⁹ Several historians would later cite Oct. 5, 1968 as the starting date for the latest installment of the Troubles; while certainly sectarian tensions pervaded and coursed through the standoff between the RUC and the predominantly Catholic protestors—only 12 percent of the RUC force at the time was of Catholic origin—the incident still operated primarily within a civil-rights framework.

Slowly but surely, the civil rights activists began to gather momentum in Ulster—in part sparked by the media attention during muddled protests. Unlike the Irish nationalists' cause, the 1960s civil rights campaign drew a host of liberal groups and individuals into its ranks. In 1968, the loose grouping

³⁴⁶ Kane.

³⁴⁷ Kane 66; Lord Cameron, *Disturbances in Northern Ireland—Report of the Commission appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1969), accessed online, 12 Sept 2013 <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/hmsoc/cameron.htm>>.

³⁴⁸ Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi, "Territoriality and Mobilization."

³⁴⁹ Cameron, *Disturbances in Northern Ireland*.

of coalitions became more centralized with the creation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association.³⁵⁰ Not surprisingly the movement found the greatest traction in urban areas with a substantial Catholic population and in rural areas where Catholics lived in clumps, granting them a bit of local autonomy.³⁵¹ Londonderry, which had a fairly even split between its Protestant and Catholic residents, functioned as the struggle's affective epicenter; not only did Catholics in the Bogside area have significant grievances to lay at the door of their local housing authority and council representation, but several of their demonstrations met with a surge of Protestant-led violence, drawing the attention of the region and the wider international community.³⁵² "The Bogside in Derry was a street, now it is a condition," poet Seamus Deane wrote in 1971.³⁵³ The Bogside also centralized the Catholic resistance in a self-contained neighborhood outside of the city wall, and its occupants secured power by establishing their portion of the city as a vacuole of autonomy. "A police cordon or a border checkpoint is a territorial method for exerting power, lending space a new meaning, and influencing events and behavior, but so is a barricaded street, a building occupation, or a picket line."³⁵⁴ In August 1969, Catholics erected barricades along the gates leading from the city centre into the Bogside, effectively blocking the police and other residents from accessing their territory. On one blockade, a chalk scrawl set the borderline: "You are now entering Free Derry."³⁵⁵ Over 27,000 people were estimated to take part in direct-action protests in Derry between October and early December 1968—a figure that represents more than half of the city's total population.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁰ Bob Purdie, "The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association," *Politics in the Streets: The origins of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1990) accessed online, 14 Sept 2013, <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/crights/purdie.htm>>.

³⁵¹ Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi, "Territoriality and Mobilization" 413.

³⁵² A smattering of articles are referenced in Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*.

³⁵³ Seamus Deane, "Why Bogside?" *The Honest Ulsterman* 28 (Jan/Feb. 1971).

³⁵⁴ Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi, "Territoriality and Mobilization" 406.

³⁵⁵ Kane 69.

³⁵⁶ Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi, "Territoriality and Mobilization" 406.

Belfast, on the other hand, saw very little in terms of civil rights protests. Although the city held nearly ten times the number of people as Derry, its sprawl fragmented and isolated the Catholic neighborhoods from each other.³⁵⁷ During the same time period, perhaps 5,000 individuals participated in some form of collective action with the student community supplying much of the energy and manpower.³⁵⁸ Owing to the 1947 Education Act, a generation of Catholic students had gained access to the province's institutions of higher education, and now many of them were fomenting the civil rights struggle.³⁵⁹ But outside of the liberal university space, Catholics were in the minority in Belfast. Civil rights activist Eamonn McCann reflected on the way that Belfast, both demographically and geographically, stymied direct-action efforts and hampered the movement's capability to organize:

"Catholics...were trapped in a larger Unionist city whereas in Derry you had a substantial Catholic majority. In Derry you had the sense of the border. If you stand at the center of Derry you can choose any one of three directions and within 5 miles you are in the Republic of Ireland, in case you need to retreat. So Catholics in Derry felt more relaxed in this situation. That is clearly a physical frame. People in Belfast were saying, "If you keep on, guys, there would be communal riots and houses burnt out." I remember people on the New Lodge, in Belfast, saying this. For us in Derry it was making no sense at all."³⁶⁰

McCann and other activists, who had taken the model of the mass march from the American Civil Rights Movement, also learned how to chart their routes so that they passed from Catholic safe zone to Catholic safe zone; when the civil rights protests passed into Unionist territory, they did so in spurts and with a retreat path already planned.³⁶¹ But even with careful strategic planning, the marchers did encounter antagonism—ranging from epithets to physical violence—along their routes. During the 1960s' marches, much of the agitation stemmed from youth on both sides rather than a systematic Unionist response; "In discussions with various persons in Ireland, Catholic or Protestant, I found that

³⁵⁷ Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi, "Territoriality and Mobilization" 417.

³⁵⁸ Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi, "Territoriality and Mobilization" 416.

³⁵⁹ Ormsby, introduction, *A Rage for Order* (1992) xv.

³⁶⁰ Interview with Eamon McCann conducted in 2003. Quoted in Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi, "Territoriality and Mobilization" 417.

³⁶¹ Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi, "Territoriality and Mobilization" 417.

the blame for these disorders is generally placed on what they call hooligans,” Kane recalls from his summer in Belfast in 1969.³⁶² Resentment began to simmer among the activists against the local police forces and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, who often times stood by and let Protestants throw stones or beat up Catholic marchers.³⁶³

The civil rights movement organized a number of well-attended marches, sit-ins and demonstrations through the latter half of the 1960s in key strongholds like Derry as well as in smaller towns with high Catholic concentrations. And, at the outset, the movement’s goal of achieving of civil rights through legal means did not seem far-fetched or legislatively untenable. Terence O’Neill, the head of the Unionist Party, became prime minister in Northern Ireland in 1963. A moderate, he attempted to assuage some of the sectarian tension in the province. For the first time since partition, O’Neill arranged several meetings with the Taoiseach, or the head of the Republic’s government; his trips to Dublin—although they took place under the auspices of trade matters—sparked backlash from within his party ranks.³⁶⁴ He also made several good-faith gestures towards Belfast’s Catholic residents by attending a Catholic service one Sunday and meeting with community leaders.³⁶⁵ And after media outlets around the globe broadcasted images of the RUC violently putting down the civil rights march in Derry on Oct 5, O’Neill—flush against British displeasure with the whole affair—introduced reforms that looked to assuage a number of Catholic concerns. The proposals included a nine-member “Development Commission” would take on the administration of Londonderry from its current local council; an ombudsman would be appointed to look into complaints lodged against existing government entities; government housing would from now on be allocated by need rather than cronyism; and company

³⁶² Kane 69.

³⁶³ Chessum, “Review of *Northern Ireland* “; Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 14 Nov 1968, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁶⁴ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 4 Feb 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁶⁵ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 4 Feb 1969.

votes—whereby commercial companies were awarded voting power in their districts according to size—would be abolished.³⁶⁶

Notably, the franchise reforms did not encompass the “One Man, One Vote” position that the civil rights activists had been advocating; while commercial interests were excluded, the voter base remained restricted to property owners and their spouses, regardless of how many adults lived and worked in a given residence, and it continued to ignore those who rented rather than owned property.³⁶⁷ The Committee for Social Justice sent a list of seven key asks that O’Neill’s reforms ignored: universal suffrage; an end to gerrymandering; an equivalent to Britain’s Race Relations Act that would “prevent religious incitement and eliminate the present provocative and hurtful denunciations of the Roman Catholic faith;” legislation to prevent discrimination in employment; an effective housing allocation system; an inquiry into the police actions in Londonderry on Oct 5; and, finally, the abolition of the Special Powers Act.³⁶⁸ And so, from the Catholic standpoint, his attempts brought little in terms of real political change; from the Protestant, he had betrayed the party goals and was bringing the province closer to the Republic of Ireland’s orbit, where they would be a minority.³⁶⁹ “Surrounding us in this area nearly all Unionist opinion is against Captain O’Neill and his minimal reforms,” writes MacCluskey. “Orange Lodge after Orange Lodge has resolved against him.”³⁷⁰

O’Neill, who had not grown up in Ulster but in London, had not anticipated the rigidity and depth of the sectarian divide that had ruled and continued to rule Northern Irish politics. Even as he attempted to placate a civil-rights movement and their claims for equal rights, he set off Unionist

³⁶⁶ Martin Melaugh, “The People’s Democracy March—Chronology of Main Events,” *Conflict Archive on the Internet—University of Ulster*, 15 Jan 2013, accessed online, 3 Oct 2013 <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/pdmarch/chron.htm>>.

³⁶⁷ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 4 Feb 1969.

³⁶⁸ Campaign for Social Justice, response to Five-Point Reform proposed by Terence O’Neill, accessed in the Wilson paper, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁶⁹ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 4 Feb 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁷⁰ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, 4 Feb 1969.

anxieties, particularly in working class neighborhoods. Whereas disgruntled youth started much of the violence that afflicted the early civil rights demonstrations, Unionists were beginning to organize in mass against the largely-Catholic movement. In 1966, the Ulster Constitution Defense Committee coalesced behind the charismatic Reverend Ian Paisley; Paisley, a fierce Unionist and a minister in the Free Presbyterian Church, staunchly defended Protestant interests in jobs and housing. From the Catholic standpoint, Paisley was ratcheting up sectarian prejudices in order to counteract the legitimate claims of the marginalized Catholic and poorer communities.³⁷¹ Soon after its founding, the UCDC in turn created the Ulster Protestant Volunteers, a paramilitary group that aimed to protect Protestant interests with whatever means were at their disposal. Similarly, the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force took off in the Protestant working class area of Shankhill outside of Belfast in 1966.³⁷² The paramilitaries undertook a gradually-escalating campaign of assassinations and general fear-mongering against the perceived Catholic threat. In 1966, Orangemen shot three Catholics on the streets, killing one. They also set off a petrol bomb in a Catholic-owned pub in the Shankhill neighborhoods, but the attack went awry, killing a Protestant widow living next door.³⁷³ The incident speaks to the messy undercurrent of the Troubles in which the technology of violence cannot distinguish friend from foe from innocent—even the best laid plans were prone to misfires, misdirections, mistaken identities, and indiscriminate killings. From the outset, the irrationality and unpredictability of paramilitary action cast a curtain of fear across whole communities.

The resurrection of the Protestant paramilitaries lay the cornerstones for another episode of sectarian conflict;³⁷⁴ this counter-narrative to the 1960s civil rights struggle demonstrates how deeply

³⁷¹ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 14 Nov 1968, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁷² Brendan Lynn, "A Chronology of Key Events in Irish History, 1800-1967," *Conflict Archives on the Internet-University of Ulster*, 21 Mar 2013, accessed online, 5 Oct 2013 <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch1800-1967.htm>>.

³⁷³ Lynn "A Chronology of Key Events."

³⁷⁴ "Meantime, Mr. Craig is making provocative speeches in Belfast, Clogher, County Tyrone and the night before last, in Dungannon. He is trying hard to whip up a sectarian conflict. This is not what the people of Civil Rights

felt the anxieties of the Protestant minority were. Even against a discursive frame of inclusion and political participation, the Orange Order suspected an Irish Republican plot to take control. "We are appalled at the way the Unionists are twisting the facts and doing their very best to make Civil Rights a sectarian issue," MacCluskey wrote to Prime Minister Wilson in 1969.³⁷⁵ As the 1960s wound down, Unionist assassinations only increased. "Since this letter was typed, I have been informed that Finbarr O'Doherty of Londonderry has had a petrol bomb thrown into his house. Also Matthew McKenna of Dungannon, father of six small children, had a threat made on his life."³⁷⁶ They also began to target the civil rights infrastructure, showing up outside of meetings en masse and intimidating those who participated in demonstrations. But their scare tactics were not reserved solely for Catholics; in many instances, moderate Protestants too found themselves on the defensive. In 1966, the Paisleyites had, unsuccessfully, attempted to oust Prime Minister O'Neill and install someone more aligned to their politics.³⁷⁷ (O'Neill's reprieve was only temporary; the Ulster paramilitaries would bring about his political demise in 1969.)³⁷⁸ "My Protestant labour councilor colleague, Jack Hassard, a war veteran, who topped the poll in our 'Catholic' ward, had his car smashed by an axe that night," MacCluskey wrote in her letter to UK Prime Minister Harry Wilson. "His life, and that of his wife and family, has been threatened so many times that he just announced his resignation from politics...How long must this go on? How long must we suffer this intimidation, when all we are doing is asking for the rights which you said in 1964 we were entitled to?"³⁷⁹

Even with the escalating violence, much of civil rights-minded Ulster remained optimistic that Paisley and his cadre represented a radical fringe and that the moderate center would be able to find a

want, and I know all the leaders intimately." Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 14 Nov 1968, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁷⁵ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 4 Feb 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁷⁶ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 9 Jan 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁷⁷ Lynn, "A Chronology of Key Events."

³⁷⁸ Lynn.

³⁷⁹ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 7 Dec 1968, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

compromise, beginning with O'Neill's Five Point reforms. Those leading the movement attempted to quell the Republican sentiments rumbling within their own base, so as not to derail the political process. "It has been noticed that this spate of explosions is escalating, presumably to arouse the anger of the minority and cause a possible confrontation with the army," MacCluskey noted. "Many of us have worked very hard to keep down the temperature and allow reforms to go through."³⁸⁰ Jimmy Simmons encapsulates the sense of urgent optimism that coursed through Belfast³⁸¹ in his editorial for the first edition of *The Honest Ulsterman – A Handbook for Revolution*: "This is a watershed in history," he expounded. "Political progress from now on will not depend on our allegiance to leaders, ideas and systems, but in each individual's allegiance to himself, his courage and wit to use all the wisdom and experience literature puts at his disposal, to get up off his knees and stop praying to be set free, to realise that he is already free."³⁸² The civil rights movement did not suspect that the rumblings of Unionist backlash were the first stirrings of a sectarian hot war that would stultify and rend the province in two for more than 20 years. Instead, its organizers were determined to continue to press their claims through nonviolent actions in the streets. MacCluskey trumpeted this call to action in her January 1969 letter to Westminster: "I think it only right that you should know that, at this late stage, the granting of universal franchise in local government elections will not now bring our people off the streets, nor will it, I am reasonably certain, delay our proposed civil disobedience campaign."³⁸³

But tensions came to a head in 1969, and the conflict ultimately took a turn for the worse, exchanging much of the civil rights' rhetoric of nonviolence disobedience and social equality for the

³⁸⁰ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 9 Jan 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁸¹ "I was talking to Steve McBride before I left about May 1968 and all that. '68 was a significant year for him, as he left school then, started reading the HU, and became closely involved in Civil Rights, PD, and so on. I suspect he could write a corking reminiscence about it all, which would be of intrinsic interest - but he also said that, more than any other publication, the HU seemed to capture the mad optimism of the time and is bound up in his mind with the whole thing." Letter from Robert Johnstone to Frank Ormsby, Ormsby papers, MARBL, Emory University.

³⁸² James Simmons, editorial, *The Honest Ulsterman* 1 (May 1968) 2-4.

³⁸³ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 9 Jan 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

language of Republicanism.³⁸⁴ Within the first few days of the new year, the stage had been set: the student movement out of Belfast, cohered under the moniker of the “People’s Democracy,” organized a march from Belfast to Derry. After setting out from Belfast, the collection of 40 or so marchers passed without incident—although the hecklers proved hard to avoid—until they reached the Burntollet bridge, about five miles from Londonderry, on Jan. 4.³⁸⁵ There, a crowd of close to 200 Orangemen and Paisleyites attacked the marchers from high bluffs, lobbing stones and other objects down at the students. *The Irish News* described the incident thusly:

The major portion of the C.R. procession was cut off and left at the mercy of the attackers. A fusillade of stones and bottles was followed by the full weight of the attack against the young men and women who pledged themselves to a policy of nonviolence.³⁸⁶

The Orangemen then charged the protestors with iron bars, sending them scattering off the road and throwing a few off the bridge down into the river where they “were then unable to leave the river because of men stoning them on either side and had to wade for about half a mile before reaching comparative safety.”³⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the RUC and the local police force did little to intervene. When the marchers regrouped in Derry later that evening, they faced down another attack along the neighborhood boundary. This time, the RUC did act, but it directed its attention towards the Catholics and ran amok through the Bogside neighborhood. Even the Cameron report, which minced its words regarding potential instances of RUC indiscretion, admitted the Jan. 4-5 rampages: “We have to record with regret that our investigations have led us to the unhesitating conclusion that on the nights of the 4th and 5th of January a number of policemen were guilty of misconduct which involved assault and battery, malicious damage to property and streets in the predominantly Catholic Bogside area, giving

³⁸⁴ “Many of the movement’s demands were quickly granted, but its campaign was associated with increasing street violence, and as political violence escalated in 1969, the movement faded into the background, and militant Republican organizations came to the fore.” Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi “Territoriality and Mobility” 407.

³⁸⁵ Kane 66.

³⁸⁶ Article in *The Irish News*, 5 Jan 1969, quoted in Kane 66.

³⁸⁷ Kane 67.

reasonable cause for apprehension of personal injury among other innocent inhabitants, and the use of provocative sectarian and political slogans.”³⁸⁸

In an attempt to protect against the police attacks, the residents erected a series of barriers along the entrances to the Bogside and declared the existence of “Free Derry,” a Protestant “no-go” zone that would serve as a powerful bargaining chip and bunker in the years of sectarian division ahead.³⁸⁹ But with the barriers arose a need for people to man them. Catholic paramilitary groups formed to take over the defense and internal surveillance of the liberated territory, a shift that increasingly brought Irish Republicans into the foreground. As the civil rights movement retreated into the Catholic “no-go” zones, it would increasingly become mapped along a Loyalist-Republican divide.³⁹⁰ Thus, the sectarian frame slowly but surely threatened to overtake the civil rights’ logic and telos altogether. Writing to the Home Office in 1970, MacCluskey tried to communicate the tenuous hold they and other civil rights groups had over the conservative Republican factions in Ulster: “[Minister of Home Affairs James Craig] intends obviously to rule by fear, and to stimulate the IRA, who have been so restrained for longer even than we had hoped.”³⁹¹

Again, the media captured a number of images that would draw the attention of the international community. Yet even with the media coverage, the Northern Irish government would make no arrests with regard to the Protestant attacks.³⁹² “We are at the moment deeply disturbed that you made practically no attempt to protect our decent socially-conscious students on their march to

³⁸⁸ Cameron, *Disturbances in Northern Ireland*.

³⁸⁹ Kane 69.

³⁹⁰ “When activists referred to predominantly nationalist areas as “civil rights areas” (New Left Review 1969: 6-7), they were acknowledging that the geography of protest and confrontation had mapped the movement onto the nationalist minority community. It could hardly be otherwise, given that these spaces were a prime source of the political power that the campaign was able to exert.” Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi “Territoriality and Mobility” 415.

³⁹¹ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 7 Dec 1968, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁹² “Surely you can see there is something wrong, when there were no arrests made after incidents which merited world-wide notice in the press, namely, the Burntollet brutalities.” Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 22 Jan 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

Londonderry," MacCluskey told Wilson in her increasingly urgent correspondence.³⁹³ A month later, in February 1969, she would write again, prophetically pointing to even darker clouds massing on the Ulster horizon: "There has been no single improvement here in the past five years, indeed things have got worse...If things do escalate and there is a sudden outburst of violence and we are abandoned by Britain, I doubt if history will ever forgive you."³⁹⁴

For Ulster, 1969 only continued to spiral out of control. In March and April, Belfast lost its access to water and electricity after a series of bombs took out the city's utility plants. The strikes were blamed on the reconstituted Irish Republican Army at the time, but later research traced the bombs back to the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Protestant Volunteers, who had detonated them in hopes of forcing O'Neill from office.³⁹⁵ Left stranded, the city quickly deteriorated, and less than a month later, O'Neill resigned as prime minister. The crisis had been brewing for O'Neill for months inside the Ulster Union Party; faced with a divisive membership, the prime minister had called a surprise election in February, only to be the one rocked when he barely held onto his seat in a face-off with Rev. Paisley.³⁹⁶ The dual bombings proved to be the last straw. Days after resigning, O'Neill complained of the volatile anxiety that permeated his Unionist base. "It is frightfully hard to explain to Protestants that if you give Roman Catholics a good job and a good house they will live like Protestants because they will see neighbors with cars and television sets; they will refuse to have eighteen children," O'Neill told *The Belfast Telegraph* on May 10. "But if a Roman Catholic is jobless, and lives in the most ghastly hovel he will rear eighteen children on National Assistance. If you treat Roman Catholics with due consideration and kindness they will live like Protestants in spite of the authoritative nature of their Church."³⁹⁷

³⁹³ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 9 Jan 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁹⁴ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 4 Feb 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

³⁹⁵ Lynn "A Brief Chronology of Irish History, 1800-1967."

³⁹⁶ Lynn.

³⁹⁷ Interview with *the Belfast Telegraph*, (10 May 1969). Quoted in Richard Morrock, *The Psychology of Genocide and Violent Oppression: A Study of Mass Cruelty from Nazi Germany to Rwanda* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010) 60.

Sir James Chichester-Clark, a former cabinet member and close friend of O'Neill, replaced his former ally at the head of the Northern Irish government.³⁹⁸ (As prime minister, he also sought to bridge the divide between the Paisleyites and the moderate Protestants, but ultimately proved unable to hold the factions together and the anti-sectarian Unionists left to form their own party, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, in April 1970.) Chichester-Clark inherited much the same fractious city that had forced his predecessor to resign,³⁹⁹ and in August 1969, a "hemorrhage of flame" broke out across Ulster.⁴⁰⁰ After denying marching permits to a number of Catholic groups throughout the summer, Derry allowed the Protestant organization, the Apprentice Boys, to march through the city on August 12 for their annual commemoration of the 1689 Protestant victory in the Siege of Derry.⁴⁰¹ The decision to allow the march struck many Catholics as a calculated insult. "The situation had been very tense in Northern Ireland since the preceding month and there had been minor riots in Belfast," Kane notes. "It would appear that the logic of expediency dictated the cancellation of this parade but Orange parades are not cancelled in Northern Ireland. If they are, the cancellation order is not obeyed or enforced."⁴⁰² And so when the Unionist procession passed near the walls of the Bogside area, Catholics and Protestants alike began to trade epithets and hurl things at the other side.⁴⁰³

The riot took off and raged through the Bogside for another two days. The police forces attempted to restore order by separating the Protestant and Catholic groups. But by taking apart a Catholic barricade on Rossville Street leading into the Bogside, they ultimately created a new front in which the police and Bogside residents would concentrate their efforts against one another. "During the

³⁹⁸ Lynn "A Brief Chronology of Irish History, 1800-1967."

³⁹⁹ "...the other day in the Stormont Parliament it was announced that a further 32,000 pounds was to be spent on publicity to improve the 'Ulster image.'" Letter from MacCluskey to the Home Office, dated 15 June 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

⁴⁰⁰ Seamus Deane, "After Derry, 30 January 1972," *A Rage for Order* (1992) line 11.

⁴⁰¹ Kane 69.

⁴⁰² Kane.

⁴⁰³ Kane.

Tuesday night, all of Wednesday, and all of Wednesday night and Thursday youths in the Bogside hurled petrol bombs and rocks at the police, who stood behind armored cars and lorries in Rossville Street," Kane records. "At times the police were beaten back almost to the entrance of the Bogside and at other times they beat back the Catholic youth to Rossville Street. By and large, however, the battle seemed to be at a standstill."⁴⁰⁴ With the police force flagging and the injuries continuing to pile up, the RUC began to use water cannons and fire arms, wounding a few nationalists. Thirty-six hours later, almost the entire Catholics community had been drafted into the fray, largely guided by false rumors that the Protestants were attacking a local cathedral.⁴⁰⁵ When the Bogsideers heard that the infamous "B Specials"⁴⁰⁶ whose "only qualification... [was] to be an Orangeman"⁴⁰⁷ had been called into action, they feared a massacre.

Chichester-Clark called for British help. The United Kingdom relieved the Stormont (otherwise known as the Northern Irish parliament), deploying British troops to calm the situation down and stop the violence. The force landed shortly after 5 pm on August 14, and the riots were quickly quelled. But the British troops did not penetrate the territory of "Free Derry," settling instead for returning the city to a semblance of normalcy. And the ripples extended throughout the province, and Catholics rioted in several other cities and townships around Ulster. Overall, no one had died in the "Battle of the Bogside" within Derry proper, but the injuries stretched into the hundreds and the subsequent unrest took the lives of five Catholics and two Protestants. A threshold of sorts had been crossed. From here on, the civil rights aspirations would continue to fade into the background in tandem with the more moderate Protestant politicians. Beginning in 1970, the provisional Irish Republican Army would take up the

⁴⁰⁴ Kane 70.

⁴⁰⁵ Kane 70.

⁴⁰⁶ Officially known as the Ulster Special Constabulary, the "B Specials" were a special reserve division of the Northern Irish police force that carried military weapons. Formed in 1920 during the struggle over partition, the B Specials were deployed in times of crisis or insurgency. They were known for being almost entirely Protestant and were generally distrusted by the Catholic minority.

⁴⁰⁷ Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 9 Jan 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

Catholic fight once again as a paramilitary force that sought to end partition.⁴⁰⁸ The lines had been drawn for the Troubles' reemergence—Orangemen v Republicans, Catholics v state forces like the RUC, and ultimately, the British army,⁴⁰⁹ Protestant paramilitaries v British troops. The Troubles had broken out across the province again.

Through 1970 and 1971, paramilitaries on both sides continued to escalate their sectarian campaigns. The Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Protestant Volunteers worked primarily through the targeted assassination of Catholics, some of whom were beaten and tortured prior to death.⁴¹⁰ They worked to create a culture of fear through Catholic communities, striking unpredictably and sometimes at random. Attempting to force a rift between Britain and Northern Ireland, the provisional IRA led a bombing campaign that worked to destabilize the province, making it as difficult as possible for the British troops to survey and control. The waves of violence forced both Catholic and Protestant families alike to move out of previously-integrated neighborhoods as the conflict became increasingly territorial.⁴¹¹ More and more, the civil rights movement struggled to find space in which to register its claims. "Obviously, demonstrations as a means of pushing the Unionists are out for the moment," MacCluskey wrote of the political climate in February 1970, "but later on in the year I do not doubt but that they will resume."⁴¹² Many of the Catholics continued to press for the British to concoct a political solution to the devolving situation. "The people are thinking, 'Westminster could legislate against religious discrimination,' 'Westminster could legislate against economic exploitation,' 'Westminster

⁴⁰⁸ Lynn "A Brief Chronology of Irish History, 1800-1967."

⁴⁰⁹ The Catholics welcomed the army as a neutral armed force to set against the primarily Protestant police, but would soon find themselves embroiled in armed incidents against the British—particularly in Belfast.

⁴¹⁰ White, "Comparing State Repression" 194.

⁴¹¹ Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi, "Territoriality and Mobility."

⁴¹² Letter from MacCluskey to Wilson, dated 4 Feb 1970, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

could use its corridors of power."⁴¹³ Westminster in turn regarded the alleged inequity in housing and employment to be matters for the Northern Irish parliament to deal with.⁴¹⁴

Instead, the British cabinet turned to a show of armed force. In an attempt to control the violence emanating from both sides, the British troops turned Belfast and other loci of unrest into small police states where movement was limited and fiercely regulated by a series of checkpoints, searches, and barricades. "I could hardly believe my eyes, but it was there, Ulster is truly nothing more than a police state," an Irish émigré remarked upon making a return to Ulster for a visit.⁴¹⁵ To counter the state's territorial exertions, the Republicans built up a proliferation of "no-go" zones in primarily Catholic neighborhoods. What had before existed as a map of largely segregated neighborhoods had become a militarized map of borders and hot zones where Protestant and Catholic alike had to navigate along their respected pathways. Starting in 1971, Northern Ireland reintroduced its control technique of internment as a way to curb Republican violence. Under the policy, the police could detain and arrest any suspected Republican without charge and keep him (or her) in jail for an indefinite amount of time.⁴¹⁶ Out of the 350 individuals interned, not one was a Protestant.⁴¹⁷ The number of internments increase apace with IRA activity; the mass incarceration, in turn, provoked more Catholics to turn to radical nationalism and participate in either official IRA or provisional IRA activities.⁴¹⁸ "The internment of Republicans reached its highest level in March 1972, when 913 persons suspected of Republican

⁴¹³ Letter from Michael Brennan. Committee for Social Justice, to Wilson, dated 9 Feb 1970, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

⁴¹⁴ "The two particular matters to which she refers – the alleged gerrymandering in Fermaugh and Tyrone, and housing allocation – are entirely matters for the Northern Ireland authorities...I think you should know that Mrs. MacCluskey was a member of a delegation to see Lord Stonham during the recent visit to Northern Ireland, and Mrs. MacCluskey was exceedingly rude to the Minister of State during this [meeting]." I.M. Burns, internal memo in the British Home Office, dated 3 Sept 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

⁴¹⁵ Letter from an unnamed reader to Frank Ormsby, dated 1970, *The Honest Ulsterman*, Ormsby papers, MARBL, Emory University.

⁴¹⁶ White, "Comparison of State Repression" 190.

⁴¹⁷ White 191.

⁴¹⁸ The Official IRA, which had been resuscitated in 1970, did not advocate violence but still worked to bring about a united Ireland. Lynn.

activity were held without charge.”⁴¹⁹ But beginning in 1973, the police began to intern Unionist paramilitary members as well—the first time the policy had been used against Protestants since the violent struggles over partition in the 1920s.⁴²⁰ Yet detained Republicans would always exponentially outnumber their rivals. The policy so frustrated Catholics that ending it became a prerequisite for any form of political compromise. As a March 1972 editorial in *Fortnight* magazine noted, eliminating internment would be a huge political gain in and of itself.⁴²¹ Between 1971 and when internments ended in November 1975, 1,981 people had been detained: 1,874 were Catholic, 107 were Protestant.⁴²²

The British decision to detain Protestant paramilitaries was provoked by the intensity of the violence in 1972, which would prove to be the bloodiest year of the Troubles. The events of January 30 would both escalate overall tensions in the region and turn the Republicans wholesale against the British forces stationed in the province. The day began in Derry with a civil rights march⁴²³ and local youth antagonizing the British troops. But as the protestors wound their way through the Bogside neighborhood, the British armed forces gave pursuit. Under an order allowing them to use live bullets, the paratroopers shot and killed 13 unarmed protestors and bystanders as they fled from troops along the streets; five were hit in the back. Another 14 were wounded in the onslaught, one of whom died months later from his injuries.⁴²⁴ Journalists had been on the scene covering the march, and they would later testify to the investigative tribunals that none of the protestors had been armed or fired at the British paratroopers.⁴²⁵ The British government in Westminster quickly organized a tribunal to look into the incidents of Jan 30, or “Bloody Sunday,” as it had come to be called in Northern Ireland. Led by Lord

⁴¹⁹ White, “Comparison of State Repression” 191.

⁴²⁰ White, “Comparison of State Repression” 192.

⁴²¹ Editorial, *Fortnight* magazine, 21 March 1972, accessed in Linen Hall Library, Belfast.

⁴²² White, “Comparison of State Repression” 191.

⁴²³ Even though sectarian violence was on the upswing, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and the People’s Democracy groups continued to organize civil rights marches through the early 1970s.

⁴²⁴ Peter Griffiths, “Northern Ireland police to question witnesses to Bloody Sunday deaths,” *Reuters*, 20 Oct 2013, accessed online 25 Oct 2013 <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/20/us-britain-bloodysunday-idUSBRE99J05Q20131020>>.

⁴²⁵ Griffiths “Northern Ireland police to question witnesses.”

High Justice Widgery, the commission rushed to complete its work in ten weeks and published its findings on April 19. Widgery adhered to the Army's narrative and found that those killed had traces of lead and gunpowder on their clothes, suggesting they had been armed.⁴²⁶ These conclusions ran counter to the testimony offered by the Catholic protestors, neutral bystanders, and journalists,⁴²⁷ leading to the widespread rejection of the commission's report in Northern Ireland.⁴²⁸ The local investigation turned up different results. After completing his full inquest in August 1972, the city coroner came down strictly against what he characterized as the British immoral use of force:

This Sunday became known as Bloody Sunday and bloody it was. It was quite unnecessary. It strikes me that the Army ran amok that day and shot without thinking what they were doing. They were shooting innocent people. These people may have been taking part in a march that was banned but that does not justify the troops coming in and firing live rounds indiscriminately. I would say without hesitation that it was sheer, unadulterated murder. It was murder.⁴²⁹

The Bloody Sunday debacle set off riots and counter-protests by Catholics in Belfast and other places around Northern Ireland. The government blamed the latest violence on a "planned campaign orchestrated by the IRA," which the Committee for Social Justice was so anxious to dispel that it sent an overnight telegram to Westminster debunking the claim.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁶ Lord Widgery, *Report of the Tribunal appointed to inquire into the events on Sunday, 30 January 1972, which led to loss of life in connection with the procession in Londonderry* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, April 1972), accessed online, 13 Oct 2013, <<http://library.thinkquest.org/18666/history/widgery.htm>>.

⁴²⁷ Ultimately, the United Kingdom would reopen the matter when Prime Minister Tony Blair established another commission in 1998. Headed by Lord Saville and organized like a tribunal, the three justices heard testimony through November 2004. Their findings were not made public until June 2010, but the inquiry concluded that British soldiers had fired on unarmed protestors, that they had done so unprovoked, and that they had shot and killed one man who had already been wounded. Prime Minister David Cameron introduced the inquiry's report in the House of Commons and apologized for the British government. Andrew Sparrow, "Bloody Sunday: the Saville report as it happened," *The Guardian*, 15 June 2013, accessed online, 13 Oct 2013, <<http://www.theguardian.com/news/blog/2010/jun/15/bloodysunday-northernireland>>.

⁴²⁸ Griffiths "Northern Ireland police to question witnesses."

⁴²⁹ "'Bloody Sunday' inquest accuses Army," *BBC*, 21 Aug 1973, accessed online, BBC Archives, 13 Oct 2013, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/21/newsid_2500000/2500321.stm>.

⁴³⁰ "We stake the reputation of our campaign on the accuracy of this message to you viz the Northern Ireland government is attempting to attribute the fighting in Belfast and elsewhere to a planned campaign by the Republicans. This is not so. We state that the root cause of Northern Ireland's troubles is a lack of British standards of equal citizenship for the Catholic minority. The immediate cause of the present disturbances is beyond all doubt the march which the government permitted its supporters to make in Derry on August 12th and also the call up of

In response to Bloody Sunday, the IRA ramped up its bombing campaign through the rest of 1972. During that year alone, the provisional IRA killed approximately 100 soldiers, wounded some 500 more and undertook around 1,300 bombings throughout the province.⁴³¹ The British retaliated in turn by detaining hundreds of Republicans and then, at the end of July, they commenced with “Operation Motorman”—securing the Republicans’ “no-go” territories and subjecting them to British regulation and control.⁴³² The initiative proved successful, but upped the number of men and the amount of resources the United Kingdom invested considerably.⁴³³ But attacks on British troops, Protestant paramilitaries, Republican guerillas, and unlucky civilians continued. In *Fortnight*, a bi-weekly Belfast political magazine, the editors ran an account of all the bombings, assassinations, and acts of terrorism committed in the previous fourteen days. To look at a smattering:

An army sergeant was seriously wounded by a sniper while on duty at an observation post on top of the Embassy Court building....In Army searches in the Lower Falls area troops found a car packed with explosives....There was a confrontation in Lurgan at a housing estate between Catholics and Protestants and two houses were burned by petrol bombs...In the Falls Road, Belfast armed men entered the Gael Uladh Club and evacuated people from the premises and then set fire to it....Four men were killed when a bomb exploded in a car which they were driving...The Official IRA claimed responsibility for a massive explosion...in the Officer’s mess of the Parachutes Brigade. Seven people including six women canteen workers, a Roman Catholic padre and a gardener were killed...Later a garage and twenty cars in the Shankill Road were wrecked by another bomb.⁴³⁴

As political scientist Robert White concluded, “By August 1972, there was large scale violence in Northern Ireland...The killing of people, by both Protestant and Republican paramilitaries, was no longer exceptional.”⁴³⁵ And so much of the state’s police response had become institutionalized, routine. The number of Republicans interred no longer depended on the number of bombs they set off, but on more

the Ulster Special Constabulary.” Telegram from Conn MacCluskey to Prime Minister Harry Wilson, dated 18 Aug 1969, Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

⁴³¹ Brian Lalor, *The Encyclopedia of Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2003) 7.

⁴³² White, “Comparing State Repression” 191.

⁴³³ White “Comparing State Repression.”

⁴³⁴ “The Past Two Weeks,” *Fortnight*, 8 March 1972, 12-13, accessed in National Library-Dublin.

⁴³⁵ White, “Comparing State Repression” 197.

economical factors like resources available.⁴³⁶ In many ways, the Troubles had settled into an impasse, albeit one peppered with bombings, assassinations, and police brutality.

On the political front, Westminster was advancing reforms in hopes of bringing the violence and sectarian tension, if not to a satisfying end, at least to a stable enough arrangement that the United Kingdom could withdraw from the region. In 1972, Prime Minister Edward Heath had taken Northern Ireland back under direct rule, eliminating Stormont. But the change had not been proposed as permanent, and so the Northern Irish people began to brainstorm ways that their state might be put back together again. *Fortnight*, Ulster's political magazine, put together an entire issue in March 1972 dedicated to rethinking a Northern Irish constitution:

In this issue we have included some suggestions as to how this might be done by constitutional lawyers on both sides of the border. There is no obvious and simple solution. But the sooner we all start thinking seriously about various alternatives, the sooner we can all look forward to a future which is not punctuated with bouts of communal violence or outbreaks of terrorism...The process need not be rushed, but the sooner we start thinking ourselves in a framework for peaceful coexistence the better.⁴³⁷

Yet one of the writers, L. Callender, noted that "not since the 1920s has nationalism been so rampant in Irish politics." Rather than see the conflict through the civil rights framework, the editorial argued there could be no easy political agreement because the United Kingdom was ignoring the historical fault line. "This fundamental struggle of the two communities has remained constant," Callender writes. "It is a struggle between nations."⁴³⁸

At first, the editorial board looked as if it would be proven right when a political solution, brokered by the United Kingdom, followed a little over a year later with the creation of a new Northern Ireland General Assembly. A general election took place a few weeks after the agreement was struck, and the new assembly members assumed their official roles by the end of July 1973. Even after months

⁴³⁶ White, "Comparing State Repression" 197.

⁴³⁷ Editorial, *Fortnight*, 8 March 1972, accessed in the National Library-Dublin.

⁴³⁸ L. Callender, "Are We Two Nations?" *Fortnight*, 8 Mar 1972, accessed in the National Library-Dublin.

of negotiating, however, the two sides found themselves unable to agree on how to set up a power-sharing Executive branch. Great Britain and Ireland came together to hold tri-partite talks on the issue—it was the first time since 1925 that the British Prime Minister, the Irish Taoiseach, and the Northern Irish government had met for face-to-face talks. And the collaboration between the normally-fraught British and Irish states proved fruitful.⁴³⁹ In December 1973, Ireland, Great Britain, Ireland and representatives from the main Unionist and Nationalist political parties signed the Sunningdale Agreement, which introduced a power-sharing system and established the Council of Ireland to foster collaboration between the northern counties and the Republic.⁴⁴⁰ From the outset, the deal proved unpopular on both sides. Nationalists still dreamed of a united Ireland and wanted a more aggressive conciliatory framework; Unionists were worried that the “Council of Ireland” was really a proto-administration for a united Ireland.⁴⁴¹ The Orangemen were also irked by what they characterized as a deal “struck with terrorists.”⁴⁴² But at first, both sides played by the rules. Tensions continued to boil, particularly within the Ulster Unionist Party where the moderate and radical factions increasingly did not see eye to eye. Many of O’Neill’s original following had already left the party, striking out on their own with the Alliance Party, but they never managed to garner a significant percentage of the vote.

By May 1974, the Ulster Workers Council and the Ulster Army Council—both of which had been organized after the agreement was officially signed in December 1973 and both of which contained members of the paramilitaries, the Ulster Defense Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force—decided to mobilize.⁴⁴³ They led a two-week general strike across industries, effectively shutting the province

⁴³⁹ Martin Melaugh, “The Sunningdale Agreement-Chronology of Main Events,” *Conflict Archives on the Internet-University of Ulster*, 15 Jan 2013, accessed online, 15 Oct 2013, <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/sunningdale/chron.htm>>.

⁴⁴⁰ *The Sunningdale Agreement*, December 1973, tripartite agreement on the Council of Ireland, accessed online, *Conflict Archives on the Internet-University of Ulster*, 15 Oct 2013, <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/sunningdale/agreement.htm>>.

⁴⁴¹ Melaugh, “The Sunningdale Agreement.”

⁴⁴² Melaugh, “The Sunningdale Agreement.”

⁴⁴³ Melaugh, “The Sunningdale Agreement.”

down. To enforce the strike, the paramilitaries patrolled the main streets and used violence to intimidate Protestants from going to work.⁴⁴⁴ After two weeks of shutdown and a number of civilian casualties, the Northern Ireland General Assembly and its accompanying Executive Branch crumpled; Ulster reverted to direct rule, and the political negotiation process ground to a halt. It would be another 25 years until the warring factions would successfully negotiate with each other in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement; the details of that compromise would resemble the Sunningdale accords.⁴⁴⁵ Until such point, the Troubles would continue to stress and strain the fabric of Northern Irish society as first one group and then the other would gain an upper hand. The next major crisis wouldn't hit until the 1981 hunger strikes by Republican prisoners as they sought to subvert the British government's authority and become recognized as political prisoners of war rather than as mere criminals.⁴⁴⁶ But for now the IRA and the Ulster paramilitaries had settled in for the long-term game, one that the United Kingdom would (rather unsuccessfully) try to end. The killing would continue, but the peak years of violence had passed:

[F]rom August 1972 through November 1975. In this time period Protestant paramilitaries killed 346 people (8.65 per month) while Republican paramilitaries killed 411 people (10.2 per month). The two groups differ most in who it was that they were killing. Most of the victims of pro-state Protestant paramilitaries were Catholic civilians, people like Rose McCartney and Patrick O'Neill. Two hundred and forty-four of their 346 (70%) victims were Catholic civilians. In contrast, anti-state Republicans primarily killed members of the security forces, especially the British army. Two-hundred and eleven of the Republicans' 411 (51%) victims were members of the security forces. If the 48 Republicans listed as being killed by Republicans (most of whom were killed in premature explosions) are excluded from the count, then the IRA's focus on the security forces is more evident.⁴⁴⁷

As the 1970s unraveled, daily life in Ulster became precarious, insecure, irrational, susceptible always to violence. "Terrorism on the one hand, military crackdown on the other [hand], that is life in

⁴⁴⁴ White, "Comparison of State Repression" 192.

⁴⁴⁵ MP Seamus Mallon, a deputy leader in the Social Democratic and Labour Party, even characterized the Good Friday Agreement as "Sunningdale for slow learners." Peter Mandelson (then British Secretary of State), speech, Institute of Irish Studies, Liverpool, UK, 4 Feb 2000, text accessed online, *Conflict Archives on the Internet-University of Ulster*, 15 Jan 2013, 15 Oct 2013, <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/pm4200.htm>>.

⁴⁴⁶ Dawe, "History Class;" White, "Comparison of State Repression" 191.

⁴⁴⁷ White, "Comparison of State Repression" 193.

Ulster, in Belfast," one journalist summarized.⁴⁴⁸ "The root of the trouble lies in the fear--a word I have heard people dwell on lovingly--that lies behind discrimination. This cannot be legislated out of existence."⁴⁴⁹ As one Belfast man darkly noted in a Sept 1971 letter to *The Honest Ulsterman*, "In any case, if you want to change politics you don't write about it: you go out and throw bombs."⁴⁵⁰ Parents who could afford the cost sent their children away to boarding school. "It will be better for him to be away from this sad place and free to do abandoned things like buying pop records or a bag of chips or meeting Protestants, in some sort of safety," one writer wrote, explaining his decision to send his son out of Northern Ireland.⁴⁵¹ Many Ulster residents had emigrated away from the violence, including Seamus Heaney who moved south of the border into the Republic – a move that many impugned with political assertions.⁴⁵² "Here the explosions literally rattle your window day and night, lives are shattered blandly or terribly, innocent men have been officially beaten and humiliated in internment camps--destructive elements of all kinds, which are even perhaps deeply exhilarating, are in the air," Heaney explained to the *Guardian* in an 1972 interview.⁴⁵³ But leaving Ulster brought its own burdens; Mahon talked in his later career about the guilt he felt for not being present in Northern Ireland through it all. "There were things that I should have come to terms with, researched, looked into, looked at, but I didn't," he allowed.⁴⁵⁴

Those who remained had to deal with the immediacy of violence. "We have exchanged living from day to day for living from hour to hour--keeps you on your toes and brings the color to your

⁴⁴⁸ Des Pres, "Emblems of Adversity."

⁴⁴⁹ Geoffrey Squires, "Saner than thou?" editorial, *The Honest Ulsterman* 20 (Dec 1969), accessed at Queens University-Belfast.

⁴⁵⁰ B.S. Johnson, letter to the editor, *The Honest Ulsterman*, 21 Sept 1971, Ormsby papers, MARBL, Emory University.

⁴⁵¹ Letter from Cronin to Ormsby, circa 1974-75, Ormsby papers, MARBL, Emory University.

⁴⁵² Randall, "An Interview with Seamus Heaney."

⁴⁵³ Seamus Heaney, "The Trade of an Irish Poet," *The Guardian*, 25 May 1972, accessed in Heaney papers, MARBL, Emory University.

⁴⁵⁴ Eamonn Grenna, "Interviews: Derek Mahon, The Art of Poetry No. 82," *The Paris Review* 154 (Spring 2000) online, 12 Sept 2013, <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/732/the-art-of-poetry-no-82-derek-mahon>>.

cheeks. Do you think you could live in normal society now (if you could find one)?”⁴⁵⁵ Hewitt, who had been able to address the Troubles in his poetry when writing from England, found that moving back to Ulster silenced him. “What I wrote then was rhetoric, politic rhetoric,” he recalled. “It was polemical stuff made possible by my distance from the situation as a resident of Coventry. But now I find you can’t write about the troubles – they’re too immediate.” For Mahon, that direct engagement with the Northern Irish political miasma would never be resolved, no matter where he lived or how many years had elapsed.⁴⁵⁶ In 1969, *The Honest Ulsterman* printed a Yeats poem as its “thought of the year.” Written during the start of the Irish Civil War in 1923, the verses reflected the paradoxical sensibility of being implanted directly into the site of violence yet not having any notion of what is going on. In his 1923 Nobel Prize speech, Yeats explained how he came to write the poem:

I was in my Galway house during the first months of civil war, the railway bridges blown up and the roads blocked with stones and trees. For the first week there were no newspapers, no reliable news, we did not know who had won nor who had lost, and even after newspapers came, one never knew what was happening on the other side of the hill or of the line of trees. Ford cars passed the house from time to time with coffins' standing upon end between the seats, and sometimes at night we heard an explosion, and once by day saw the smoke made by the burning of a great neighboring house. Men must have lived so through many tumultuous centuries.⁴⁵⁷

The *HU* editors printed the following verses from “Meditations in a time of civil war:”

We are closed in, and the key is turned
On our uncertainty; somewhere
A man is killed, or a house is burned,
Yet no clear fact to be discerned.⁴⁵⁸

Clearly, they were invoking an affective resonance with Yeats—the reference would not go unnoted by the Irish literary community—and by foregrounding the above stanza, the magazine centered itself within the increasing chaos of Ulster at the end of 1969. Violence all around, and “yet no clear fact to be

⁴⁵⁵ Letter from John Cronin to Frank Ormsby, dated 15 May 1975, Ormsby papers, MARBL, Emory University.

⁴⁵⁶ Grenna, “Interview: Derek Mahon.”

⁴⁵⁷ W.B. Yeats, “The Irish Dramatic Movement,” *Nobel Lecture*, 15 Dec 1923, accessed online, *Nobel Prize.org*, 22 Oct 2013, <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1923/yeats-lecture.html>.

⁴⁵⁸ W.B. Yeats, “Meditations in times of civil war,” quoted in *The Honest Ulsterman* 18 (Oct 1969).

discerned.” As the mortar cracks and the walls of the structure loosen, they too call on the simplicities of the bee hive to set against the chaos breaking all around. Yeats continues: “More substance in our enmities/Than in our love; O honey-bees,/Come build in the empty house of the stare.”⁴⁵⁹ The closing line, which Yeats uses as a refrain in his poem, is only repeated once in *The Honest Ulsterman’s* rendering of it, an indication that the project of construction—which Yeats implies in his call to build “in the empty house”—is not as salient in this particular context. Northern Ireland already has its own state institutions; those institutions just discriminated against and marginalized a significant portion of the population. And so, like Yeats cordoned off in his Galway house, the Northern Irish tried to develop their own insular safe zones against the aggressive British surveillance and the paramilitaries’ attacks—whether that be in the home or the stilted conversations carried out with the other side on one’s errands. Carson took his turn with this construction of an interior against a senseless environment in his poem, “Letters from Alaska,” which *The Honest Ulsterman* published in early 1971: “Land and sea/Have lost all meaning—/we build from what we see./Our igloos keep us warm.”⁴⁶⁰

As Montague noted in his 1980 interview with John Hewitt, the terms “Protestant” and “Catholic” are almost so broad and culturally (rather than religiously) inscribed as to be misleading. Yet the rift between the two main factions carried a good deal of weight as the deaths piled up. As Clark notes, the antagonism of the 1970s took its toll on the friendship between the Protestant and Catholic poets in Belfast.⁴⁶¹ For many moderate Protestants, the Ulster Volunteer Force’s assassinations and the police’s mass imprisonment of Republicans set off feelings of anxiety and guilt, but they often were content to remain on the sidelines as individuals who would not exacerbate the situation.⁴⁶² Mahon

⁴⁵⁹ Yeats, “Meditations in times of civil war.”

⁴⁶⁰ Ciaran Carson, “Letters from Alaska,” *The Honest Ulsterman* 27 (Jan/Feb. 1971) 15.

⁴⁶¹ Clark, *An Ulster Renaissance*.

⁴⁶² Chessum “Review of *Northern Ireland*” 143-149.

looks back on his decision to remain distant and unengaged from the problems afflicting his ancestral home:

At that time, Protestants like James Simmons, Michael Longley, myself could think that this was not our quarrel—our peculiar upbringing as middle-class, grammar-school-educated, liberal, ironical Protestants allowed us to think of ourselves as somehow not implicated. I told myself that I had more important things to do. Which were going to London, getting on with my own literary career as I had now started to conceive of it, marrying Doreen, getting myself together, discovering a sense of purpose. And writing directly about those conditions in the North was not part of that purpose.⁴⁶³

Moderate Protestants, those who had largely supported the aims of the Catholic-led civil rights movement, found it difficult to pick a side, if not impossible. Mahon, whose working-class Protestant family had strong allegiances to the Orange Order and the Protestant way of doing things, found he couldn't write about the Troubles unless he approached it obliquely. "You couldn't take sides...It's possible for me to write about the dead of Treblinka and Pompeii—included in that are the dead of Dungiven and Magherafelt. But I've never been able to write directly about it. In *Crane Bag* they'd call it "colonial aphasia." Perhaps, in fact, that's what it is."⁴⁶⁴ Mahon, like Longley, struggled to find the right vocabulary and means to talk about the Northern Ireland situation. "Moderation is not enough!" decried the Oct 1969 cover of *The Honest Ulsterman*.⁴⁶⁵

The Catholic writers, on the other hand, tended to engage the conflict much more head-on. They were also quicker to recognize that the sectarian tensions would rise again to the surface. As Mahon wrote, "Way back in nineteen sixty-six/who besides Seamus would have dreamed/the past more wakeful than it seemed?"⁴⁶⁶ Heaney, who would discover in the bog a figure that enabled him to both capture and criticize the historical Irish-Republican structure of feeling, would address the Troubles

⁴⁶³ Grennan, "Interviews: Derek Mahon."

⁴⁶⁴ Grennan, "Interviews: Derek Mahon."

⁴⁶⁵ Front cover, *The Honest Ulsterman* 18 (Oct. 1969).

⁴⁶⁶ Derek Mahon, unpublished epistolary poem to Michael Longley, quoted in Gavin Drummond, "The Difficulty of We: the epistolary poems of Michael Longley and Derek Mahon," *Yearbook of English Studies* (2005), accessed at *The Free Library*, 1 Jan 2005, 2 Nov 2013 < [http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The Difficulty of We: the epistolary poems of Michael Longley and...-a0133405969](http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+Difficulty+of+We:+the+epistolary+poems+of+Michael+Longley+and...-a0133405969)>.

through much of his work in the 1970s; *North*, published in 1975 to critical acclaim around the English-speaking world, acted as both a journalistic recording of what was occurring and as a critical and imaginative commentary by way of the ritualistic killings and violence of the old Norse cultures. Ciaran Carson, who disagreed with the poems that made *North* so powerful outside of Northern Ireland, also found himself able to talk more directly about the Troubles. "Edna [Longley] might say that I see more room for provisionality and hope because I am Catholic," he confided in a 1991 interview.⁴⁶⁷ And Carson's work, particularly in *Belfast Confetti*, would attempt to document and map Belfast during the height of the 1970s and 80s violence rather than to evade or aestheticize.

But what both the Protestant and Catholic poets could agree upon was that the media discourse regarding the Troubles continued to reduce, oversimplify, and dramatize the episodic violence in such a way as to make the entire situation both trite and overwhelmingly weighty. "The way the media present news events encourages us to see them as absolute and self-generating. We become absorbed in the action, the smoke and flames, and forget about the causes."⁴⁶⁸ Journalists flocked to Belfast as the paramilitary activity heated up and the police began cracking down on the Catholic neighborhoods. Heaney would later write a poem that addressed the superficiality and banality of the continued deluge of press reports. In "Whatever you say, say nothing," he grapples with how to respond to yet the latest strand of questioning from unwitting reporters:

"I'm writing just after an encounter
With an English journalist in search of 'views
On the Irish thing'. I'm back in winter
Quarters where bad news is no longer news,

Where media-men and stringers sniff and point,
Where zoom lenses, recorders and coiled leads
Litter the hotels. The times are out of joint"⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ Frank Ormsby, Interview with Ciaran Carson, *Linen Hall Review*, April 1991, accessed in Ciaran Carson papers, circa 1970-2010, MARBL, Emory University.

⁴⁶⁸ Squires, "Saner than Thou?" 30.

⁴⁶⁹ Seamus Heaney, "Whatever you say, say nothing," *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975) lines 1-7.

Here, the English are not stirring up trouble in the usual manner; it is their interest in “the Irish thing” that Heaney finds so oppressive, in large part, one reckons, because their knowledge of the historical context and the goings-on is so limited. In an interview some years later, Heaney located the seeds of these lines in his frustrations with foreign reporters: “This poem arises out of impatience with my own servility in this situation, and indeed impatience with journalists who were continually coming in to ask to have the situation explained to them.”⁴⁷⁰ Likewise, Heaney used the verse to criticize the guarded nature of daily conversations as individuals of different religious backgrounds ran into one another on the streets or in the grocery store. He notes, “it would be wrong to think that Catholic and Protestant do not live together or do not speak together or do not co-exist. They have...rituals by which they allow themselves to coexist....A way of maintaining human community and civil exchanges, yet both of us would know we were treading on dangerous territory.”⁴⁷¹

As a member of the Northern Ireland Arts Council, Michael Longley viewed the media from a similar standpoint as Heaney, but he did not have the luxury oftentimes of turning the questioners away. When approached by the BBC for a special on the Irish poets, Longley attempts to recruit Frank Ormsby and Michael Foley from *The Honest Ulsterman* to participate: “Ugh! I hear you say: but no publicity is bad publicity, as the fella said.”⁴⁷² Yet as another writer notes, the clichés that were being bandied about in the news reports did take their lead from real acts of violence breaking across Ulster. “It is fair to be irritated by foreigners who talk too glibly of Ulster being a police state; but we do let ourselves be dominated by religious fanatics of all persuasions, spoken for by an abysmally untalented establishment, entertained by mass-media that have a genius for the second rate.”⁴⁷³ Words, even if tired and simplified, carry weight.

⁴⁷⁰ Randall, “An Interview with Seamus Heaney.”

⁴⁷¹ Randall, “An Interview with Seamus Heaney.”

⁴⁷² Letter from Longley to Ormsby, Ormsby papers, MARBL, Emory University.

⁴⁷³ James Simmons, editorial, *The Honest Ulsterman* 3 (July 1968) 4.

And so the failures of the media, in turn, put pressure on Ulster's poets to articulate and intervene in the Troubles. "Let's just say that you must, in order not to go mad, be able to speak," Mahon noted.⁴⁷⁴ The pressures to make political statements continued to mount as the political process stalled and the violence became almost routine. "In both Irish poetry and criticism there is an awareness of what is at stake, even among those who would see poetry as resisting any easy or ready-made accommodation with the public world, as indeed offering an artful textual parallel to rather than a representation of that world."⁴⁷⁵ Yet many of the Belfast group resisted the external push to simplify the situation and write with a particular political telos rather than letting the imaginative impulse guide their work. For this, they often received scathing critique from individuals both inside and outside Northern Ireland.⁴⁷⁶ But choosing to engage directly with the sectarian conflict was not an easy road. Padraic Fiacc edited an anthology of Northern Irish poetry directly related to the Troubles; his decisions to include a significant number of poems that addressed the situation head-on made the final collection rather controversial in Northern Ireland and the Republic more generally.⁴⁷⁷ Fiacc tried to stick to a line between evasion and exploitation of "the horror, something that demanded our serious, grown-up attention."⁴⁷⁸

I am aware that in compiling this anthology, I might be accused of a cynical exploitation of what is, hopefully, a transient situation. It is self-evident, however, that the violence, division and hatred that, in their present acute phase, disfigure the face of Ireland have roots that go deeper and spread wider than the events of the past six years [1968-1974]. Whether or not any of the poems in this anthology have the mark of greatness is for a future generation of readers to judge. But there is a time to keep silence and a time to speak; at the very least there is nothing in this anthology that did not cry out to be said, and this is surely more than enough to justify its existence.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁴ Grennan, "Interviews: Derek Mahon."

⁴⁷⁵ Anthony Bradley, rev. of *Seamus Heaney*, by Helen Vendler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) *Contemporary Literature* 41.2 (Summer 2000).

⁴⁷⁶ Ormsby, introduction, *A Rage for Order* (1992) xvii.

⁴⁷⁷ Dawe, "History Class."

⁴⁷⁸ Grennan, "Interviews: Derek Mahon."

⁴⁷⁹ Padraic Fiacc, introduction, *The Wearing of the Black* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1974).

For him and all the Ulster poets who would follow in this vein, that negotiation would prove tricky and oftentimes less than rewarding. As the province broke down around them, they would turn increasingly to MacNeice (and away from Hewitt) for guidance in navigating a political and cultural space riven by incompatibilities and disagreement. With the submergence of the civil rights movement by sectarian politics, Hewitt and the structure of feeling he espoused could not stand. His comfortable seat as a humanist and well-meaning Protestant was no longer safely above and outside the fray. "Moderation is not enough!" Like O'Neill, Hewitt had not anticipated how deeply Ulster felt the historical divide between Unionists and Nationalists. "...[I] would make amends/by fraternizing, by small friendly gestures,/hoping by patient words I may convince/my people and this people we are changed."⁴⁸⁰ Yet the Unionists' staunch opposition to the Catholic-led civil rights movement seemed to indicate more continuity than change from the mytho-historical colony that Hewitt posits in his poem. "...somewhere/A man is killed, or a house is burned,"—in part because a significant portion of Northern Ireland's Protestants felt that "this is our country also, nowhere else;/and we shall not be outcast upon the world."⁴⁸¹ To accept Hewitt's regionalist viewpoint and his map of Ulster would be to reject the legitimacy of the Catholic struggle and ignore the violence inflicted under the banner of the Protestant territorial claim.

Instead, the Ulster poets read MacNeice's poems of movement and plurality, of formal constraints and syntactical chaos, and found there resonance with the Ulster they were living in. And so we can plot the differences between Hewitt and MacNeice along a number of aesthetic and political lines. To begin: each portrayed the Northern Irish situation in different logics. For Hewitt, Ulster remained mired in a colonialist paradigm in which the Catholics' civil rights struggle could be read as an

⁴⁸⁰ Hewitt, "The colony," lines 126-129.

⁴⁸¹ Hewitt, "The colony," lines 139-140.

anticolonial campaign for equal participation and equal access to resources within the bounds of the six counties. "If not to kin, to co-inhabitants."

MacNeice, on the other hand, traced the contours of Northern Irish politics not in terms of systemic and institutionalized privilege, but as the encounter between two radically different entities. These opposites were held together and riven from one another by the same "in-between"—their co-positions within Northern Ireland. His reading of the sectarian rift extended all the way down, past issues of material accumulation and political participation, to the affective and the perceptual. Hence, MacNeice's reliance on aporetic imagery. In his verse, an image comes double-figured; it contains within itself two opposites, dark and light, violence and love, and one side of the image turns back on itself with each line break and its shift of perspective. MacNeice, a poet of parallax, is more suited to 1970s Northern Ireland, where there are at least two renderings of any incident. The police fired into unarmed protestors in Derry; Irish Republicans threatening the RUC with guns were killed in a scuffle in Derry. The IRA bombed the Belfast utility plants; Protestant paramilitaries bombed the Belfast utility plants. "We are closed in, and the key is turned/On our uncertainty."⁴⁸²

Hewitt did not problematize his imagery in the same way. His figures take root in the landscape, in the Ulster clay, and thus their meaning appears constant, no matter the change of light or the shift of the weather. His writing marks off a territory, sets itself up as stable and perceptible within those boundaries. As an Ulster poet, Hewitt:

must let this rich earth so enhance the blood
with steady pulse where now is plunging mood
til thought and image may, identified,
find easy voice to utter each aright.⁴⁸³

His images are naturalized and assert themselves in the verse; the names of particular Ulster places assert a (yet uncontested) claim to the land and to signification. "I take my stand by the Ulster

⁴⁸² Yeats, "Meditations in time of civil war."

⁴⁸³ Hewitt, "Once Alien Here," lines 21-24.

names,/each clean hard name like a weathered stone."⁴⁸⁴ Like Anteaous, Hewitt and his work anchor themselves in the soil. His imagery is concrete, yet it bears the romantic generality of the pastoral. He speaks "of rock and glen/and mist and cloud and quality of air,"⁴⁸⁵ and we could be locating ourselves anywhere. The landscape bears Ulster's name, but the verse maps out a dreamscape, a province where Catholic and Protestant alike linger over "the little green hills and the harsh grey peaks." Hewitt's sight and his sleep is untroubled: "for over us all is the selfsame sky."⁴⁸⁶

MacNeice, in his conflicted relationship to Ireland, rebuked the territorial claim decades earlier—in part, because he is a poet of movement, of trains and train tracks. Displaced from Ulster at a young age, and displaced imaginatively from his family's homeland in the West of the Republic, the poet ruminated on dislocation and transience rather than on historical roots. The only claim that Ireland lay on him sounded from a mythic space which was always-already ruined. Ireland called out "like a bell in an underwater belfry."⁴⁸⁷ Rather than professing a common unity of perception between Catholics and Protestants "under a selfsame sky," he sets the sky too on a trajectory of instability and change. "...I mark that what/Light was leaving some of [the stars] at least then,/Forty-two years ago, will never arrive/In time for me to catch it, which light when/It does get here may find that there is not/Anyone left alive."⁴⁸⁸ The only certainties for MacNeice, the only anchor, lies in the quotidian, the mundane layerings of life rather than in the grand abstractions and concepts. The only things I know for certain, he told his stepmother in a letter, are the little answers—what I like for breakfast, what I think about a film.⁴⁸⁹ The realities of "a Dunlop tyre" and "a packet of fags" cannot be mapped onto either the Protestant or Catholic imaginative map; they oppose political categorizations through their very

⁴⁸⁴ Hewitt, "Ulster Names," lines 1-2.

⁴⁸⁵ Hewitt, "Once Alien Here," lines 14-15.

⁴⁸⁶ Hewitt, "Ulster Names," line 43.

⁴⁸⁷ MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* XVI, lines 59-60.

⁴⁸⁸ Louis MacNeice, "Star-Gazer," *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 10-15.

⁴⁸⁹ Quoted in Allison, "Pure Form, Impure Poetry, and Louis MacNeice's Letters," *Incorrigibly Plural*.

materiality. MacNeice makes clear this commitment to the mundane against a form of romantic distance in his poem, "Under the Mountain:"

Seen from above
The foam in the curving bay is a goose-quill
That feathers....unfeathers...itself.

...But when you get down
The breakers are cold scum and the wrack
Sizzles with stinking life...

And when you get down
The house is a maelstrom of loves and hates where you—
Having got down—belong.⁴⁹⁰

Yet MacNeice is not evading the greater sectarian morass; "Poetry today should steer a middle course between pure entertainment ('escape poetry') and propaganda," he wrote.⁴⁹¹ And so rather than intellectualize the situation or set forth a political claim, he articulates the affective register of fear and uncanniness through the vehicle of the nightmare. In "The Introduction," MacNeice takes the focus on the natural world and, through repetition and parallelism, turns it into a horrible vision space, a place we recognize but where everything is off: "Crawly crawly/Went the twigs above their heads and beneath/the grass beneath their feet the larvae/Split themselves laughing. Crawly crawly/Went the cloud above the treetops reaching/For the sun that lacked the nerve to set."⁴⁹² As MacNeice once wrote of Auden, "In dreams the hierarchies of life break down."⁴⁹³ In his nightmarish and convoluted verse, he subverts the usual aesthetic supports of the poetic—the dream-image and form—by pushing both to their breaking point.

Unlike Hewitt, who is content to remain unquestioningly within the bounds of formal verse, MacNeice only writes one line to undercut it in the next. His verse oscillates; it makes use of formal

⁴⁹⁰ MacNeice, "Under the Mountain," *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 1-3; 10-12; 16-18.

⁴⁹¹ Edna Longley, *MacNeice*.

⁴⁹² MacNeice, "The Introduction," *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 3-8.

⁴⁹³ Louis MacNeice, *Modern Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938) 106.

constraints only to highlight their artificiality. *Come back early or never come*. And so against Hewitt's unproblematic sense of place, his concrete but general landscapes, his dream-figures, MacNeice sets up the chord of displacement, the concrete and particular recording of the mundane, the nightmare. His structure of feeling would act as a guide for the 1960s and 70s generations as they too attempted to be more than what MacNeice called a "slogan poet"—one who trades in propaganda and feeds the community's own sentiments back into it.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹⁴ Edna Longley, *MacNeice*.

Chapter 5: *'Bodies as Numinous as Words: Using Heidegger, Deleuze and Guattari to Explore the Relationship between Language and the Bodies It Attempts to Name*

The northern poets have continued, in reviews and criticism as well as poetry, to weigh and scrutinize the relationship between art and politics and the nature of artistic responsibility. Far from being crippling self-conscious...this preoccupation has proved enabling, underpinning and balancing the rich body of Troubles poetry of the last twenty-five years. It has neither stifled the cry of protest nor frozen the spring of compassion and in itself constitutes a valuable, challenging examination of the whole nature of 'response.'⁴⁹⁵

From the outset, the Troubles pressured the Northern Irish writers for a response, for an account of sorts of the situation and a sense of where the "birdless" province could go from there. Journalists and some literary critics lambasted the poets for not addressing the conflict more directly in their work. But as Michael Longley noted, the Troubles often presented the artist with a double-bind—the poets were accused of evasion if they did not write and exploitation if they did. Yet, he acknowledged that the writer "would be inhuman if he did not respond to tragic events in his own community and a poor artist if he did not seek to endorse that response imaginatively." It just took time for "the raw material of experience to settle to an imaginative depth," he allowed.⁴⁹⁶ Even as the community pressed Longley and his peers to articulate what was happening to it, the majority of the Belfast writers refused the easy move into political propaganda. As Louis MacNeice had concluded decades before, "the mere slogan-poet contradicts his name—poietes, a 'maker.' The poet is a maker, not a retail trader."⁴⁹⁷ And yet the growing sectarian rift imposed itself on the writers, made itself felt, changed the nature of their work. As Seamus Heaney recounted in an 1980 interview:

From that moment the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament...I mean that I felt it imperative to discover a field of force in which, without abandoning fidelity to the processes and experience of poetry as I have outlined them, it would be possible to encompass the perspectives of a humane

⁴⁹⁵ Ormsby, introduction, *A Rage for Order* (1992) xvii.

⁴⁹⁶ Michael Longley, 'Preview,' *Radio Times*, 20 Oct 1979, quoted in Ormsby, introduction, *A Rage for Order* (1992) xvii.

⁴⁹⁷ MacNeice, preface, *Modern Poetry*.

reason and at the same time to grant the religious intensity of the violence its deplorable authenticity and complexity.⁴⁹⁸

This question of how art relates to politics is by no means a novel one, but it presented itself with deeply-felt urgency in the Northern Irish context during the 1970s. “For poetry makes nothing happen/it exists/in the valley of its making,” W.H. Auden wrote in his 1940⁴⁹⁹ elegy for W.B. Yeats. The Belfast poets, each in his own way, set up a counterargument to this claim—at times by directing their gaze towards MacNeice. “And then on the other side of it I have Louis MacNeice, the Northern Irish poet, counter that with the notion that art, poetry, must make something happen, that at some level it has to change the world, not necessarily in terms of mind-bendingly, extravagantly, huge ways,” Muldoon said. “But just in ways as simple as the fact that ideally one should never be able to look at a briefcase again after reading that poem, certainly not an eelskin briefcase—never be able to look at it again in exactly the same light... I know my poems fall drastically short of those ambitions; however, those are the ambitions.”⁵⁰⁰ For Mahon, poetry worked on an individual’s imaginative field rather than his or her perceptual one, but verse still possessed the potential to influence the actual through the mediation of an actor’s imaginative range.⁵⁰¹ And then for Heaney, the political charge of poetry lay in the affective sphere: “I disagree that ‘poetry makes nothing happen’. It can eventually make new feelings, or feelings about feelings, happen, and anybody can see that in this country for a long time to come a refinement of feelings will be more urgent than a re-framing of policies or of constitutions.”⁵⁰²

The Ulster poets knew that verse did not exist, solipsistic, in an aesthetic tower, but that it had the potential to radically intervene in the political sphere—even if they could not agree on the manner in which poetry did so. Neither Heaney nor Muldoon saw poetry, considered purely as poetry rather

⁴⁹⁸ Quoted in Des Pres, “Emblems of Adversity,” accessed in Heaney papers, MARBL, Emory University.

⁴⁹⁹ The poem was published in his 1940 collection, but is believed to have been written in the late 1930s.

⁵⁰⁰ Ingersoll and Rubin, “The Invention of the ‘I’: A Conversation with Paul Muldoon.”

⁵⁰¹ Grennan, “Interviews: Derek Mahon.”

⁵⁰² Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose, 1968-1978* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981).

than as rhetoric, as effecting large-scale political shifts. And so in my consideration of Auden's proposition, I want to theorize how language operates in the poetic—namely, by focusing on how it throws off the ropes of mere representation to act with real force on the individuals who encounter it. But rather than continue to read the poets' varying perspectives against one another, I turn instead to a few thinkers who give language a more robust sense of agency than the traditional representation-based models. Although Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari differ from Martin Heidegger on a broad swath of fronts, they all theorize language as an active force that does, at certain moments and in certain contexts, intervene directly into the material world (for Deleuze and Guattari, it transforms bodies; for Heidegger, it creates both the materiality and the world in one fell swoop). As Raymond Williams notes, "People tend not to think of it in that way because they cut out the process, they go straight from the thing in the head to the thing in somebody else's head. Whereas I think most people who work with this material are very aware that this is a productive process."⁵⁰³

Deleuze and Guattari begin to disassemble and rethink this circulatory model of language, of "the thing in the head [that leaps] to the thing in somebody else's head," by arguing that it fails to account for instances of performative language. Drawing off of J.L. Austin's famous theorization, they point to the ways that words can intervene as opposed to merely signify or represent: "to order, question, promise, or affirm is not to inform someone about a command, doubt, engagement, or assertion but to effectuate these specific, immanent, and necessarily implicit acts."⁵⁰⁴ But for a performative act, like saying "I do" in a marriage ceremony, to bring about the desired end, it relies on an entire assemblage of enunciation, whose nonlinguistic presuppositions set up the liminal moment in which a simple statement ("I do") becomes an act (the conjoining of two bodies in a juridical arrangement) simply through its enunciation. To account for the performative function of language

⁵⁰³ Raymond Williams and Daniel Williams, "Marxism, Poetry, Wales: Interview with Poetry Wales," *Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2003) 84.

⁵⁰⁴ Deleuze and Guattari. *ATP* 77

requires a broader model than a narrow set of linguistic constants, and so Deleuze and Guattari set about effectively dismantling Saussurian linguistics and its closed circulation of signs.⁵⁰⁵ For them, a signifying language acts as the repressing representation of desire as it attempts to infuse and saturate the *socius*. Against such an onslaught, there remains little space for language to subvert and assert its own agency against the prescriptive signifier-signified relation. Yet poetry often times draws its energy from the ambiguities left around the edges of a traditional notion of signification. How to situate the poem against the different linguistic functions of signification, representation and performance? In poetry, can language act as a generative force that is aligned with desire rather than remained mired in signifiers that only squash its revolutionary tendencies? And if so, how does the poetic mobilize that productive force?

Heidegger, who set poetry on high, certainly thought the poetic offered a foundational way of knowing the world. "Poetically man dwells."⁵⁰⁶ "To write poetry is measure-taking, understood in the strict sense of the word, by which man first receives the measure for the breadth of his being."⁵⁰⁷ "But poetry that thinks is in truth the topology of Being. The topology tells Being the whereabouts of its actual presence."⁵⁰⁸ Through the act of poesis, language is engaged with world-making, with calling the thinged-world as we inhabit it into being. "What is spoken purely is that in which the completion of the speaking that is proper to what is spoken is, in turn, an original. What is spoken purely is the poem."⁵⁰⁹ It is clear that Heidegger affirms poetry as an originary site, even if at first glance his theorization remains oblique.

⁵⁰⁵ "No water will ever cleanse the signifier of its imperial origin: the signifying master or 'the master signifier.'" Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2009).

⁵⁰⁶ This is the title of an essay by Heidegger.

⁵⁰⁷ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 219.

⁵⁰⁸ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 12.

⁵⁰⁹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 192.

Yet Heidegger's constitutive quality of language vis-à-vis the original act of enunciation—while an argument that I sentimentally agreed with—ignores the problems of power and domination in any given socius. For him, the act of enunciation precedes any consolidation or workings of power in a given social field. The real, as we come to experience it, descends from the original unity of World and Earth, the measuring-granting and the concealing-grounding that gather together in the mode of true Being. This positing of an original and primal unity out of which everything arises in relation is his ontological premise. But for me, and I think for Deleuze and Guattari, such ontology gives language all too easily over to the divine realm. Heidegger allows that most individuals merely repeat that which language speaks in the first moment; they are not the operative moment of enunciation, the great enunciator. But Heidegger continues to see language, as an asubjective formation, name World and Thing as a primordial unity of being. In contradistinction, Deleuze and Guattari want to posit that the real exists prior to language—although not prior to the plane of expression, which intervenes in and arranges bodies. And so what is helpful in Deleuze and Guattari's engagement with language is that it is never divorced from the political. A semiotic regime, when broadened outside the traditional conception of it as a closed system, always presents a micropolitics of the social field.

But to arrive at this new retooling of language, Deleuze and Guattari follow much the same lines as Heidegger in rejecting both language-as-subjectivist and language-as-concept. "We do not wish to reduce the nature of language to a concept, so that this concept may provide a generally useful view of language that will lay to rest all further notions about it."⁵¹⁰ And Heidegger suffuses Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of a semiotic regime based on flows. His formalization of the worlding of the world and the thinging of the thing in their relationship of disclosing appropriation through pure difference has its echoes in the two planes, autonomous, but reciprocally preconditioning, of forms of content (the extension of the hand-tool worked over by gradual modification) and forms of expression

⁵¹⁰ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 188.

(the intense sphere of the face-language mutated by incorporeal transformations). Reading Deleuze and Guattari in this way—through the veil of Heidegger—complicates them both, pulls at the margins of their concepts and sets up new terms. Deleuze and Guattari put the process of enunciation into a particular arrangement of power and machinic effectuality rather than into the divine realm. “Language speaks,” Heidegger claims. “No, a collective assemblage, cohered by power and saturated with desire, speaks,” they respond.

In my treatment of poetry and the potentiality of the lyric, I am attempting to read Heidegger’s poesis as world-making against and into Deleuze and Guattari’s writing as a form of cartography. I want to argue that this rethinking of language, rather than confining it always and forever to the sterile space of signification, opens up spaces and pathways for writing to act productively.

.....

Fitting—that an exploration of the poetic as a making would begin with a poem.

Meditations at Lagunitas

All the new thinking is about loss.
 In this it resembles all the old thinking.
 The idea, for example, that each particular erases
 the luminous clarity of a general idea. That the clown-
 faced woodpecker probing the dead sculpted trunk
 of that black birch is, by his presence,
 some tragic falling off from a first world
 of undivided light. Or the other notion that,
 because there is in this world no one thing
 to which the bramble of blackberry corresponds,
 a word is elegy to what it signifies.
 We talked about it late last night and in the voice
 of my friend, there was a thin wire of grief, a tone
 almost querulous. After a while I understood that,
 talking this way, everything dissolves: justice,
 pine, hair, woman, you and I. There was a woman
 I made love to and I remembered how, holding
 her small shoulders in my hands sometimes,
 I felt a violent wonder at her presence
 like a thirst for salt, for my childhood river
 with its island willows, silly music from the pleasure boat,
 muddy places where we caught the little orange-silver fish

called pumpkinseed. It hardly had to do with her.
 Longing, we say, because desire is full
 of endless distances. I must have been the same to her.
 But I remember so much, the way her hands dismantled bread,
 the thing her father said that hurt her, what
 she dreamed. There are moments when the body is as numinous
 as words, days that are the good flesh continuing.
 Such tenderness, those afternoons and evenings,
 saying blackberry, blackberry, blackberry.⁵¹¹

In his "Meditations at Lagunitas," Hass tugs at the conception of language that Deleuze and Guattari aim to overturn: "the notion that...a word is an elegy to what it signifies." He is circling around this notion of language as one suffused with lack, as one inherently predicated on loss and endless distances. "This master signifier remains what it was in ages past, a transcendent stock that distributes lack to all elements, something in common for a common absence."⁵¹² Hass likewise rejects the Platonic notion that each concrete image must necessarily represent a falling-away from an ideal concept. Language as concept, language as representing image--"After a while I understood that,/talking this way, everything dissolves: justice,/pine, hair, woman, you and I."

Heidegger commiserates with this position. "No one would dare to declare incorrect, let alone reject as useless, the identification of language as audible utterance of inner emotions, as human activity, as a representation by image and by concept."⁵¹³ All the intellectual treatments of language, Williams argues, separate into these two camps, that of figurative expression and that of transmitted concept. "Yet what actually happened was a deep split, which produced its own powerful categories of separation, some of them old terms in new forms: categorical divisions between the 'referential' and the 'emotive,' between the 'denotative' and the connotative,' between 'ordinary language' and 'literary language.'"⁵¹⁴ In their work, Deleuze and Guattari critique this false caesura and the two language

⁵¹¹ Robert Hass, "Meditations on Lagunitas," *Praise* (New York: HarperCollins, 1979).

⁵¹² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 113.

⁵¹³ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 191.

⁵¹⁴ Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 32.

functions it categorizes as reductionist and ultimately subjugated to questions of meaning. For them, Saussurians and others distill linguistics to a signifying system of constants that function as little more than abstract graphs; in doing so, they find it easy to maintain a system of signified-signifier. "There result diverse but always convergent consequences: the comparison of language to a game; the signified-signifier relationship, where the signified finds itself by nature subordinated to the signifier; figures defined as the effects of the signifier itself."⁵¹⁵

At the poem's close, Hass moves beyond this view of language as first and foremost a system of linguistic signs—closer to an idea of a material and active writing that is suffused more by productive desire than by lack. Hass wants to reinsert the corporeality and the productivity of creative enunciation back into language: "There are moments when the body is as numinous as words." As Heidegger would say, the pure speaking of language arises here in that it is no longer tied to the residue of a past speaking, to the subjected simulation. This use of language, the saying of blackberry, is an act that presences in "days that are the good flesh continuing." And Hass enacts that, calls the bread and the dream, by treating the words of the poem itself as bodies. As objects with materiality rather than as signs. "Such tenderness, those afternoons and evenings,/saying blackberry, blackberry, blackberry." Deleuze and Guattari allow this, allow that "sometimes the words as undivided flows, as nondecomposable blocks, or full bodies having tonic value—constitute asignifying signs that deliver themselves over to the order of desire: rushes of breath and cries."⁵¹⁶

Poet Billy Collins advocates for a similar approach to reading, a textual engagement in its most active sense. He asks his students to take a poem and "press an ear against its hive" ("Introduction to Poetry"). To "waterski/ across the surface of a poem/ waving at the author's name on the shore."⁵¹⁷ He

⁵¹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 242.

⁵¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 243.

⁵¹⁷ Billy Collins, "Introduction to Poetry," *The Apple that Astonished Arkansas* (Fayetteville, AS: University of Arkansas Press, 1988) lines 4; 9-11.

begs them to read poetry as an experience of play and exploration across the word-objects and figure-images rather than as a strict ordering of signs and designations. Heidegger might add that Collins' students should participate in the preservation of the poem's work by standing out into the truth of World and Thing it reveals.⁵¹⁸ Yet, all they want to do is "tie the poem to a chair with rope/and torture a confession out of it./They begin beating it with a hose/ to find out what it really means." But this begs the question of how to read (and write) beyond the realm of signification. After all, "no water will ever cleanse the signifier of its despotic origin." What are the conditions under which writing, specifically the poetic, pass through the wall of the signifier, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms? Under which it speaks purely in the poem as an original enunciation that calls the world to grant things and the things to bear the world? How do we find ourselves saying blackberry, blackberry, blackberry?

This problem—the one that obsesses Hass in "Meditations at Lagunitas" and that leads Heidegger over and over to his assertions, "Language *speaks*" and "*Language speaks*"—is also the cul-de-sac that Deleuze and Guattari are attempting to theorize their way out of. Language, when contained in a closed circuit of signs, subjects and subordinates desire. It blocks desiring-machines from acting through the social field and contains them instead within the arbitrary impasse erected between signifier and signified. In this it functions similarly to the Oedipal triangle promulgated again and again, in ceaseless corrallings, by psychoanalysts.⁵¹⁹ To stifle desire necessarily closes down its political effectuality. A language that confines itself to an abstracted and constant category outside of the socius appears to mediate or reflect the social field from a secure vantage point; it presents itself as naturalized, essential, transhistorical, unchangeable. "Our criticism of these linguistic models is...that they do not reach the abstract machine (the coherent yet asubjective forces of orchestration) that

⁵¹⁸ "Preserving the work means: standing within the openness of beings that happens in the work. This 'standing-within' of preservation, however, is a knowing." Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 65.

⁵¹⁹ "Take a look at psychoanalysis and linguistics: all the former has ever made are tracings or photos of the unconscious, and the latter of language, with all the betrayals that implies (it's not unsurprising that psychoanalysis tied its fate to that of linguistics.)" Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 13.

connects a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statements, to a collective assemblage of enunciation, to a whole micropolitics of the social field.”⁵²⁰

.....

Deleuze and Guattari want to reject the dominant form of linguistics in favor of the glossomatic model promulgated by Hjelmslev:

Because it abandons all privileged reference...Because, within this field, it sets in motion its flows of form and substance, content and expression. Because it substitutes the relationship of reciprocal precondition between expression and content for the relationship of subordination between signifier and signified.⁵²¹

In seeking those “moments when the body is as numinous as words,” Deleuze and Guattari turn to the figure of God as a lobster, to the double articulation of planes of content and expression. Humming with glints and echoes of Heidegger, their framing goes something like this: The real that we inhabit (what they refer to as the actual) is composed of two dimensions—the plane of content and the plane of expression—between which exists a real difference. (Not a difference in the negative sense stemming from a transcendent signifier, but a positive difference created by the intersection of two flows.) By content, they refer to “formed matters,” or substance that is selected and selected through a particular organizing principle. By expression, they point to “functional structures” that possess an organization specific to their functioning as well as a substance of their own.⁵²² Unlike the traditional notions of content and expression that reduce language to a representation, Deleuze and Guattari argue that content and expression each have both form and substance. Content does not merely exist as matter, but exists as formed substances that react against and condition the pressures of expression that attempt to work over it. In turn, the forms of expression also possess a substance. “The articulation of

⁵²⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 7.

⁵²¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*.

⁵²² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 43.

content is double in its own right and constitutes a relative expression within content; the articulation of expression is also double and constitutes a relative content within expression" (ATP 44).

But we must be careful, Deleuze and Guattari caution, not to fall back into the typical trope of signified and signifier, albeit beneath a different star: forms of expression do not reflect the forms of content. God is a lobster. God takes its two pincers and reaches into the seething milieu to pull out formed substances, that which relates to bodies, and substantive functions, that which relates to statements. God puts those two dimensions into relation, where the forms of expression work over the forms of contents in a complex articulation. Taken together, the dimensions of content and expression constitute and compose the social strata; they delineate what is articulated and what is made visible through a complex regime of signs and bodies. The most well-known—and easiest to grasp—example that Deleuze and Guattari give of this double articulation at work in both expression and content refers back to Foucault's work on the prison system in *Discipline and Punish*. The prison acts as the form of content; it presents a physical structure, iron and cement, that makes visible certain bodies.⁵²³ Yet it too is governed by particular codes and rules that structure the behavior of the bodies it contains. Likewise, delinquency as a discursive formation of statements and names acts as a form of expression, transforming bodies and acts intensively into criminals and crimes. It too has a substance: the specific offenses it marks out. "The form of expression is constituted by the warp of expresseds, and the form of content by the woof of bodies."⁵²⁴

Here is where I will step into murky waters. Deleuze never wrote a book on Heidegger nor did he appear to obviously engage with his theory much outside of one chapter in *Difference and Repetition*. And so I stand on insecure ground in claiming that Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of the

⁵²³ "If different examples of architecture, for example, are visibilities, places of visibilities, this is because they are not just figures of stone, assemblages of things and combinations of qualities, but first and foremost forms of light that distribute light and dark, opaque and transparent, seen and not-seen, etc." Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, transl. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 57.

⁵²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 86.

planes of content and expression bears more than a slight formal resemblance to Heidegger's ontology of the real constructed by a two-fold articulation of world and thing through a pure and positive difference. For sure, to translate—or at least attempt to translate—Heidegger and his difference between being and beings as constituted through the gathering-together of language as pure enunciation runs aground in places. I have not yet fully come to terms with how Deleuze and Guattari engage with and pull against Heidegger, but setting the two in dialogue feels a fruitful exercise.

To begin at the beginning—a conceptually difficult task. The beginning for Heidegger must always originate from the moment of relationality. Nothing precedes its relations. Instead, the pure act of language, that which names Things and World, creates both Thing and World by calling them together. Yet to be clear, neither Thing nor World exists as a separate and autonomous sphere. This gathering together first proceeds by the rift of a primary unity of Being, a rift that separates and holds apart World and Thing while also constituting them as two planes of the real in that very act of division. And it is a folding that is enabled, that moves from a place of real difference rather than the negative difference experienced and cordoned off by the mediation of the concept/representation. “The difference does not mediate after the fact by connecting world and things through a middle added on to them. Being the middle, it first determines world and things in their presence, i.e., in their being toward one another, whose unity it carries out.”⁵²⁵ It is a positive difference between the particularized beings of coherent bodies and Being as the all-encompassing experience of the real. (And it is a positive difference that Deleuze and Guattari adopt and will carry out even further in their replacement of the unity of the primordial In-Relation with the multiplicity of singularities as pure difference.)

Thus, Heidegger isolates two planes of existence, that of World and Thing. They are stilled, made solid and substantial by an act of calling each to be present to each other, an act that is accomplished through the pure enunciation of language. “This gathering, assembling, letting-stay is the thinging of

⁵²⁵ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 200.

things....Thinging, they unfold world, in which things abide and so are the abiding ones."⁵²⁶ Here, Heidegger wants to controvert the "interpretation of 'thing' by means of matter and form."⁵²⁷ Such a formalization loses the essential thing-being by reducing a corporeal body to a perceived extensive relationship.⁵²⁸ Instead, he posits a Thing as a "self-contained independence" that refuses enunciation.⁵²⁹ They abide, they conceal their thing-being from an easy parsing. Heidegger warns against taking the conceptual mode we use in approaching a tool or a piece of equipment and applying it to Thing-being. Yet Things, the bodies which stabilize and hold substance, anchor the world. Heidegger is careful not to use the word "world" in a metaphysical sense. It is not the aggregation of all matter nor is it "theologically conceived creation." Instead, the World represents what Heidegger refers to as the unitary fourfold of mortals and divinities, earth and sky. Admittedly a shaky concept for me, the fourfold seems to relate to the act of seeing as whole—or being able to articulate as whole—the diverse spectrum of experience, from the substantive earth to the immaterial sky, from the temporally-bounded to that which appears limitless. The World is not the agent of that articulation, but it is the site of enunciation. The World acts in so far as it is engaged with the letting-stay of material bodies; it grants things their presence. A lamp has no world. But anyone who "dwells in the overtness of beings, of the things that are" and deliberately acts in accordance with that awareness of the things that are has a world.⁵³⁰

Heidegger fixates on poetry, or better yet, on poeisis, the act of its making, because he finds that World and Thing are called forth together out of concealment in the work of art. In the work, the materiality of the earth is set forth into the setting-up of the world. Each is created only out of their relation, and that relation is first stilled in the art work. Most radically, these acts of poeisis open up a

⁵²⁶ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 197.

⁵²⁷ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 29.

⁵²⁸ For Heidegger, the "formed matter" logic applies instead to the nature of instruments rather than things.

⁵²⁹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 31.

⁵³⁰ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 43.

world at the same time as they ground that world in the material substratum. "The painting spoke. In the vicinity of the work, we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be."⁵³¹ Heidegger also identifies this form of creation, as opposed to a prescriptive process of production, with truth. "Createdness of the work means: truth's being fixed in place in the figure."⁵³² But as the historical context changes, and so does the truthful statements, works of art can lose their revelatory character and become aesthetic artifacts that reveal the World-Earth joining of a previous time. The particular being of an artwork is tied not to its material substance or its aesthetic form, but to the relation that it uncovers and renders visible. As a work of art, the poem stills the figure of truth, the relation of World and Things, by naming and thus casting light on beings.⁵³³ Within the work, Heidegger comments, "the being of the being comes into the steadiness of its shining."⁵³⁴

Now the first moment of translation. Can we draw a conceptual correspondence between Heidegger's World and Thing and Deleuze and Guattari's planes of expression and content? If not exactly identical, can we say that they at least are engaged in a similar task of constructing the real? Deleuze and Guattari propose the warp of statements and the woof of expressed; Heidegger, the warp of Things as that which abides and the woof of World as that which articulates and unites the fourfold. Formally, the correspondence certainly seems to exist. But what sort of correspondence is it? What translation can we attempt? Is this a homologous resemblance or an analogous one? Deleuze and Guattari would most likely deny any mimetic representation, even if only a conceptual one. And to posit that the planes of expression and content emerged out of Heidegger's ontological construction of the manifold gathering of World and Thing is a stretch.⁵³⁵ But attempting to force an encounter between the

⁵³¹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 34.

⁵³² Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 62.

⁵³³ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 70.

⁵³⁴ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 70.

⁵³⁵ It is possible—more than possible, tempting even—to draw the formal parallel between the plane of expression's form and substance and Heidegger's articulation of World and Thing. For Heidegger certainly recognizes that there is a real distinction between the statement's calling-together and the coexistence of bodies

two ontologies does provide productive sparks, particularly when it comes to delving into the role of language *qua* an active force of articulation or enunciation.

Heidegger notes the real distinction between the things that a speech act calls into being and the existence of those things at the same spatiotemporal point as the enunciator. But he does not explore the double articulation of planes of content and expression. For him, what I would argue is more interesting is the intersection and encounter between those planes—namely, how corporeal bodies and incorporeal enunciations interact with and against one another to create the real. At first glance, it seems obvious that the division between World and Thing coincides with the planes of expression and content. After all, as Deleuze and Guattari put it: “if in a social field we distinguish between the set of corporeal modifications and the set of incorporeal transformations, we are presented, despite the variety in each of these sets, with two formalizations, one of content, the other of expression.”⁵³⁶ The thinging of Things, that which abides—here Heidegger seems to be proposing bodies, a proliferation of bodies that are modified and changed through the physical nature of their extensive interactions. The key characteristics here are the thing’s spatio-temporal extension and the resistance it puts up to being defined by a use-value.⁵³⁷ “Thinging gathers. Appropriating the fourfold, it gathers the fourfold’s stay, its while, into something that stays for a while: into this thing, that thing.”⁵³⁸ On the other side of the threshold, we have the World. Can Heidegger’s World double as a figure for the plane of expression? They both certainly turn on the intensive and the incorporeal assignation of states. Statements of delinquency transform bodies into criminals. It is a coding of sorts and can take a sweeping number of

in a particular space. “Snowfall and tolling of vesper bell are spoken to us here and now in the poem. They are present in the call. Yet they in no way fall among the things present here and now in this lecture hall.” Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 196. He differentiates between the presencing that language accomplishes by calling World and Thing into a being-together and the objects that presence. But at the same time, Heidegger does not seem to allow that the gathering-together Language enacts is merely a “functional structure” that presents a particular mode of organization. For him, World and Thing are called into being through their relation; it is an ontological claim rather than a perceptual one.

⁵³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 85.

⁵³⁷ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 171-172.

⁵³⁸ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 182.

forms, from the basis of linguistic signs to that of temperature gradations. The Things gestate the World, which houses all Things in its splendor, beneath its articulated connections. At first glance, Deleuze and Guattari's two planes seem to match, more or less, as formal translations of World and Thing.

The easiest argument in favor of reading Heidegger's World and Thing as the Plane of Expression and the Plane of Content, respectively, arises out of his example of the Greek temple. He identifies the temple as a work of art; as such, it allows those who contemplate it to experience the mutual presencing of World and Thing. It crystallizes the rift. "The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air. The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the surge of the surf, and its own repose brings out the raging of the sea."⁵³⁹ Yet it is not merely a screen against which material forces are made manifest; the traverse pathways that human beings travel pass through its auspices as well. "The temple-work, standing there, opens up a world and at the same time sets this world back again on earth, which thus emerges as native ground."⁵⁴⁰ The Earth, as that substance which refuses disclosure yet co-rises in all Things to give them their irreducible materiality, is joined in the Temple to the World as a collective articulation. The temple oversees and brings together the corporeal modifications of bodies and the incorporeal transformations effected by statements; it serves as a form of architecture that reveals bodies and also as a site imbued with a divine authority that changes bodies from dirty to clean, that renames. Deleuze and Guattari would point to the fact that Heidegger eclipses the religious law that regulated and delineated the World by turning almost exclusively to the temple. But he still arrives at the same fundamental tensions—between extension and intension, between content and expression, between corporeal modifications and incorporeal transformations—in his exploration of the temple. The temple qua its substance, both in its self-contained materiality and in the bodies it makes visible,

⁵³⁹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 41.

⁵⁴⁰ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*.

adheres to the plane of content; the temple qua its divine code, both in its religious code and in the names it disperses, resides on the plane of expression.

Another key moment of correspondence seems to arise in the nature of the relationship between the two planes. For Heidegger, Thing and World are constituted solely through this pure difference and in the moment of mutual stilling, each disclosing appropriates the other. They interpenetrate one another. Thing does not determine World nor does the World shape Things. Instead, they each intervene in one another through a process of unconcealing. They are gathered, revealed, in a clearing. In its working, the temple sets forth the World and sets up the Earth. Deleuze and Guattari prefer to use the terms "reciprocal precondition" rather than appropriation. But both identify that there is no direct "fusion" or mirroring between the two planes. They do not necessarily correspond or reflect one another, but instead are mutually conditioning. Things gestate a World, which they condition as the abiding ones. The World gathers and assembles Things, draws them into a disclosure. Things and World are spoken together as an encounter across a real and positive difference, and in that speaking, they persist in their presencing. For Deleuze and Guattari, the plane of expression intervenes in the plane of content, which irreducibly resists and reacts back upon its attempted enunciation.

Yet there exists a clear difference between both theories when it comes to the originary tale. For Deleuze and Guattari are clearly not Heideggerians or phenomenologists. For Heidegger, nothing exists prior to its relations whereas they posit matter and a virtual plane of pure difference as prior to the process of formalization. They are still realists. So for them, the relation between the planes of content and expression is not that which constitutes the substance of the real itself; before they articulated into one another and create the actual, they exist, albeit not as the terms of expression or content. In attempting to translate Heidegger into Deleuze and Guattari and back again, we will run aground time and time on this shoal: the key differential point follows not from the two planes of the real, but from how they come to be articulated together in a relationship of positive difference.

For Heidegger, this gathering together of World and Thing is enacted by language and precedes the difference. *Language* speaks. This is not the moment of an individual enunciation in which man speaks in the social system of signification and representation; it is asubjective and accomplished by language itself in its most pure moment of the calling-into-being of Thing and World. In utterance, language calls things and world into a presencing with one another. It names and it bids them to exist in relation. In naming, language stills things and world, secures them for a moment in a relation of difference. "Language speaks as the peal of stillness. Stillness stills by the carrying out, the bearing and enduring of world and things in their presence...Language goes on as the taking place or occurring of the dif-ference for world and things."⁵⁴¹ Saga—language as history, as the sedimentation of pure speech acts that still world and thing in their mutual presencing. Most of what we consider to be speech is for Heidegger simply a residual use of language; we have listened and received the former summons of Thing and World as mere representations, which we then bandy about in order to communicate. "Mortal speech must first of all have listened to the command, in the form of which the stillness of the difference calls world and things into the rift of its onefold simplicity."⁵⁴² The poem, in its essence, accomplishes the originary moment of enunciation; it is that which stills Thing and World in their presencing to one another. The poem's pure speaking is the process of world-making.

Deleuze and Guattari do not hold language in such high esteem. They do not wish to theorize language, like Heidegger does, as the force through which the world is created and recreated. (Here, we could translate Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the lobster—or the abstract machine that articulates together the planes of expressions and content—into Heidegger's robust and radical theorization of Language as that which speaks.) Deleuze and Guattari are not ready to relinquish the abstract machine to enunciation that easily. Instead, for them, language is yet another site of contestation and struggle; it

⁵⁴¹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 205.

⁵⁴² Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 206.

too constitutes a collective assemblage of expression whose functioning is worked over by the abstract machine. "This shows up the error, even hypocrisy, that consists in thinking that knowledge appears only wherever the relations between forces are suspended. There is no model of truth that does not refer back to some kind of power, and no knowledge or even science that does not express or imply, in an act, power that is being exerted."⁵⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari see language, even at its most productive, as a part of an assemblage that privileges and enacts certain relationships of power. To view language as a static and closed system of constants or to view it as a force that calls forth the essence of things—both positions avoid the problems of power that inheres in the sedimentation of old representations and brings about the rupture of new articulations. For them, the heterogeneous elements are not created in the moment of enunciation; they precede it and merely exist alongside each other prior to a mutual appropriation. "Consistency necessarily occurs between heterogeneities, not because it is the birth of a differentiation, but because heterogeneities that were formerly content to coexist or succeed one another become bound up with one another through the 'consolidation' of their coexistence and succession."⁵⁴⁴ And for Deleuze and Guattari, the machinic attempt at consistency or consolidation cannot be divorced from questions of power. They want to delve into the ways that a machinic assemblage effects a new semiotic of power (i.e., the ways that their statements attempt to intervene in contents and that contents in their irreducibility react back against attempts to enunciate them).

It becomes necessary then to step beyond Heidegger's formalizations of language as agent. Deleuze and Guattari do so by turning to Foucault and his diagram. The diagram—or what they refer to as the abstract machine—places the dimension of content and the dimension of expression into relation and effectuates that articulation through its various machinic assemblages. In the example of Foucault's examination of the prison system, he identifies the abstract machine or the diagram at work as that of

⁵⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 39.

⁵⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 330.

the Panopticon. All of the architectures and statements of the disciplinary socius strategically serve to order human conduct according to particular rules under the threat of a constant surveillance.

Panopticism coheres the strategies of power in their transverse functionings between the forms of content and the forms of expression, between the visibilities and the articulables, between the architectures and the statements.⁵⁴⁵ These two regimes do not correspond or conform to each other; instead, there exists a “reciprocal precondition” between the forms of content and the forms of expression. The dimension of expression, in a cohered stratum, intervenes and interfaces with that of content. Expression does not aim “to represent them but to anticipate them or move them back, slow them down or speed them up, separate or combine them, delimit them in a different way.”⁵⁴⁶

Deleuze and Guattari therefore break away from the category of “language” entirely. “There is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages.”⁵⁴⁷ They situate the sign not as a despotic constant, but as a site of struggle that is negotiated and renegotiated by a collective assemblage of enunciation, not as a designation of meaning but as a function of its usage. It is a pragmatic linguistics, one that does not abstract away from the substances of enunciation or the power relations that dictate the expresseds’ relations to contents. “There is no model of truth that does not refer back to some kind of power, and no knowledge or even science that does not express or imply, in an act, power that is being exerted.”⁵⁴⁸ And so it is also necessarily a political linguistics. “It must be observed how thoroughly politics works language from within.”⁵⁴⁹

This reinsertion of power—and the politicization of the process of enunciation—complicates the attempt to read Heidegger’s formalization into the planes of expression and content. Language *speaks*,

⁵⁴⁵ Deleuze, *Foucault* 34.

⁵⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 86.

⁵⁴⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 7.

⁵⁴⁸ Deleuze, *Foucault* 39.

⁵⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 83.

and the world is made anew, Heidegger argues. For Deleuze and Guattari, the world is made anew in fits and starts as the actual is continually negotiated vis-à-vis the planes of expression and content. "The expressions or expressed are inserted into or intervene in contents, not to represent them but to anticipate them or move them back, slow them down or speed them up, separate or combine them, delimit them in a different way."⁵⁵⁰ Deleuze and Guattari might counter, Language speaks and that new organization of naming makes visible new arrangements of bodies, which in turn resist and react against the process of naming. By reading Heidegger in that way, the moment of enunciation again takes on a primary agency, but this time, by determining expression's functioning logic. And then, indirectly or secondarily, it effects the composition of the real through expression's manner of intervening in and anticipating the forms of content.

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With that all messily sloped across the table, we now can progress to the place of writing, as Seamus Heaney would describe it. If to participate in language in the most quotidian sense is to subordinate oneself to the reactive position of listening and responding, can we locate any radical possibilities for reframing the real through writing? These theorizations, however, by opening language outside of the realm of mere representation carve out space for the potential creativity of writing as well as reading.⁵⁵¹ And so now the question arises of how such a political possibility functions.

For Deleuze and Guattari, true writing belongs to the same familial tree as cartography. "Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come."⁵⁵² To repeat or speak with prefigured and socially-signified words is to trace, but not to create. "Take a look at psychoanalysis and linguistics: all the former has ever made are tracings or photos of the

⁵⁵⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 86.

⁵⁵¹ After all, the Belfast group's reclamation of Hewitt and MacNeice is predicated on such creative and interrogative readings.

⁵⁵² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 4-5.

unconscious, and the latter of language, with all the betrayals that implies (it's not unsurprising that psychoanalysis tied its fate to that of linguistics.)" At its most creative, the act of writing requires the act of performance. It takes after the functional logic of the performative, that the work-being enacts what it expresses.⁵⁵³ Hence, language can never be divorced from the implicit presuppositions and situational arrangements of bodies into which its statements intervene. Words have substance, and they are necessarily articulated into a contested relationship with bodies. To write is to map these surfaces, both corporeal and incorporeal. Likewise, Heidegger sees poetry as a form of articulating construction. It is a process of making. And they both rely on the figure of the cartographer: Deleuze and Guattari directly, Heidegger through his notion of a "taking-measure." It is a measuring in the first moment, in that instance in which the unit of measurement is fixed. "To write poetry is measure-taking, understood in the strict sense of the word, by which man first receives the measure for the breadth of his being."⁵⁵⁴

Again, we have formal correspondences between the terms and conceptual figures utilized. But we must be careful not to mistake these resemblances for identity. Given that Heidegger leaves language as that which creates and inhabits the constitutive in-between, he ascribes much more room for agency to its utterances. *Language* speaks. The pure moment of poetic speech may not have a predestined or predetermined logic, but it surfaces with much less baggage. Through poetry, new worlds are possible. Deleuze and Guattari are more skeptical; for them, the signifying circuitry of language tends to orchestrate and implement a system of social repression. Yet it inherently overflows its centers of signification, but that seepage and that escape tends to not work through construction but through mutation. Words as asignifying objects, figures as a-representative images—these can break through the firm categorizations and impasses set up by signification. In that escape, they are creative. But they can be creative in two ways—first, in the sense that they follow a line of flight and pass beyond

⁵⁵³ Here we can draw some parallels from J.L. Austin's work on the speech-act and Butler's ideas of gender performance in that both argue for a shift from focusing on what something means to what something does.

⁵⁵⁴ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 219.

into new becomings; and second, they work through mutation and revision to draw new maps of bodies. In the former, we fall into the aesthetic project of Mallarme; in the latter, we might locate the attempts of other writers attempting to make use of the aesthetic in a politically meaningful and creative way. For Deleuze and Guattari, the abstract machine slowly grinds onward, making the virtual into the actual, sedimenting and deterritorializing, tracing old lines and making new maps. Writing, at its most creative, still participates in this process.

I lean towards Deleuze and Guattari's notion of writing and its potential efficacy as a creative force in the plane of expression that mutates and intervenes in the plane of content. But that in turn requires an analysis of how poetry acts as a particular mode of expression within the Northern Irish collective assemblage of enunciation—as well as how the mode exposes itself to political possibility. Here, I want to replace the traditional notions of genre as a coherence of formal properties with an expansion of Deleuze and Guattari's mode of expression. They give a hint of how they perceive this sort of exploration to unfold in their plateau on the novella in *A Thousand Plateaus*. For them, the novella constitutes a literary genre within a particular socio-historical context;⁵⁵⁵ it takes as its question “What has happened?” A novella centers itself temporally in the present, but always in a present that is backward-looking and confronted with an unfolding whose causality only presents itself in the impenetrability of the secret. They then oppose this question—and the temporality it enshrines—to the one posed by the tale as a differential literary genre marker. In the tale, everyone always asks, “What is going to happen?” and fixates their eyes on the prospective horizon. “You will never know what just happened, or you will always know what is going to happen: these are the reasons for the reader's two bated breaths, in the novella and the tale, respectively, and they are two ways in which the living

⁵⁵⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 194.

present is divided at every instant.” (The novel, in turn, incorporates the questions of both the tale and the novella in an intertwining that provides it with temporal duration.)⁵⁵⁶

Deleuze and Guattari then take the genre one step further: not only does a particular mode of expression center itself around a question, but it also possesses its own form and substance that delineate it. In the novella, for instance, they argue that the form is that of the secret. We are always aware that something has just happened, yet we cannot penetrate its opacity to determine what substance it conceals. It takes on the form—the posture, if you will—of the secret rather than the content of a mysterious object to be uncovered. For its substance, the novella instead relies on “postures of the body and mind that are like folds or envelopments.”⁵⁵⁷ Thus, there is a particular correspondence, if you will, between the substance and the form, between the folded and concealing bodies and the secret. And so that question is not merely posed; it emerges from the novella’s double articulation. “The links of the novella are: What happened? (the mode of expression), Secrecy (the form of expression), Body Posture (the content of expression).”⁵⁵⁸

From this point of embarkation, I proceed in the direction of the poetic. The genres traditionally implicated in the poetic are historically-contingent and socially-reflective categories. As Raymond Williams puts it, literature enacts a categorization of reading, one that is conditioned by social and class-based forces of exclusion and inclusion. And so I want to approach poetry and the poetic not from the standpoint of its clear literary demarcations, but from a standpoint closer to Deleuze and Guattari. In doing so, I will necessarily need to parse and separate out the generally-understood genres of dramatic and narrative poetry from what I am calling the lyric. Both the dramatic and the narrative poem ground themselves temporally—much like the novella or the tale. The unfolding of events, whether or not the causality is approached retrospectively and opaquely or prospectively and lucidly, figures prominently.

⁵⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 192.

⁵⁵⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 193.

⁵⁵⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 194.

The lyric, in contradistinction, places its concern elsewhere. The verses follow a single strum of the lyre; they make use of extensive bodies but want to produce an intensive affect. Affect here refers not to the Spinozist concept of *affectio*—the ability of a body to affect and to be affected in turn. Instead, I mean to denote a collective and asubjective experience of feeling. By a collective experience, I draw on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of group individuation within a particular assemblage. "The people must be individualized, not according to the persons within it, but according to the affects it experiences, simultaneously or successively."⁵⁵⁹ The affect must be uprooted from any notion of an individualized subject, or else it falls back on itself as a solipsistic and contained emotion. Instead, they adopt a force that is exterior to the atomistic logic of personality and that surges out of the group individuation. Deleuze and Guattari look to Kleist as the writer who brings literature out of the carefully-cordoned space of personalized emotion into the collective wave and retreat of affect. "This element of exteriority—which dominates everything—will give time a new rhythm: an endless succession of catatonic episodes or fainting spells, and flashes or rushes."⁵⁶⁰ What I am calling the lyric follows in Kleist's path, but it adopts a different form and content of expression. It too is concerned with an affective and intensive transformation rather than a happening and the individualized reaction it provokes.⁵⁶¹

Williams also attempts to theorize this phenomenon of a collectively-lived affective arrangement or collectively-imbricated feeling. In an early attempt to define literature, he posited the

⁵⁵⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 341.

⁵⁶⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 356.

⁵⁶¹ Heidegger gets at the importance of an impersonal affect when he ties the gathering of World and Thing to an experience of pain. He asks, "Whence and in what way is pain called?" Pain lies as the fundamental ground on which he builds his theory of the pure speaking of the poetic as a bidding and making-stay of Thing and World. For Heidegger, the constitution of Thing and World necessarily begins with the rending in two of a pure and positive difference that also gathers those two planes together into a relationship of disclosing appropriation. Pain rends, and pain bids Things and World to presence to each other. But pain, while it may surface in particular conjunctures as the catalytic affect behind a particular structure of feeling, is not expansive enough to circumambulate all of the possible emotional surges that a group could hold in common.

concept as a “record of detailed individual experience which has been coherently stated and valued.”⁵⁶² Yet in his later analyses, Williams moved away from the false dichotomy between the individual immersed in his subjective experience and the social as a system of constraint. And his movement in that direction—namely through his concept of the “structure of feeling”—proves particularly fruitful analytically for attempting to theorize what is at work in the poetic. Williams wanted to explore a notion of an individuated group who lived out a particularly-constituted mode of affective response.⁵⁶³ By a structure of feeling, Williams refers to “the pattern of impulses, restraints, tones” that shaped how a collective subjectivity interacted with and perceived their particular social context. It deals less with thought and more with feeling, with the ways of feeling and reacting that certain generations or groups adopt in reaction to their world. When he first promulgated the notion of a structure of feeling, Williams located it primarily within the aesthetic sphere as the element of a work that could not be explained by exterior forces yet also gave rise to a particular socially-crystallized sensibility.⁵⁶⁴ Throughout his career, the concept has migrated beyond the purely aesthetic sphere into what he refers to as the lived experience of a social formation. Yet the best evidentiary support for a particular context’s structure of feeling surfaces in its artistic production, Williams argues. This link between the aesthetic and the social stems from his conceptualization of the artistic convention as socially-sedimented and selective tradition rather than as a privileged and ahistorical space.

In the later Williams, this structure of feeling becomes associated more and more with what he terms the emergent—namely, cultural processes, reactions, and modes of perception that are engaged in the creative process of rupturing and retooling the dominant structures. He argues that the emergent is made possible because of a temporal gap (and I would argue, a necessarily conflicted encounter

⁵⁶² Williams, *Reading and Criticism*.

⁵⁶³ “I do not mean that the structure of feeling, any more than the social character, is possessed in the same way by the many individuals in the community. But I think it is a very deep and wide possession, in all actual communities.” Williams, *Politics and Letters*.

⁵⁶⁴ Williams, *Politics and Letters* 159.

between heterogeneous elements) between what individuals live within a social formation and what the social formation has articulated into an expressive relationship. In this space, a number of pre-emergent forces or affects can emerge as “disturbance, tension, blockage, emotional trouble.”⁵⁶⁵ But a threshold has yet to be crossed; these affects have not yet been enunciated and crystallized into a discursive structure. Williams argues this threshold is reached “at those specific and historically definable moments when very new work produces a sudden shock of recognition. What must be happening on these occasions is that an experience which is really very wide suddenly finds a semantic figure which articulates it.”⁵⁶⁶ Here, Williams’ concept of the “semantic figure” fits with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the “order-word” in that both designate a phrase that effectuates or articulates a particular subjectivizing affect within its collective assemblage of enunciation.⁵⁶⁷

While Deleuze and Guattari would most likely reject the formal notion of a “structure” of feeling, they adopt a similar causality in their theorization of “matters of expression.” For them, the simple causality of historical analyses offers little.⁵⁶⁸ Instead of the germinal, they too prefer a wave-like causality: pre-emergent processes build in a social formation like a centripetal wave towards a point of convergence, a threshold at which the emergent is enunciated. After that threshold, the same processes break across the social formation as a centrifugal wave, dispersing throughout and making residual the dominant structure of feeling. This threshold is marked, for Deleuze and Guattari, by the moment in which heterogeneous qualities are articulated together in a pattern that becomes autonomously

⁵⁶⁵ Williams, *Politics and Letters* 168.

⁵⁶⁶ Williams, *Politics and Letters* 164.

⁵⁶⁷ “The order-words or assemblages of enunciation in a given society (in short, the illocutionary) designate this instantaneous relation between statements and the incorporeal transformations or noncorporeal attributes they express.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 81.

⁵⁶⁸ “It is true that the human sciences, with their materialist, evolutionary and even dialectical schemes, lag behind the richness and complexity of causal relations in physics, or even in biology.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 431.

expressive: “Inasmuch as these heterogeneities are matters of *expression*, we say that their synthesis itself, their consistency or capture, forms a properly machinic ‘statement’ or ‘enunciation,’”⁵⁶⁹

To return finally to the poetic: we have stated previously that the lyric is attempting to engage with a collectively-propagated affect, in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, or a structure of feeling, in Williams’. We might then situate its project through the following question: “Whence and in what manner comes this asubjective affect?” This is not to indicate that each and every lyric poem will successfully attempt this problem nor that it will set out to attempt it; such a conclusion would be ludicrous. In fact, many poems that fail to compel the reader are those works that remain tethered to the individualized experience of emotion rather than an impersonal and collective enunciation of affect. “What we wish to say is that there is a self-movement of expressive qualities. Expressiveness is not reducible to the immediate effects of an impulse triggering an action in a milieu: effects of that kind are subjective impressions or emotions rather than expressions” (*ATP* 317). Even when a lyric poem does become expressive, that also does not indicate that it is articulating an emergent structure of feeling; it too could be caught in the re-inscription of dominant modes of feeling and perceiving. A radical poem, one that accomplishes a pure speaking in Heideggerian terms, would serve as the threshold—the moment of enunciation for pre-emergent forces and tensions—that would consolidate and make coexistent a new arrangement of heterogeneous elements and affects.

But what here is meant by the poem? Historically, the particular expressive mode of the poetic has drawn its boundaries of literary inclusivity in different ways. For instance, a poem could employ elements of the dramatic mode or of the narrative with its temporal causality in order to function. A narrative poem, that which is moved primarily by a question similar to the novella—what is happening—will also mobilize moments of affective response and intensive qualification.] Heidegger too has opened the pure poem to an existence outside of its formal impulse: “the opposite of what is purely spoken, the

⁵⁶⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 330.

opposite of the poem, is not prose. Pure prose is never 'prosaic.' It is as poetic and hence as rare as poetry" (PTL 205). Here, Heidegger makes it clear that the pure poetry he is invoking does not have necessary or essential ties to formal patterning; the moment of enunciation accomplished in his archetypal poem is of a different order. There must be something revelatory in the verse, a world-making impulse. The traditional literary genres have always been open and shifting definitions.

But almost always, poetry had cleaved towards some kind of formal organization, one much more robust and complicating than that of prose with its wholesale commitment to syntactical structures. Here, we associate the poetic with its conventional formal impulses—line, meter, stanza, rhyme, figurative devices of representation. But today, the "prose" poem complicates even that principle by opening a zone of indiscernibility right on the border. In turn, contemporary poets who write in free verse make use of the line loosely rather than bowing to a more rigid imbrication of syntactical rhythm; they too see that the work of writing poetry lies in something other than following formal prescriptions. But let it not be said, they argue, that free verse is without form. Its formal organization is simply more chaotic, less confining, but it still attempts to establish a rhythm that "ties together critical moments."⁵⁷⁰ Do not mistake the formal code of meter and lineation as that which makes a poem expressive (rather than merely a matter of subjective catharsis). "Meter, whether regular or not, assumes a coded form whose unit of measure may vary, but in a noncommunicating milieu, whereas rhythm is the Unequal or the Incommensurable that is always undergoing transcoding. Meter is dogmatic, but rhythm is critical."⁵⁷¹ Rhythm is, first and foremost, a formal phenomenon.

To define the poem as a literary genre places us on uncertain and unstable ground: We have some sense that the poetic must attach itself to a certain formal impulse, yet we also do not limit the revelatory enunciation made possible in the poetic to a particular formal organization. What is the

⁵⁷⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 313.

⁵⁷¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 313.

relation of the lyric to form? of formal organization to the lyric's problematic—what and from where comes this affect? And, perhaps more importantly for a political analysis, how does the lyric become expressive within an assemblage as opposed to merely a noncommunicating meter or a functional, subjective reaction? Instead of operating under the traditional notions of genre, I want to follow in the vein of Deleuze and Guattari and posit the lyric poem as a particular mode, or functional structure, on the plane of expression. And so I chart the lyric poem as an expressive project: “whence and in what way comes this affective experience? (the modality or expression), repetition (the form), the image, conceived both visually and acoustically (the substances).

The formal impulses of the poetic, as opposed to the prosaic, depend upon and creatively work from a place of repetition. At its most autocratic, the refrain. At its loosest, an irregular pattern of sounds (meter, rhyme) or of syntactical units (lineation). The best poems deploy more than one technique of repetition. To take a generally-available example: the sonnet as a formal logic is composed by a number of repetitions, which could be more or less regular. To be considered a sonnet, it necessarily repeats the unit of the line to a prescribed terminus—14 lines. A faithful Shakespearian attempt repeats the unit of the stanza, the end rhyme according to a particular pattern, and, within the parameters of the line, a logic of stresses and unstressed sounds. But any given 14-line poem could also utilize forms of repetition that are not essential to the concept of the sonnet-form, ranging from the structure of syntactical clauses (anaphora) to the periodic surfacing of particular vowel sounds and consonantal arrangements (assonance, consonance). And then it could also, like the sestina, repeat particular words. Much as the repetition of molecules according to a particular organizational logic gives a substance its form, the repetition of these particular linguistic elements gives verse its form.

“Form is how poetry expresses time,” poet Glyn Maxwell writes. “The rhyming force of an uncontrollable Present....mutates so easily into an inexorable Future...that seems to be happening

already.”⁵⁷² Acoustic repetitions create a time signature. The two-beat iamb traipses by. The expectation and then satisfaction of an end rhyme moves the poem forward like the revolutions of a steam engine. Even without a narrative or causal impulse, a poem conditions us to a particular, heterogeneous block of time whose extension is enacted through the reading. “Poetry remains akin to memory—the reason rhythm is of its essence.”⁵⁷³ In turn, the visual form, its organization of and placement of words across the page, gives a poem a spatial range. As Deleuze and Guattari note, this repetition “becomes expressive, on the other hand, when it acquires a temporal constancy and a spatial range that make it a territorial, or rather territorializing, mark: a signature.”⁵⁷⁴ The poem can compose a territory by expressing its own spatio-temporal segment. It offers up a localized moment of control, order, rational construction, even agency, against a chaotic milieu (or milieus):

Somewhere beyond the scorched gable end and the burnt-out buses
 there is a poet indulging
 his wretched rage for order-
 or not as the case may be; for his
 is a dying art,
 an eddy of semantic scruples
 in an unstructurable sea.⁵⁷⁵

Deleuze and Guattari also touch on the apparent stability that an ordered territory offers. “The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos.”⁵⁷⁶ Mahon wants poetry to retain the song-like substratum: “The suggestion should always be there, even in the most talky poem...that once upon a time this stuff was sung, not spoken. I’d call it music.”⁵⁷⁷ And so it is no wonder that “when the drums start” in Ulster and the bombing takes out the buses, the Northern Irish poets clung to form in their work; many academic critics have noted their cleavage to traditional

⁵⁷² Maxwell, “On Autumn Journal,” *Incorrigibly Plural* 183.

⁵⁷³ Edna Longley, *MacNeice*.

⁵⁷⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 315.

⁵⁷⁵ Mahon, “A Rage for Order,” lines 1-7.

⁵⁷⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 311.

⁵⁷⁷ Grennan, “Interviews: Derek Mahon.”

verse forms and rejection of an American experimentalism.⁵⁷⁸ The expressive repetition, the refrain, is that which, in one instance, constructs a territory. It composes a home by drawing “a circle around that uncertain and fragile center.” The question and dislocation of home preoccupied MacNeice and extends through the work of his adopted flock. Even for MacNeice, his home is situated in the reproduction of sound—“yet her name keeps ringing like a bell/in an underwater belfry.” Poetic formalism—defined here by the vehicle of repetition—impresses itself upon the Belfast writers as a ground more solid than even the soil of their own province, whose claim is contested and chaotic.

While the poet certainly has more agency in the composition of verse—which word to use that best rhymes with “grime,” which verb to fill out the anapest—a poem’s formal organization should still contain within itself a sense of its own purposiveness.⁵⁷⁹ The form works with its content. Derek Mahon bemoaned the free-verse aficionados writing today, saying, “they are not poets, not to me they’re not. They’re writing free verse (I suppose you would still call it)—without any specific talent for poetry—to express themselves, to deliver narrative, to state opinions. But they are not doing the thing that poetry does, as far as I’m concerned. Formally, that is.”⁵⁸⁰ But form does not only present another “tool in the poet’s toolkit,” so to speak. The formal limitations imposed upon the poet can often lead to revelation.⁵⁸¹ Unlike in a prose piece, the writer cannot set out with a firm idea of where he is going. And along his meandering and side-stepping attempts to meet certain formal requirements, the materiality of words, their sounds and their stresses, is thrown back into the mix. A poet must navigate around the limits placed on him by form, and the uncharted territory oftentimes provokes surprising word choices and arrangements. “I do not see the word at all, I invent it.”⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 311.

⁵⁷⁹ “I’m interested in organization. I’m interested in at least the appearance of control, orchestration, forceful activity; something intense happening, something being intended and achieved—purposefulness instead of randomness.” Grennan, “Interviews: Derek Mahon.”

⁵⁸⁰ Grennan, “Interviews: Derek Mahon.”

⁵⁸¹ Ciaran Carson, Personal interview, 31 July 2013.

⁵⁸² Kafka, quoted in Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* 28.

To move then from the form of the lyric poem to its substance, or substances, I should say. For the poetic breaks with the “tyranny” of other modalities of expression that are composed of a single substance. Verse, with its formal impulse towards repetition, works over both language *qua* layers of sound and language *qua* image. The first retains its kinship with music; the second draws its alliance with conceptual thought. As Heidegger puts it, “Singing and thinking are the stems/neighbor to poetry.”⁵⁸³ Yet the poem has traditionally been associated first and foremost with the visual image. Literature teachers profess that it is primarily a metaphor-driven genre, concerned with bodies and colors and the unfolding of landscape. But here I want to subvert that conceptualization—by rethinking the visual image outside of the mimetic impulse. To take the latter: instead of the metaphor, I want to substitute what Lyotard names the “figure.” For Lyotard, the figure arises prior to signification. To quote at length from Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of him:

Lyotard shows us that what is *at work* in dreams is not the signifier but a figural dimension underneath, which gives rise to configurations of images that make use of words, making them flow and cutting them according to flows and points that are not linguistic and do not depend on the signifier or its regulated elements. Thus Lyotard everywhere reverses the order of the signifier and the figure. It is not the figures that depend on the signifier and its effects, but the signifying chain that depends on the figural effects—this chain itself being composed of asignifying signs—crushing the signifiers as well as the signifieds, treating words as things, fabricating new unities, creating nonfigurative figures configurations of images that form and then disintegrate.⁵⁸⁴

Lyotard’s figure is akin instead to the pure image, in the Heideggerian sense. “The nature of the image is to let something be seen. By contrast, copies and imitations are already mere variations on the genuine image which, as a sight or spectacle, lets the invisible be seen and so imagines the invisible in something alien to it.” (Deleuze and Guattari also open the asignifying image up within the realm of music when they argue that true creation comes from rending sonorous instead of reproducing the sonorous.)⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸³ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 13.

⁵⁸⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 165.

⁵⁸⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 346.

Poet Ciaran Carson too took issue with the mimetic image, and in his early work, he “wanted to put forward a series of images which I then could pull apart and show how false they became when compared with any real situation.”⁵⁸⁶ And so rather than imitate the city he knows so well in his poem, “Belfast Confetti,” Carson renders visible a nightmarish map where “the explosion/itself—an asterick on the map. This hyphenated line, a burst of rapid fire...”⁵⁸⁷ The identity statements clearly play us false; Carson sets up the mimetic impulse only to see it fall. He would later explain: “For years, I had nightmares of Belfast.”⁵⁸⁸

Many poets intuit the creative impulses of the asignifying image; the metaphor and the simile should not be conceived of or treated as the ligature that is drawn between two firm representations. Instead, as Ellen Bryant Voigt once said in a workshop, what drives a metaphor forward is the difference, not the semblance of identity, between two images. Deleuze and Guattari want to take this fixation on an inherently unstable idea of mimetic language even further; they want writers to compose, as the dreamweaver, constellations of figures to which signification can cohere through the conjunctive synthesis of “and.” Carson expressed an affinity for the constellation as an organizing principle for his imagery as it “safeguards particularity while fissuring identity.”⁵⁸⁹ Stop torturing the poem with a hose to uncover its meaning, Billy Collins urges his students. Treat the poem as a room, feel around its edges in the dark, let the signification take shape from the figures it arranges and puts into conversation.

And so this brings us to the other substance that participates in the lyric encounter—that of the materiality of sound itself. Saussurian concepts of language tends to ignore the substance of the words themselves as corporealities that rush past the teeth and curl around the tongue. But the poet has never lost track of the efficacy and power of sound. “[M]ost people who work with this material are very

⁵⁸⁶ Ormsby, “Interview with Ciaran Carson,” 1991.

⁵⁸⁷ Carson, “Belfast Confetti,” lines 2-3.

⁵⁸⁸ Ormsby, “Interview with Ciaran Carson.”

⁵⁸⁹ Ormsby, “Interview with Ciaran Carson.”

aware that this is a productive process," Williams noted in a 1977 interview.⁵⁹⁰ A (true) poem cannot abstract away from the materiality of the words themselves—words as particles of substance rather than as linguistic signs. Deleuze and Guattari do not address the poetic as a genre (and probably would refuse the literary categorization as falsely transhistorical and ineffectual), but they do open spaces in *Anti-Oedipus* for a nonsignifying and material working of language. "In language and writing itself, sometimes the letters as breaks, as shattered partial objects—and sometimes the words as undivided flows, as nondecomposable blocks, or full bodies having tonic value—constitute asignifying signs that deliver themselves over to the order of desire: rushes of breath and cries."⁵⁹¹ The poet "fords/his life by soundings./Soundings."⁵⁹²

How then does this rethinking of the lyric poem as a mode of expression help us approach its political potentiality? Much as Raymond Williams holds, I would argue that the historically-sedimented categorizations of the literary genre tend to efface and elide social systems of power, given that they were drawn by much the same repressive processes. But more tellingly, locating the lyric poem within the Northern Irish collective assemblage of enunciation, the poetic is positioned to actively intervene in a political dimension. As Heaney recalled, there was something at stake for poets writing in Belfast during the Troubles. Their work, with varying degrees of success, attempted to revise the active structures of feeling or enunciate new ones. Williams described how social crises tended to subvert and revise the structure of feeling when he looked at the changes wrought in the Protestant tradition through the decades: "Every key crisis in society as a whole provoked great conflict in the system, which responded with reinterpretation, redistribution of emphasis, in many cases even positive denial. These responses then tended to form new configurations of residual, dominant and emergent religious feeling. The result is typically a simultaneity of multiple different relations between the presumed belief-system

⁵⁹⁰ Raymond Williams and Daniel Williams, "Marxism, Poetry, Wales: Interview with Poetry Wales" 84.

⁵⁹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 264.

⁵⁹² Seamus Heaney, "Gifts of Rain," *Poetry* 119.5 (Feb 1972) lines 10-12.

and the actually operative social system.” In much a similar fashion, I would argue, these new literary generations of Ulster writers wrestled with the crises and political turmoil of their context by attempting to intervene in and reshape the structure of feeling, to varying degrees of success.

If we take the structure of feeling as the corresponding content to the lyric’s expression, then we need to explore the territorial claims that a poem, or conjunction of poems, is advancing through their refrain. “Expressive qualities or matters of expression enter shifting relations with one another that ‘express’ the relation of the territory they draw to the interior milieu of impulses and exterior milieu of circumstances.”⁵⁹³ The mode of expression becomes an agent of liminality and transference; it determines an interior and an exterior, and by delineating the boundary also regulates the nature of the relation between the two spaces. The poem too is aimed at staking out a particular structure of feeling—of determining where it draws its bounds and how it deals with both internal impulses and exterior circumstances, as Deleuze and Guattari characterize it. But these poetic interventions often time are not composing a territory from pure chaos, but instead confront already-articulated structures of feeling. And so the poem’s expression could act on the structure of feeling through a number of methods—from the creative line of flight that escapes territory altogether to the resituating of a territory’s margins to changing the interrelation of its interior to its exterior to the composition of a new map or structure of feeling altogether.⁵⁹⁴ As a poet who hoped to move beyond denotation almost entirely into a play of pure sound, Mallarme attempted to “pass through the wall of signification.” For the majority of the Belfast poets, their verse remains more invested in rearticulating and revising the

⁵⁹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 317.

⁵⁹⁴ We can see a similar array of interventions available in the biological assemblage when considering the genetic code and its possible rearticulation: “...biologists have stressed the importance of these determined margins, which are not to be confused with mutations, in other words, changes internal to the code: here, it is a question of duplicated genes or extra chromosomes that are not inside the genetic code, are free of function, and offer a free matter for variation” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 322.

predominant structure of feeling. Their approach is more grounded. And more constitutive in its ambitions:

Men said that he was chanting
verses about honour
and that four lights burned

in corners of the chamber:
which opened then, as he turned
with a joyful face
to look at the moon.⁵⁹⁵

.....

From a literary standpoint, successful poems are not hard to find if one knows where to look. But from the vantage point of a moment of creative enunciation, many more poems fail than succeed. All of this theoretical unpacking finally reveals its purpose—to help understand and qualify which poems are successfully engaged in active and productive creation. Here, I will only attempt a cursory case study of just how one goes about reading a lyric poem through its conjuncture.

Any definition or attempt to circumscribe the Irish structure of feeling during the Troubles will necessarily be reductive, owing both to a dearth of space and a lack of immersion on my behalf. But suffice to say, Belfast and the rest of Ulster had descended into what must have felt like a failure of social intelligibility. As a Catholic writing in Ulster – a region historically divided between its pastoral “Irishness” and its industrial “Britishness” — Heaney is very aware of the contradictory and oppositional forces that embattle the political sphere. He writes of the Northern Irish immersed in the trauma of the Troubles:

It is not just the [Northern Irish] writers and politicians who must make the effort I’m talking about: the whole population is adept in the mystery of living in two places at one time. Like all human beings, of course, they would prefer to live in one, but in the meantime they make do with a constructed destination, an interim place whose foundations straddle the areas of self-division, a place of resolved contradiction, beyond confusion.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁵ Seamus Heaney, “Funeral Rites,” *A Rage for Order* (1992) lines 74-80.

⁵⁹⁶ Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* 190.

He wants to change the dominant structure of feeling from one of seemingly impenetrable conflict to an affective space in which the contradictions can live side by side as irreducible others.⁵⁹⁷ His piece, “Casting and Gathering,” is catalyzed by the violence of the Irish contradiction and is at work on the construction of a new structure of feeling through the lyric mode of expression—that is, through a composition of formal repetitions, dream-figures and sounds:

“Casting and Gathering”
for Ted Hughes

Years and years ago, these sounds took sides:

On the left bank, a green silk tapered cast
Went whispering through the air, saying hush
And lush, entirely free, no matter whether
It swished above the hayfield or the river.

On the right bank, like a speeded-up corncrake,
A sharp ratcheting went on and on
Cutting across the stillness as another
Fisherman gathered line-lengths off his reel.

I am still standing there, awake and dreamy,
I have grown older and can see them both
Moving their arms and rods, working away,
Each one absorbed, proofed by the sounds he’s making.

One sound is saying, ‘You’re not worth tuppence,
But neither is anybody. Watch it! Be severe.’
The other says, ‘Go with it! Give and swerve.
You are everything you feel beside the river.’

I love hushed air. I trust contrariness.
Years and years go past and I do not move
For I see that when one man casts, the other gathers
And then vice versa, without changing sides.⁵⁹⁸

The poem wants another way, some lived mode between the “went whispering” and the “sharp ratcheting,” but it cannot do so through the limited means of signification alone. There is no third space

⁵⁹⁷ Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*.

⁵⁹⁸ Seamus Heaney, “Casting and Gathering,” *Seeing Things* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1993).

that can be traced. Instead, the poem necessarily must function as a map. “The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged ‘competence.’”⁵⁹⁹ The poem produces this new structure of feeling through the sound itself, not through prosaic signification. “Years and years ago these sounds took sides.” Heaney situates the reader between the two banks that have, in the current social assemblage he inhabits, set themselves in opposition to each other. He enacts the incommensurabilities of those two sides through their consonants—casting out hush and lush, gathering like a speeded-up corncrake. The poem is primarily a material experience of the soft intensity of the ‘sh’ and the ‘ss’ and the cacophonous ratchet of “cr” and “ks” colliding. And the forceful repetition of these sounds becomes expressive, enacts two opposite territorial claims.

Yet “I am still standing there, awake and dreamy, I have grown older and can see them both.” This is the turning moment in the poem. First off, we have the interjection of the speaker, not as a subject, but as a vantage point. But equally importantly, the speaker is relying on his sight. The poem thus far has been saturated by sound, even as it constructs two figures of fishermen. It is this tension between sight and speech, visibilities and statements, the poem will continue to explore in the last two stanzas. As Deleuze puts it: “Moreover it is the statements and visibilities which grapple like fighters, force one another to do something or capture one another, and on every occasion constitute ‘truth.’ Speaking and seeing at the same time, although it is not the same thing, although we do not speak of what we see, or see that of which we speak.”⁶⁰⁰ Here, the speaker inhabits a third vantage point alongside the two—which in a signifying sense would necessarily be constituted as the middle of the river where bodies would drown. It is akin to the dream. And it is created by the vowel, by the opening of sound out over the banks of its consonants. “Awake and dreamy” and “moving their arms and rods” and “both proofed by the sounds”: Heaney is making a material argument that passes beyond the

⁵⁹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 12.

⁶⁰⁰ Deleuze, *Foucault* 67.

hegemony of the signifier.⁶⁰¹ He is setting up figures not as a product of signifying-signs, but as acoustic images that exist as constellations on which signification comes to depend.

On a first pass, it would seem that the poem should end after its third stanza. Have we not opened up a new space in the splay of the vowel? Should we not stand where we too can see them both at work on opposite sides of the river? But no, Heaney refuses to fall into the trap of abstracting away from the real nature of the difference through the sterility of an identity. The poem is not content to remain “proofed by the sounds” it is making, absorbed by the visual identity that can be established between the two fishers. “The equal or identical always moves toward the absence of difference, so that everything may be reduced to a common denominator. The same, by contrast, is the belonging together of what differs, through a gathering by way of the difference,” Heidegger reminds us.⁶⁰² Reducing the real and traumatically articulated contradictions of the Troubles would eviscerate and make empty the difference.

The poem must necessarily move into its fourth stanza, where the acoustic images fall into the use of signifying language. They acquire voices that move denotatively rather than materially. Interestingly, as soon as the shift to signification is effected, the materiality of sound drops out of the poem entirely. It becomes neutral. The focus instead shifts to the contradictory messages of the voices.⁶⁰³ And yet, while the difference is articulated as real, the syntax and the visual resemblances of “severe” and “swerve” gather the two sides together. And that bridge makes way for the fifth stanza in which the speaker recognizes them both as purely and positively different but able to exist side by side, even within the same line. “I love hushed air. I trust contrariness.” Sound is back into the poem, but instead of being used to construct contradictory acoustic figures, it is that which brings the two sides

⁶⁰¹ (In fact, the fourth stanza decries the signification aspect of language. It is only when the sounds themselves attempt to become denotative, the two banks attempt to speak, that the oppositionality reasserts itself.)

⁶⁰² Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 216.

⁶⁰³ “Only statements are determining and revelatory, even though they reveal something other than what they say.” Deleuze, *Foucault* 67.

together into the third space. The sounds of “I love hushed air” and “I trust contrariness” are the Same, but not identical. Years and years go past, but the speaker does not move because he sees that the two are brought together by their difference but are not hollowed out by it. “For I see that when one man casts, the other gathers/And then vice versa, without changing sides.”

Deleuze and Guattari might experience this poem as I do. They might feel the words as “agitated layers of air, sounds”⁶⁰⁴ that “break through this wall so as to set flows in motion, and establish breaks that overflow or rupture the sign’s conditions of identity.”⁶⁰⁵ They might recognize how the poem is engaged in the process of constructing a third space through its nonsignifying figures. In the remaining chapters, I will not return explicitly to the theoretical explorations of Heidegger’s world-making and Deleuze and Guattari’s planes of expression/content. I do not wish to merely chart how the poems play against their theories of language. Rather than prescriptively apply Heidegger’s worlding or Deleuze’s order-word, I want to set forth the poems as the primary texts, to let them react back against the theory, if they would. And so I let their conceptual framings and insights guide my readings of Heaney, Mahon and Carson’s work. That is, I draw on Heidegger’s notion of the work of art as that which makes World and sets forth the earth in order to substantiate the readings of these poems as political, rather than merely aesthete, forays. (His notion of the abode will also rise to the fore as I consider the Catholic and Unionist structures of feeling and their territorial logics.) From Deleuze and Guattari, I borrow quite a number of elements: their theorization of expression as a matter with both form and substance; the collective assemblage of enunciation and the order-words and incorporeal transformations that are made possible within it; their turn to the constellation of figurative images as opposed to the stunted metaphor; and their concept of the refrain as a territorializing device. These concepts direct and provide surface contact for many of my readings but not all. I follow where the poem bids.

⁶⁰⁴ Marx and Engels. *The German Ideology* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998) 19.

⁶⁰⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 243.

Thus, we can now move to reading the Belfast poets as they attempt to express, through their poems, a different perceptual and affective arrangement. For the collective assemblage too is “awake and dreamy;” it too “does not move.” It too wants to retool the Irish structure of feeling in such a way as to create the possibility of coexistence in difference rather than the violent destruction of the Troubles. As Heaney puts it, these attempts must – if they are to be authentic and efficacious – stem from “an elsewhere beyond the frontier of writing where ‘the imagination presses back against the pressure of reality.’”⁶⁰⁶ This elsewhere where language is in the process of saying something new through those afternoons and evenings, where a word is no longer an elegy to what it signifies. Saying, blackberry, blackberry, blackberry.

⁶⁰⁶ Heaney. *The Redress of Poetry*. 196.

Chapter 6: 'To be at home in my own place within the proper name:'
Seamus Heaney Attempts to Locate the Individual within a Catholic Structure of Feeling

Coming to terms with contemporary Northern Irish poetry leads a critic either directly to Seamus Heaney or through the eddies he left in his wake. Literary critics and writers alike have lauded him as the best Irish poet since W.B. Yeats. Robert Lowell began the wave of approbation early, when he made the comparison after reading Heaney's 1975 collection *North*.⁶⁰⁷ Even after his first volume, *Death of a Naturalist*, was published in 1966, a critic for *London Magazine* had grouped the young Derry writer with the best of contemporary poets, including British writer Ted Hughes. American critics through the 1970s would refer to him as the "most important Irish poet" now writing.⁶⁰⁸ A 1980s review of his work in *Harper's* set Heaney up as a critical foil for everything that was currently wrong with the solipsistic, self-important flotsam of American poetry. "What we need is what [Heaney] gives--a poetry that allows the spirit to face and engage, and thereby transcend, or at least stand up to, the murderous pressures of our time," Terence Des Pres writes. "This need is not a question of praxis or ideology, but of imagination regaining authority and of spirit bearing witness to its own misfortune and struggle."⁶⁰⁹

And so Heaney's success as a poet in the larger literary worlds of London and New York, while certainly attributable to his copious talent and deft wordsmithing, also drew from his political resonances in an increasingly-embattled territory. For a statelet that had previously registered little currency on the international literary stage, Northern Ireland had become a series of news headlines—first as a violently-repressed civil rights movement and later as a repetitive spree of sectarian bombings and assassinations against the back-drop of fierce British surveillance. From a benighted and ignored city, Belfast found itself home to a revolving door of journalists, who discursively constructed and

⁶⁰⁷ "Obituary: Heaney 'the most important Irish poet since Yeats,' *The Irish Times*, 30 Aug 2013, accessed online 14 Oct 2013, <<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/obituary-heaney-the-most-important-irish-poet-since-yeats-1.1510684>>.

⁶⁰⁸ Darcy O'Brien, "In Ireland After *A Portrait*," 1 Mar 1977, accessed in Seamus Heaney papers, MARBL, Emory University.

⁶⁰⁹ Des Pres, "Emblems of Adversity" 74.

disseminated Ulster in stark black and white, caught in the monotony of an endless cycle of violence. Against such a reductive view, the bevy of writers that had gained traction in publishing houses through the 1960s now felt called upon to make their answer. Some certainly responded directly: as one reviewer commented, playwright Brian Friel and poet Thomas Kinsella attempted to write about the Troubles without the mediation, without form, without delay, just with the emotional affect of the moment.⁶¹⁰ And others have found the horrific nature of the conflict almost too “immediate,” as Hewitt would put in upon his return to the province from England in 1971. “At the beginning I was taken aback by the scale and ferocity of the violence,” Michael Longley has written. “I continue to be dumb-founded by the awfulness of our situation...I have written a few inadequate elegies out of my bewilderment and despair. I offer them as wreaths. That is all.”⁶¹¹ The other Protestant poet from the “tight-assed trio,” Derek Mahon would later talk of his inability to write directly of the violence as “perhaps...a form of ‘colonial aphasia.’”⁶¹²

Heaney, out of his generation, seemed the most willing to engage in and write of the political rift and the incumbent violence yet without—as Yeats had warned—letting the will run amuck over the powers of the imagination. The comparisons to Yeats came thick and fast from reviewers during the 1970s, and they have abated little in the critical work done on Heaney’s opus since.⁶¹³ Denis Donoghue, in a 1980 lecture at Princeton University, located Heaney’s relationship to the Northern violence in Yeats’ wake:

Conflict as such was dear to Yeats because it was the readiest form of his energy: he was more in need of conflict than of the peace that brings it to an end. He feared peace

⁶¹⁰ Donoghue, “Now and In Ireland: The Literature of the Troubles,” lecture.

⁶¹¹ Quoted in Fran Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry: W.B. Yeats to Michael Longley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 153.

⁶¹² Grennan, “Interviews: Derek Mahon.”

⁶¹³ The Cambridge Companion to Heaney’s verse does not draw aesthetic parallels between Heaney’s verse and that of his great predecessor—as Edna Longley does in her lineage between the formalism of the late Yeats and that of Louis MacNeice—but instead situates the Derry poet within the same problematic. Yeats worried about the poets’ responsibilities to both the aesthetic and the political and the tension that often resulted between the two spheres; likewise, Heaney negotiated, throughout his career, between the personal voice and the public voice of the poet. Randall, “Interview with Seamus Heaney.”

because he feared inertia. Heaney is the most telling poet in this respect, and the success of *North* makes his case exemplary; it is clear that thousands of readers have found their feelings defined in that volume more than in any other.⁶¹⁴

Yeats' poetic engagements with the Easter Rising in 1916 and the Irish Civil War remain exemplars and source poems for those Northern Irish writers—even as they try to escape the aesthetic shadow he has cast over the whole of the Irish literary field in the decades since. In Ormsby's anthology, *A Rage for Order*, he opens with two excerpts from Yeats' most well-known war poems—"The second coming" and "Meditations in time of civil war." *O honey-bees, come build in the empty house of the stare*. Particularly following the publication of *North* in 1975—in which Heaney explored Northern Ireland's ritualistic killings through the time-defying preservation of the bog and the figures presented by medieval Norse honor societies—critics began to strongly identify Heaney with Yeats, an association that could figure either positively or negatively. In *Eire-Ireland*, one reviewer noted that poets often struggle to make a convincing case for their local contexts among an international readership, with the notable exceptions of first Yeats, and now Heaney. "Both Yeats and Heaney find in the rhetoric of poetry, in words consciously and carefully chosen, the means to elaborate those images of Ireland that sustain their work and maintain their national and cultural identities," Conor Kelly wrote in Ireland's popular political magazine, *Magill*, in 1983.⁶¹⁵ But the comparisons to Yeats also opened Heaney to attack along similar lines that were leveraged against his predecessor. The mythical rendering of violence, which operates in both Yeats and Heaney, can easily pass into a romantic aestheticizing of real oppression. *A terrible beauty is born*.⁶¹⁶ As Ciaran Carson argued in his critique of Heaney's so-called "bog poems," the mythical vision impressed the killings into a clean-cut frame that distorts and distracts from their harrowing immediacy. "No one really escapes from the massacre, of course," noted Carson in his

⁶¹⁴ Donoghue, "Now and In Ireland: The Literature of the Troubles," lecture.

⁶¹⁵ Kelly, "Seamus Heaney Naming His Nation."

⁶¹⁶ W.B. Yeats, "Easter, 1916."

controversial review of *North*. "The only way you can do that is by applying wrong notions of history, instead of seeing what's before your eyes."⁶¹⁷

But Heaney's seeming affiliation with or affinity to Yeats—in its many formulations and contestations—points to both his force within the Irish literary landscape and his differentiation from many of his contemporaries, who have not drawn the same intensive comparisons. Since the Belfast group leapt onto the literary stage as a collective, if not coherent, assemblage of enunciation, Heaney has been charted in contradistinction to his Protestant contemporaries and friends, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley. Later, he would also serve as a counterpoint to the next generation of Catholic writers that would incubate within the Belfast group and rise to the fore during the 1970s, including Paul Muldoon and then Carson. Those differentiations have been mapped in a number of ways by various critics, from the purely aesthetic pole to the conventionally political. As Heather Clark notes in her book on the Belfast group and its self-conscious emergence as a literary collective through the mid-1960s, that differentiation between Heaney and his compatriots was heightened intentionally—at the outset, largely by Heaney himself and then later by younger writers.⁶¹⁸ Heaney, who had just graduated from Queens University in Belfast in 1961 and begun to take his affinity for verse seriously, joined the Hobsbaum workshop in October 1963.⁶¹⁹ Edna Longley was already a regular member of the Monday night gathering, as an up-and-coming addition to the Queens' English department, and Heaney's wife, Marie, joined soon after he did. Michael Longley began attending the weekly sessions in 1964; through Hobsbaum's group, the Longleys and the Heaneys became friends—the first close friendship either couple would enjoy with someone across the religious divide.⁶²⁰ Through the Longleys, Heaney would also come into contact with Derek Mahon, who had gone to secondary school and then Trinity College

⁶¹⁷ Ciaran Carson, rev. of *North*, by Seamus Heaney, *The Honest Ulsterman*, 1975.

⁶¹⁸ Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance*.

⁶¹⁹ Led by Philip Hobsbaum, a professor and poet at Queens University, the workshop met weekly for nine years. Heaney, Longley, Muldoon, Ormsby, Stewart Parker, Simmons, and Carson all participated, among others.

⁶²⁰ Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance*.

with Michael and Edna. There, the two Protestant friends had honed their craft under the tutelage of Alec Reid and published often in the student literary magazine.⁶²¹ For still-uncertain Heaney, Mahon and Longley presented an intimidating front. "They had an elegance, they had a self-confidence, they had met Louis MacNeice and W.R. Rodgers, they read contemporary poetry, they had collected slim volumes. I didn't have any of that at all," he told *Kinahan* in an interview. "They were already poets, in a way, Mahon and Longley were less in need of collective support, and less charmed by Hobsbaum."⁶²² Against the learned worldliness of Mahon and Longley, Heaney turned his focus to his rural upbringing and worked to evoke the rhythms of country life through earthy, corporeal language, which he highlighted through his use of a short, dense metrical line. His first volume, *Death of a Naturalist*, is riddled with such poems, from the rural livelihoods embodied in "Thatcher" and "Follower" to the poetic mission statement of "Digging." The verse met with unexpected critical acclaim from across the pond: both *The New Statesman* and the *Times Literary Supplement* ran rave reviews of Heaney's debut effort. They complimented, among other elements of his work, his attention to the rural landscape and his precise, visceral language that hit the reader like each harrow of a spade into damp earth.⁶²³ From there, his success only seemed to build, both in Ireland and abroad. In 1968, Heaney won the Somerset Maugham award, given to the British writer(s) under 35 for the best book published in the United Kingdom within last year, for *Death of a Naturalist*. Faber published his next volume, *Door into the Dark*, three years later to similar approbation. "As in Seamus Heaney's much praised first book, *Death of a Naturalist*, the setting is usually rural Ireland and the exercise one of acute natural perception," wrote

⁶²¹ Grennan, "Interviews: Derek Mahon."

⁶²² Quoted in Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance*.

⁶²³ Clive James, "Fear in a tinful of bait," rev. of *Door into the Dark*, by Seamus Heaney, *Times Literary Supplement*, 1969, accessed online, 27 Oct 2013, <http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/multimedia/archive/00366/Clive_James_on_Seam_366565a.PNG>.

Anthony Thwaite in his *New Statesman* review. "It's impossible to fault the clean language, sensuous delight, concise and modest statements."⁶²⁴

After Heaney's sudden rise to the fore, Mahon and Longley were saddled with the task of distinguishing their own work. "When I am asked to write or talk about myself I quite naturally mention Mahon and Heaney, not because they are colleagues and close friends, but because, as Ulstermen, we share a complex and confusing culture: they help me to define myself," Longley said in a 1969 interview.⁶²⁵ Although, as Clark notes, neither admitted to changing their aesthetic or any of their verse as a result of the Belfast workshop group, the three did send each other poems; Longley and Mahon continued to edit each other's work and provide poetic advice through their regular stream of trans-Atlantic correspondence. (Mahon was teaching in the United States at the time.) But as Longley also allowed later on, perhaps they did not acknowledge during the 1960s just how intensely the three competed among themselves for poetic acclaim.⁶²⁶ The younger Catholic poets, most notably Ciaran Carson, would wrestle with Heaney's gravitational pull as well. Carson's first pamphlet, *The Insular Celts*, and his later engagements with the Troubles have often been read as direct counterpoints to Heaney's verse.⁶²⁷ But the brightness of Heaney's star both overshadowed the other writers and made Northern Ireland into a literary context of note, thereby increasing publishers' and critics' interest in a city that had long been devoid of any rooted poetic community.

Certainly Heaney does bring to bear formal differences from his contemporaries. Who could mistake Heaney's lovely sounds, the robust and low-swinging rhythms of his lines, and the precise, concrete hewing of his language? "The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap/ Of soggy peat,

⁶²⁴ Anthony Thwaite, "Country Matters," rev. of *Door into the Dark*, by Seamus Heaney, *The New Statesman*, June 1969, accessed online, 27 Oct 2013, <<http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2013/08/27-june-1969-its-impossible-fault-seamus-heaneys-clean-language-and-sensuous-delight>>.

⁶²⁵ Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance*.

⁶²⁶ "We competed with each other more ferociously than perhaps we now remember." Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance*.

⁶²⁷ Alexander, *Ciaran Carson: Space, Place, Writing*.

the curt cuts of an edge/Through living roots awaken in my head."⁶²⁸ Hobsbaum dubbed it "Heaney-speak."⁶²⁹ And then there were the differences in content: his cleaving to the rural landscape rather than the streetscape trekked so adroitly by Mahon and Carson; his focus on the bucolic quotidian (although certainly no less dark for its pastoral subjects) as opposed to the industrial or bourgeois scenes depicted by MacNeice. In his review of Heaney, Thwaite finds in these subjects and themes a note of the "exotic"—at least within the context of the British reading public. "It may be that in our now densely urban Britain we tend to romanticise and overvalue the almost lost world of thatchers and farriers and rat-catchers and wild predators," he notes. "A foreigner reading some recent English verse might imagine that we spend most of our time behind the plough or tickling trout, and that the town is still alien to us."⁶³⁰ Thwaite means it rather innocuously here, but other critics have logged Heaney's portrayals of a conventionally-conceived rural Irishness as one of the reasons for his popularity in London.⁶³¹ Although Longley also writes of the Irish countryside, and with great dexterity, his landscapes tend to be personal, invoked by an individual perceiver, positioned where "rain and sunlight and the boat between them/shifted whole hillsides through the afternoon."⁶³²

Heaney approaches the rural scenes of Derry and his childhood not merely as personal reminiscences but as the lodestone for a sense of a Catholic community, one that he often positions as divorced from or opposed to the eloquence of Mahon and Longley with their slim volumes. Several critics have faulted Heaney for his easy collusion of place and communal identity through the vehicle of language as ahistorical, totalizing, and appropriative in its own right; a number of parallels link his work

⁶²⁸ Seamus Heaney, "Digging," *Death of a Naturalist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966) lines 25-27.

⁶²⁹ Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance*.

⁶³⁰ Thwaite, "Country Matters," *The New Statesman*.

⁶³¹ One of Heaney's major influences, Patrick Kavanagh, also drew heavily from the activities and scenes of rural Irish life in his verse. And like Heaney, Kavanagh would be catapulted into the literary ranks after British readers discovered his work, albeit a generation earlier in the 1950s. Ingersoll and Rubin, "The Invention of the 'I': A Conversation with Paul Muldoon."

⁶³² Michael Longley, "Leaving Inishmore," *No Continuing City* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

to Irish nationalism. Critic Neal Alexander connects Heaney's search for place-based identity to Heidegger and his mutual presupposition of being and dwelling. He notes, "Heaney's affirmation of the importance of a direct, perhaps primal, connection with 'the land itself' not only compounds being and dwelling in a conception of place as stable, fixed, and intimately familiar, but also accords special significance to *rural* places and the countryside generally."⁶³³ An essay Heaney published in his 1972 prose collection, *Preoccupations*, self-consciously takes measure of this project to stake a claim to place:

I would begin with the Greek word, *omphalos*, meaning the navel, and hence the stone that marked the centre of the world, and repeat it, *omphalos, omphalos, omphalos*, until its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside our back door. It is Co. Derry in the early 1940s. The American bombers groan towards the aerodome at Toomebridge, the American troops manoeuvre in the fields along the road, but all of that great historical action does not disturb the rhythms of the yard. There the pump stands, a slender, iron idol, snouted, helmeted, dressed down with a sweeping handle, painted a dark green and set on a concrete plinth, marking the centre of another world. Five households drew water from it.⁶³⁴

Heaney's turn to the concept of the *omphalos* is critical to his understanding of community; on a basic level, it spatializes the notion of identity, making the community a place where "a pump stands...set on a concrete plinth...marking the centre." The pump is also a functional center; "five households drew water from it." But Heaney connects the sound of the pump (*omphalos, omphalos, omphalos*) to the act of world-making. His world is enacted aurally even as it extends spatially, making the case for both a place and the households that belong to it. It is a world whose activities and imaginary remain unencumbered by American troop movements or any of "that great historical action." Heaney clearly sets up his community on a ground apart from that of Unionist Ulster and its commitments to the 1940s war effort. And apart from the ground inhabited by MacNeice. He acknowledges as much: "I still remained at a reader's distance. MacNeice did not throw the switch that sends writing energy sizzling into a hitherto unwriting system...I envied [his poems] but I was not taken

⁶³³ Alexander, *Ciaran Carson: Space, Place, Writing* 13.

⁶³⁴ Heaney, *Preoccupations* 17.

over by them the way I was taken over by [Patrick] Kavanagh.” At the time, Heaney admired MacNeice’s attention to form; later he would revisit MacNeice’s “bi-focal vision” of Northern Ireland and how such a perceptual grid is impregnated with political possibility.⁶³⁵ Yet for the young Heaney, MacNeice’s English education, his urban and industrial landscapes, and his European concerns did not resonate with Heaney’s childhood world with its “slender, iron idol” at its center.

He might have said that he did not identify with MacNeice’s structure of feeling. And so while I do not want to translate Heaney’s rendering of the *omphalos* and community identity exactly, I do want to bring to bear certain elements of it in my consideration of the Northern Irish structures of feeling that are mobilized, contested, and revised by the Belfast group in the wake of the Troubles, namely, the territorial dimension. Heaney’s communal identity inheres in a spatial imaginary, albeit one that is enunciated temporally through the expressive rhythms of quotidian life, through the guttural working of the pump handle. The co-implication of place and identity has long been an Irish problematic: “Irish in particular use imaginations of space to naturalize and reinforce political ideologies.”⁶³⁶ In Northern Ireland, those political claims to territory have been “felt with most violence and insistence, as is materially evident in modern Belfast’s sectarian geography of ‘peace lines’ and checkpoints, walled estates and boundary zones.”⁶³⁷ And so I argue that, for the Belfast group taken as a collective assemblage of enunciation, the province’s structures of feeling are tied to the situational and affective relationship between the individual and the community (whether that be a religious, geographic, political, economic, or cultural community) and between the community and its greater milieu. But to be clear: the territorial concern is not always tied to Williams’ concept of the structure of feeling; the

⁶³⁵ Seamus Heaney writes: “Like Hewitt, he grew up in pre-partition Ireland, but, unlike Hewitt, he did not allow the border to enter into his subsequent imaginings: his sense of cultural diversity and historical consequence within the country never congealed into a red and green map. In MacNeice’s mind, the colours ran – or bled – into each other.” *The Redress of Poetry* 198-9.

⁶³⁶ Alexander, *Ciaran Carson: Space, Place, Writing*.

⁶³⁷ Alexander.

Northern Irish context itself makes such an understanding useful. The poems engaged in rearticulating the Ulster structure of feeling are operating along this territorial axis that problematizes the ready joining of place, identity, and community that Heaney alludes to.

“Everywhere being nowhere/who can prove/one place more than another?” Heaney asks in “The Birthplace.”⁶³⁸ The Belfast assemblage is out to prove particular articulations of place and our affective relations to those spaces. I will take a critical look at these attempted interventions by reading three writers from the Ulster coterie: Heaney; Mahon; and finally Carson. To begin with Heaney, I will first explore one of his early poems so as to more fully ground the stable and unquestioned ligature between place and identity that Heaney posits. Here, he most directly revisits and takes up the work of John Hewitt, albeit from a Catholic stance rather than a Protestant one. Then I will move onto the more problematic and nuanced revisions of this Catholic structure of feeling that he undertakes as the Troubles begin to bear down on the province. From there, I will shift to Mahon as he negotiates, close on the heels of MacNeice, the Protestant sensibility in the face of the Unionist paramilitaries (as well as the government’s collusion with them). And finally I close with Carson, another Catholic, but a writer who documents deteriorating Belfast better than almost anyone else writing. Each of them, I argue, is engaged in revising conventional but politically intractable notions of territory and those communities that belong to them.

First, the 1960s’ Heaney:

The Thatcher

Bespoke for weeks, he turned up some morning
Unexpectedly, his bicycle slung
With a light ladder and a bag of knives.
He eyed the old rigging, poked at the eaves,

Opened and handled sheaves of lashed wheat-straw.
Next, the bundled rods: hazel and willow

⁶³⁸ Heaney. “The Birthplace.” ____ Lines ____.

Were flicked for weight, twisted in case they'd snap.
It seemed he spent the morning warming up:

Then fixed the ladder, laid out well honed blades
And snipped at straw and sharpened ends of rods
That, bent in two, made a white-pronged staple
For pinning down his world, handful by handful.

Couchant for days on sods above the rafters
He shaved and flushed the butts, stitched it all together
Into a sloped honeycomb, a stubble patch,
And left them gaping at his Midas touch.⁶³⁹

In "The Thatcher," we are not listening to the young Heaney recount a favorite childhood memory; in fact, he holds himself apart from the scene even as his lines render it (a wrinkle that we will return to later). Through the four quatrains, Heaney enacts a community ritual, one that continues to amaze the country folk even as they use his visit to mark time passing. "Bespoke for weeks, he turned up some morning/Unexpectedly..." Heaney begins. He then employs his customary precise language to make vivid the thatcher's work, thereby embodying the man himself not through any bodily description but purely through the silhouette traced by his actions:

Then fixed the ladder, laid out well honed blades,
And snipped at straw and sharpened ends of rods
That, bent in two, made a white-pronged staple
For pinning down his world, handful by handful.

We pay attention to the craft here of making a home; Heaney is all too consciously drawing upon the greater resonances imbued in this imbrication of "making" and "dwelling." The thatcher is "pinning down his world, handful by handful." This poem, while at first glance an eclogue,⁶⁴⁰ details a radical process of world-making—at the same time a routine of upkeep that is expected and anticipated by the rural Catholic residents and a work of revelation that leaves them "gaping at his Midas touch."

⁶³⁹ Seamus Heaney, "The Thatcher," *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. Paul Muldoon (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).

⁶⁴⁰ An eclogue is a particular form of poem that draws from Virgil's pastorals. It tends to be short, at times dialogic, and centers itself in a rural landscape. MacNeice was quite fond of the form.

To lay out the ligature between building, dwelling, and world-making more extensively: The verse depicts a material act of construction, of “sheaves of lashed wheat-straw...stitched all together.” Even though we too witness the thatcher as he works and are conscious that he has been “couchant for days on sods above the rafters,” there remains a cognitive disconnect between his act of laboring and what it accomplishes, between process and product. The thatcher then disappears; he has “left them gaping at his Midas touch.” Heaney hits on the same disjunction that preoccupied Marx in his contemplation of commodity fetishism. The product, standing alone, presents itself almost as a mystical object when divorced from its labor;⁶⁴¹ so the “stubble patch” leaves the Catholic residents with a sense of the otherworldly or divine. The thatcher does not dwell beneath the roofs he repairs. And the inhabitants are not fixed upon the ladder of their house, repairing the eaves. The mediation of the market seems to have intervened in Heidegger’s traditional formulation: “building is not a merely a means and a way toward dwelling—to build is in itself already to dwell.”⁶⁴² Does the individual agent who builds (or, in this case, rebuilds) necessarily need to be the one who dwells? Is the agent, by thatching, already dwelling? Who dwells? Who thatches?

Here, we might be helped by Deleuze and Guattari and their theorization of the expressive. To translate once more: Heidegger’s ‘building’ can be seen as an expressive act, as that which renders itself spatio-temporally extensive. To build, a temporal process, delimits space; a building, a spatial structure, stands for a meaningful segment of time. For Deleuze and Guattari, a matter because expressive as opposed to merely functional when it acquires spatial-temporal constancy (scale is of little import here).⁶⁴³ Heidegger ties building to dwelling, to a sense of both presence and ownership—not in the

⁶⁴¹ Even the bucolic is not safe from the market! But on a more serious note, Raymond Williams accomplishes a great feat of literary history when he reads the pastoralisms of English writers back into their larger economic and social contexts in his seminal work, *The Country and the City*. But who, he asks, organizes and bounds the so-called “natural” for our aesthetic appreciation? And what repressive and coercive forces are at work in that preparing that presentation of the landscape?

⁶⁴² Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 147.

⁶⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 315.

market-driven sense, but in that of a belonging-together of those who dwell and the abode. Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari see the expressive as a function of territoriality:

The expressive is primary in relation to the possessive; expressive qualities, or matters of expression, are necessarily appropriative and constitute a having more profound than being. Not in the sense that these qualities belong to a subject, but in the sense that they delineate a territory that will belong to the subject that carries or produces them. These qualities are signatures, but the signature, the proper name, is not the constituted mark of a subject, but the constituting mark of a domain, an abode.⁶⁴⁴

Read in this manner, the connective tissue between building and dwelling does not inhere in the subject—he who builds is he who dwells—but in the territory. A building is a dwelling. As in Heaney's poem, the body of the thatcher is irrelevant and immaterial. We should have paid closer attention to the gaze that the poem cast on the scene: its middle two quatrains do not countenance him at all; instead, they are given over to the acts of building, of "pinning down his world, handful by handful."

We may have avoided the problematic of the subject, but who is it that "carries or produces" the expressive qualities and thus belongs to its territory? In the instance posed by Heaney, the territory is not that of a bird assemblage—as proffered by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*—but of a human one. The expressive elements are embodied in an architecture, a human intervention in the terrain. By constructing a place of an abode, the inhabitants of Heaney's community make a space into a place and can thereby situate themselves in both space and time. "In its world-forming capacity, architecture transforms geological time into human time, which is another way of saying it turns matter into meaning," Robert Pogue Harrison notes.⁶⁴⁵ It also turns geologic space into human space. Heaney makes a foray into this notion with his poem, "The Peninsula." He writes:

When you have nothing more to say, just drive
For a day all around the peninsula.
The sky is tall as over a runway,
The land without marks so you will not arrive

⁶⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 312.

⁶⁴⁵ Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* 3.

But pass through, though always skirting landfall.⁶⁴⁶

Out of the homogenous matter scattered about on the peninsula, no manmade marks have been made; there are no structures to arrive at, no thresholds to cross, except for the geological one registered by the boundary between land and sea. The house, while constituted by the detritus to be found on the land (“wheat-straw,” “hazel and willow”), exists on another space-time grid—a human one. It transforms the landscape from a mere spatial and a temporal clear zone into a *place* where belonging is possible, where we can indwell and time “requires/a deeper, better verb than *pass*;/ it’s more like pool, and ebb, and double/back again.”⁶⁴⁷

In Heaney’s poem, the thatcher’s laboring is tied explicitly to an architecture, to the crafting of a home. But here, a home is not merely a structure perceived in isolation. The thatcher “stitched all together/Into a sloped honeycomb.” The line echoes of Yeats and his arresting image of the honey bees in “Meditations in a time of civil war.” *O honey bees,/Come build in the empty house of the stare*. Yeats beckons to the Irish people to construct a new community in the house left vacant by the “stare”—the Irish term for starling. Through the simple refrain, he knots together a notion of construction, dwelling, and community.⁶⁴⁸ Heaney would certainly not be unaware of this poem, which has continued to hold so much resonance in Ireland, and consciously brings its weight to bear in “The Thatcher.” And so we have an intertwining between home-making and the constitution of an associated community, which is further confirmed by Heaney’s use of the plural pronoun (“them gaping”) in the poem’s final line. Rather than an isolated instance of home repair, the reader encounters a forceful argument for the connection between architecture and a collective identity. Yet what distinguishes Heaney from so many other Irish

⁶⁴⁶ Seamus Heaney, “The Peninsula,” *Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (1986) lines 1-5.

⁶⁴⁷ Mark Doty, “Essay: The Love of Old Houses,” *Source: Poems* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002) lines 48-56.

⁶⁴⁸ Some critics might insert the term ‘nationhood’ instead. In Yeats’ encapsulation, that reading would certainly hold, given his other writings. Yet I would like to situate Heaney first within a localized sense of community rather than an imagined one, à la Benedict Anderson. I do allow that he opens himself to attack from those critical of nationalist formations and identities.

writers (many of whom have passed like ephemera into the current of literary history) is that he contests Yeats. He says, Yes, but. To Yeats, who tied the building of an Irish nation to a grand project of myth-making and pseudo-historicism, Heaney advocates for a different constituting ground—the rhythms and rituals of rural work as lived by the Irish community. “The ploughed field” and the “whitewashed gable” as opposed to Yeats’ “ancient tower” and “symbolic rose.”⁶⁴⁹

And yet we must also follow the Heideggerian thread back to its theoretical source. “Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells.”⁶⁵⁰ As Deleuze and Guattari might put it, the matters of expression are not limited merely to paving stones and thatch. A bird delineates its territory by repeating its warble.⁶⁵¹ Again, the boundary is a performative delineation rather than that which inheres in a fixed structure; the territory is enunciated into being. We dwell in the house of language. And so poems too create places out of spaces through the enunciation. After all, a name draws boundaries as effectively as a ring of stones. The proper name constitutes the signature, the delineating mark of an abode. “What ish my nation?” asks Captain MacMorris. Heaney, like Yeats before him, engages in this project of naming his nation, declared one literary critic in 1983.⁶⁵² As Hewitt wrote: “I take my stand by the Ulster names/each clean hard name like a weathered stone.”⁶⁵³

In his 1969 *Door into the Dark*, Heaney writes poems to Ulster names as well—Anahorish, Toome, Broagh. The poet recognizes that these names carry also the weight of a sedimented past. Names serve as hallmarks or access points for memories as lived in the present, both by individuals and by communities, and they act as touchstones for future action. Communities propagate forward, generation by generation, through the gifting of their names. Saying blackberry, blackberry, blackberry.

⁶⁴⁹ Yeats, “Meditations in times of civil war.”

⁶⁵⁰ Heidegger, “On the way to language.”

⁶⁵¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 315.

⁶⁵² Kelly, “Seamus Heaney Names His Nation.”

⁶⁵³ Hewitt, “Ulster Names,” lines 1-2.

Although “Thatcher” does not promulgate a particular place-name, Heaney is advancing a territorial claim through the performativity of its language. The thatcher is “pinning down his world, handful by handful” as the poem is pinning down the world, breath by breath. “Bent in two, [the stresses] made a white-pronged staple.” And so while Heaney’s verse is not rigidly tied to a metrical patterning, the loose iambic pentameter regulates the breath into a subtle pace. The tight iambs of certain lines—“It seemed he spent the morning warming up”—set up the radical breaks to hit harder and linger longer. The spondees pull on their lines and at our attention: “lashed wheat-straw,” “well-honed blade,” “white-pronged staple,” “handful by handful.” Heaney is also loose with his end rhyme, but it is certainly there, ghosting through the verse and setting up similar consonantal buffers that the momentum of the line arrests upon. “Thatcher” opens with the consonant-driven pairing of “morning/slung;” it closes with that of “patch/touch.” Here, he can get away with rhyming couplets because the pattern is not too exacting to become the forced automaton of an industrial assembly line. Instead, the loose rhyme serves to enforce the formal break of the lines, to compose a series of regimented units that repeat, and through their repeating, change and drive the poem forward. Through the positioning of his end words, Heaney draws attention to their aural similitude—and opens the door to a more nuanced understanding of their relationship. “Knives/eaves,” or better yet, “blades/rods”—the instrument that severs and sharpens is likened to the hazel and willow rods that will be folded and stapled to hold the roof, and through the roof, the world, all together. “Stubble patch/Midas touch” brings the earth of the fields into the divine.

But these are simply the more “regular” of the poem’s formal elements. Heaney is an aural poet, and his language works with particular aural registers. His vowel patterns hold together groupings of phrases, draw continuities, play across the surfaces of his diction like light off wind-bestirred water. In the first quatrain, his ear fixes on the long “i”: his bicycle and light ladder and bag of knives; he eyed the

old rigging. Then it is on to the long “e,” driven home with the quick one-two of “eaves” and “sheaves” but followed by “wheat.” And then the long “a” plays off the short “i” over the next three lines:

hazel and willow
Were flicked for weight, twisted in case they’d snap.
It seemed he spent the morning warming up:

And further the direct repetition of the mouth-shape and cadence of “hazel and willow”—two troches linked by “and”—is then echoed six lines later with the crucial phrase “handful by handful.” All around, the vowels and consonants are resounding off each other, sending tremors through the verse, making it ripple. “Form is how poetry expresses time.”⁶⁵⁴ And so as the verse occupies space—it splays across its lines and its imagery clearly visual first and foremost—it also operates temporally through its aural patterning. In “Thatcher,” the sedimentation of sounds moves from matter into meaning.

Heaney is advancing an argument (but isn’t it so much more than that—ah, the joy of poetry) about the constitution of a Catholic community through the labors undertaken to live in the rural landscape. It is not, as Kavanagh satirizes, the poetry of “the peasant [who] has no worries/in his little lyrical fields.”⁶⁵⁵ The images of rural life that Heaney portrays involve real work: “My father worked with a horse-plough,/His shoulders globed like a full sail strung/Between the shafts and the furrow.”⁶⁵⁶ And Heaney’s opus offers up the notion that country life certainly dealt with darkness and death, often more candidly than other contexts might. “I was six when I first saw kittens drown./Dan Taggart pitched them, ‘the scraggy wee shits’,/Into a bucket; a frail metal sound.”⁶⁵⁷ The rural abode, Heaney argues, is not tied to a particular structure or bucolic scene; its territorial delineation is enacted through the building—the processes of making a life that the community shares in common.

⁶⁵⁴ Maxwell, *Incorrigibly Plural* 183.

⁶⁵⁵ Patrick Kavanagh, “The Great Hunger,” *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Verse* (1986) Section XIII, lines 3-4.

⁶⁵⁶ Heaney, “Follower,” *Faber Book* (1986) lines 1-3.

⁶⁵⁷ Heaney, “The Early Purges.” *Death of a Naturalist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966) lines. 1-3.

And yet, already Heaney's notion of the communal identity and its territorial extension (or should we say the territory and the community that belongs to it?) is nuanced. For as critic Helen Vendler points out in her reading of "Thatcher," the speaker never makes an appearance in the poem. "The early 'poems of anonymity' are always elegiac: Heaney will not write from 'inside' or from a present-tense perspective, as though he were still living in the archaic culture he describes."⁶⁵⁸ Even as the community is named and left gaping, he is not figured as one of them, even as he stands amidst the watchers. It is a marginal position. Not completely outside—he knows that the thatcher was "bespoke for weeks." But he does not wholeheartedly position himself within it; Heaney leaves himself on the periphery, looking at the group and defining its collective extension. This critical distance allows him to write of their amazement with the satirizing quip of the "Midas touch."

But for now, the relationship of the speaker to the collective, of Heaney to the Catholic community that he has grown up within and will continue to name through his verse, is left unexamined. As the Troubles break across Ulster and petrify the Catholic and Protestant communities into antagonistic forces, Heaney—like the other Belfast poets—will have to think through their relationship to their native ground. For Protestants, this activity of defining one's relation to the Unionist minority has always been particularly fraught.⁶⁵⁹ Protestant poet Tom Paulin, who broke into the Irish literary scene in the late 1970s, writes scathingly of the homogeneity and stagnancy of Ulster's Unionist community. "I see a plain/Presbyterian grace sour, then harden,/As a free strenuous spirit changes/To a servile defiance that whines and shrieks."⁶⁶⁰ For those writers reared within the Catholic communities, inhabiting and promulgating a stable and consonant sense of collective identification did not bring as many ethical tribulations—at least until the energetic bombing campaign led by the Provisional Irish

⁶⁵⁸ Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* 18.

⁶⁵⁹ Or at least it has been since Partition. John Hewitt's poem, "The colony," traces the longer tradition of Unionist guilt and its uneasy melding with their own sense of a territorial claim: "This is our country also, nowhere else;/and we shall not be outcast on the world."

⁶⁶⁰ Tom Paulin, "Desertmartin," *A Rage for Order* (1992) lines 15-18.

Republican Army. This is obviously painting with a broad stroke. But the larger point is critical: Catholic and Protestant poets alike had to reconfigure their relationship to their religious communities. And in doing so, they often had to find new ground on which to constitute their sense of territory and belonging. "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold."⁶⁶¹ In the face of the violence that made either orthodoxy untenable, where do you position yourself between the pressures of an individual art and a public searching for a spokesman? How does your conception of the Ulster communities and their respective groundings shape or preclude certain political ends?

For that is what is at stake in the poet's articulation of the omphalos. In the Northern Irish structures of feeling, the territorial communities of both Unionism and Nationalism exert a strong pull on their members. A poet writing in this juncture must necessarily negotiate the triangulation between place, community and identity. Yet, of the three poets considered here—and perhaps, more widely-speaking, of his generation—Heaney is the most affirmative of this rooted notion of belonging in his work. "The source of the feeling in many of my poems is a notion of home, a notion of repose in the world-centre, in the 'omphalos,'" Heaney commented. "The omphalos is the place, the home, which is the centre of my way of feeling."⁶⁶² But Derek Mahon and Ciaran Carson are also at work in this problematic of Irish space, place, and belonging. Mahon writes vividly from the margin, from a chosen site of displacement and exile even within the native community, and his verse problematizes the center from the periphery. And then finally, Carson returns us to the heart of Belfast as he lived the conflict "bomb by bomb."⁶⁶³ Carson lived in Ulster through the 1970s and 80s, and his work hews the most to a documentarian posture. His perceptive negotiations of the city, rent by unpredictable violence and fiercely contested and surveyed by British forces and paramilitaries alike, drive at a fundamental ligature

⁶⁶¹ W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming" *Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (1989) line 3.

⁶⁶² He continues: "But my way of knowing that I'm being myself is to be displaced from home, and I think I've almost created the conditions of being at home and not at home, at once." Mills, "Interview with Seamus Heaney."

⁶⁶³ Derek Mahon, "Afterlives," *A Rage for Order* (1992) line 46.

between place, power, and perception. For Carson, the map becomes unstable, both as a tool of territorial power (think Hewitt's 'The colony': "though we mapped, we did not occupy"⁶⁶⁴) and as a means of resistance. "[Expressive qualities] delineate a territory that will belong to the subject that carries or produces them..[and are] the constituting mark of a domain, an abode."⁶⁶⁵ The territories that Heaney, Mahon, and Carson respectively delineate contain or provision different imaginative possibilities, whether that be a mitigation or repair of strident sectarianism or an active endurance that seeks "refuge as the/cave of night booms/with fresh explosions."⁶⁶⁶

The majority of those who have railed against Heaney for implicitly condoning a divisive Republican nationalism target a collection of verse known colloquially as "the bog poems,"⁶⁶⁷ for these poems take their creative source material from the Irish terrain "that keeps crusting/Between sights of sun."⁶⁶⁸ Heaney finds in the bogland a fitting figure for the Irish historical memory and its tendency to recover the events of its past and deliver them once more into the present:

Bogland
for T.P. Flanagan

We have no prairies
To slice a big sun at evening –
Everywhere the eye concedes to
Encroaching horizon,

Is wooed into the cyclops' eye
Of a tarn. Our unfenced country
Is bog that keeps crusting
Between sights of the sun.

They've taken the skeleton
Of the Great Irish Elk

⁶⁶⁴ Hewitt, "The colony," line 76.

⁶⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 312.

⁶⁶⁶ John Montague, "Cave," *A Rage for Order* (1992) lines 12-14.

⁶⁶⁷ Alexander, *Ciaran Carson: Space, Place, Writing*.

⁶⁶⁸ Heaney, "Bogland," *A Rage for Order* (1992) lines 7-8.

Out of the peat, set it up
An astounding crate full of air.

Butter sunk under
More than a hundred years
Was recovered salty and white.
The ground itself is kind, black butter

Melting and opening underfoot,
Missing its last definition
By millions of years.
They'll never dig coal here,

Only the waterlogged trunks
Of great firs, soft as pulp.
Our pioneers keep striking
Inwards and downwards,

Every layer they strip
Seems camped on before.
The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage.
The wet centre is bottomless.⁶⁶⁹

The Irish landscape here is immediately set off against the “prairies [that] slice a big sun at evening” of the American West. The United States’ Native American tribes offer a useful foil for Heaney and other Catholic poets writing about their marginalization and perceived Otherness in Ulster.⁶⁷⁰ But here he is more interested in the spatial figure: “Our unfenced country is bog that keeps crusting.” Through their apparently limitless extension, the prairies present a radical challenge to traditional modes of property regulation and ownerships. The bogland poses the same problem by making and remaking its ground each night. Heaney plays off the limitlessness of the frontier, drawing the geographic logic of the Wild West into the geologic mode he sees operative in the Irish context. “The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage./The wet centre is bottomless.” But the geologic confounds the conventional linear

⁶⁶⁹ Heaney, “Bogland.”

⁶⁷⁰ Paul Muldoon also uses the Native American structure of feeling to comment on the Irish Republican one, most notably in his poem, “The Indians on Alcatraz:” “...the people of the broken lances/Who have seemed forever going back. Now they have willed this reservation,/It is as if they accept that they are islanders at heart.” Muldoon, “The Indians on Alcatraz,” *A Rage for Order* (1992) lines 8-12.

mode of temporality by spatializing it. Time sediments and accumulates; it can be dug up and returned to the present. "The past is not dead. It is not even past."⁶⁷¹ Instead, "they've taken the skeleton/of the Great Irish Elk/Out of the peat, set it up." As a temporal preserve, the bog submerges its artifacts but does not decompose or digest them. "Butter sunk under/More than a hundred years/Was recovered salty and white," Heaney notes. Americans imagine the Western plains as the vestige of a fast-dissipating world; he imagines the bog as the site of a past that is always-already returning.

In this extended imbrication, the bog too is set up against the industrial order ("They'll never dig coal here") and the Protestant hegemony that such an order consolidates and perpetuates. "Bogland" is clearly not a rumination on abstract landscapes; Heaney's verse articulates the Catholic political predicament in Northern Ireland and its structure of feeling. The island's spatial boundaries leave its Catholic population in a concessionary position before the "encroaching horizon;" they are left with only one viable direction in which to move. The Irish "pioneers keep striking,/ inwards and downwards." The look on their faces harried, "as if these people have never stopped riding hard/In an opposite direction."⁶⁷² At the poem's opening, the bog is remaking its surface each night, a process with the promise of renewal. By its close, the Irish Catholics can find no new ground, either geographically or historically. "Every layer they strip/Seems camped on before." Rather than appearing as an emblem imbued with the positive affects of freedom, possibility, and agency, the limitlessness of the frontier is tethered to a sense of hopelessness in the face of inevitable repetition. Already, we can see the criticism that Heaney is lodging against Catholic nationalism and its mythos of an enduring martyrdom. The Great Irish Elk lauded and set up by the Irish Republic appears not as majestic, but as "an astounding crate full of air." (The turn here from "astounding crate" to "full of air" brings a slight hint of MacNeice.) This Irish terrain is figured as feminine, as "kind, black butter/Melting and opening underfoot," which aligns with

⁶⁷¹ William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1990).

⁶⁷² Muldoon, "The Indians on Alcatraz," lines 5-7.

a common characterization Heaney makes of the Protestant-Catholic divide as masculine-feminine.⁶⁷³ Its only products too are feminized by their time immersed in the terrain. "...the waterlogged trunks/Of great firs, soft as pulp" are useless in the face of a modern industrial economy and its conceptions of productive labor and agency. For millions of years, this territory has refused definition, refused to construct and build upwards. Heaney's implicit criticisms of the narrow entrenchment of the Catholic mindset percolate throughout the verse.

And yet, Heaney's delineations of the Catholic structure of feeling—and its territory—along such general lines also falls back into the posture of the Republican and Protestant nationalisms. Here, Aaron Kelly's notion of a "rusticative ideology" is helpful: "which is to say, ideologies entrapped in a mythic orientation towards a rural idealism. By this I mean that Irish Nationalism and Unionism literally ground themselves on a pastoral conservatism which has profound implications for the representation of place and social relations in Irish culture."⁶⁷⁴ While they are fiercely opposed to one another in the political sphere, these two communal identities employ similar versions of a place-based logic. The intractability of their divide stems from their attempt to stake a claim to one and the same spatial territory by mobilizing substantively different myths. In "Bogland," Heaney criticizes the Catholic structure of feeling and its martyr myths where "the waterlogged trunks/Of great firs [are] soft as pulp," but he also buys into the logic of the "rusticative ideology." His articulation of the bog—and the temporal relation it represents—denies the plurality of Catholic differences, across socioeconomic classes, the rural-urban divide, etc. And it abstracts away from the historical developments that have left a definition in the Northern Irish terrain; the bog, which "keep crusting/Between sights of sun," acts with the dogmatic force of an iterative meter. Time passes, and yet nothing changes.

⁶⁷³ This parallel is made most bluntly in his poem, "Act of Union" from *North* in which Heaney likens England's colonization of Ireland to rape—of which Northern Ireland is the unwanted progeny. England speaks here: "I am the tall kingdom over your shoulder/That you would neither cajole nor ignore." Heaney, "Act of Union," *A Rage for Order* (1992) lines 9-10.

⁶⁷⁴ Kelly, *The Thriller and Northern Ireland Since 1969: Utterly Resigned Terror* 83.

In Heaney's poem, he ignores the real differences between the different moments of sectarian conflict by focusing only on the repetition. The Troubles of the late 1960s is a different beast than that of the mid-1970s or that of the late 1970s or that of the 1980s. And so while the society is still rent along the general Protestant-Catholic fault, a closer look reveals that Ulster is crisscrossed by a web of fractures that are pressurized and strained on a number of different levels (most importantly, on the basis of class). Each new episode of "the Troubles," broadly construed, results from a multifocal composition of causes, only some of which can be painted in broad sectarian strokes. Yet Heaney's faith in the mimetic capabilities of language to represent the Catholic position—even as he criticizes the structure of feeling it depicts—becomes too stable, too reductionist, and too cleanly theorized. He puts up back into lock-step with the rusticative ideologies that make the Ulster situation politically calcified on both the imaginative and affective planes.

"Bogland" made its way in his 1969 volume. But Heaney had only just begun to plumb the "kind, black butter." As the Troubles become more and more violent, he turns to the ritual violence of medieval bogland cultures as another expressive figure. In particular, Heaney fixated on a book by P.V. Glob that detailed the bog cultures of the medieval Norse and their ritualistic modes of sacrifice.

Reflecting on his discovery of Glob's text, Heaney writes:

It was chiefly concerned with preserved bodies of men and women found in the bog of Jutland, naked, strangled or with their throats cut, disposed under the peat since early Iron Age times. The author, P.V. Glob, argues convincingly that a number of these, and in particular the Tollund Man, whose head is now preserved near Aarhus in the museum at Silkeborg, were ritual sacrifices to the Mother Goddess, the Goddess of the ground who needed new bridegrooms each winter to bed with her in her sacred place, in the bog, to ensure the renewal and fertility of the territory in the spring. Taken in relation to the tradition of Irish martyrdom for that cause whose icon is Cathleen Ni Houlihan, this is more than an archaic barbarous rite: it is an archetypal pattern. And the unforgettable photographs of those victims blended in my mind with photographs of atrocities, past and present, in the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles.⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁷⁵ Cited in Des Pres, "Emblems of Adversity," *Harper's*.

Heaney would later borrow a phrase from Yeats to characterize this method of dealing with Northern Irish sectarian violence—articulating “befitting emblems of adversity.”⁶⁷⁶ Prefaced by a few scattered poems in his 1969 and 1972 collections, the bog poems as a collectivity cohere in *North*, Heaney’s most controversial collection—and the one that perhaps did the most to make his name internationally.⁶⁷⁷ Several, including “Punishment” and “Grauballe Man,” postures the figures of skeletons dug up out of old Danish bogs as analogous—befitting if you will—to the crimes perpetrated by Ulster’s Republicans both against Protestants and against other Catholics who are seen to break with community mores.

To look at “Punishment:”

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.

It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging
of her ribs.

I can see her drowned
body in the bog,
the weighing stone,
the floating rods and boughs.

Under which at first
she was a barked sapling
that is dug up
oak-bone, brain-firkin:

her shaved head
like a stubble of black corn,
her blindfold a soiled bandage,

⁶⁷⁶ “The question, as ever, is ‘How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea?’ And my answer is, by offering ‘befitting emblems of adversity.’” Heaney, quoted in Des Pres, “Fitting Emblems of Adversity.” The phrase, “befitting emblems of adversity,” is drawn from the final line of Yeats’ poem, “My House,” which comprises the second segment of a seven-section rumination on the Irish Civil War, “Meditations in time of civil war.”

⁶⁷⁷ A good number of reviews in American and British publications praise the collection. Robert Lowell, upon finishing it, declares Heaney the best Irish poet since Yeats. Yet many Heaney’ Irish and Northern Irish contemporaries and the later generations of the literary community will ultimately be more critical. Tellingly, Paul Muldoon includes none of Heaney’s *North* poems in his 1986 anthology, *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Verse*—even though the book draws from his opus heavily.

her noose a ring
to store
the memories of love.
Little adulteress,
before they punished you
you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scape-goat,
I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
I am the artful voyeur
of your brain's exposed
and darkened combs,
your muscles' webbing
and all your numbered bones.
I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,
who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.⁶⁷⁸

The speaker sets up the analogy between the girl's body excavated from the Jutland and the Catholic girls that the IRA leaves "cauled in tar" in public spaces for consorting with Protestant boys (or at least appearing to). Here the body serves as the common ground. The speaker can see "her drowned/body in the bog,/the weighing stone." With intimate detail, Heaney traces the contours of the mummified girl, from "the frail rigging/of her ribs" to "her shaved head/like a stubble of black corn" to her "tar-black face." The girl has been married to the earth, "her noose a ring," and she marked the edges of the medieval community's grid of social acceptability. By her forced and violent expulsion from

⁶⁷⁸ Seamus Heaney, "Punishment," *A Rage for Order* (1992).

the interior, she delineates the imagined territorial boundary. "My poor scapegoat." But this is not merely one act that Heaney is elegizing and aestheticizing; this girl is presumably one of many communal sacrifices that ended up in the boglands. But then Heaney moves us out of the medieval context and into the contemporary; the dream-figure of the girl, the "barked sapling/that is dug up/oak-bone, brain-firkin," blends with the images of the Catholic girls that the IRA and other Republican militants tar and feather for breaking with community solidarity. The "tar-black" face is doubled over as those "little adulteresses" now coated in tar by members of their own religious community, perhaps even friends or family members. And so he also maps the extension of Catholic territory onto these betraying sisters' bodies as they "wept by the railings."

The speaker ties the two images together through his affective response to the abuses marring these girls' bodies and his relationship to the communities who inflicted "the exact/and tribal, intimate revenge." For he sympathizes with the victims, adopting a humanist's "civilized outrage." Heaney handles the body of the mummified girl bluntly but with care, as he would a child. His patronizing moniker represents the first shift in perspective. Through the first five stanzas, the speaker imagines himself as present at the rite of sacrifice ("I can feel the tug/of the halter/at the nape/of her neck"), through her burial ("I can see her drowned/body"), and then after her unearthing ("she was a barked sapling/that was dug up"). And then he appears even more fully in the poem, his authorial license no longer submerged but foregrounded in the direct address: "Little adulteress." He recognizes the material hurt inflicted on this body; he recognizes that her individual self has been subsumed and overridden by the community's perceived need to police its borders. Heaney could almost love her.

But he is torn: "[I] would have cast, I know,/the stones of silence." Heaney acknowledges the guilt he feels for his collusion with the community's forms of judgment and punishment; he stands always as an observer, as a poet who turns the depictions of violence rendered on real bodies into aesthetic fodder for his craft. "I am the artful voyeur/of your brain's exposed/and darkened combs." But

it is a many-fingered guilt: the guilt of silent spectator in the face of abuse; the guilt of a community member who understands, affectively, the desire to punish and so secure the collective territory; the guilt of an artist who takes another's suffering and uses it for his work; the guilt of someone caught fast and attentive to a scene of intimacy they should have no part in. But ultimately, Heaney cannot reject the Catholic community of which he figures himself a part. He acts not as a distant observer, but as a scrupulous documenter of his own experience with the affective struggle of belonging to a community that undertakes horrible things in order to defend its existence.⁶⁷⁹

Heaney as a speaker is conflicted by the Catholic community's violent acts of territorialization. But his verse, I would argue, has been swept up by Republicanism's mythos of violence; he romanticizes the story of the girl, even as he depicts her mummified state today. She was "flaxen-haired, under-nourished and...beautiful"—a sympathetic silhouette. He too subsumes her as an individual, not to a communal reductionism, but to an aesthetic one. His reading of her death and unearthing is imagined, projected from the speaker's desire for it to be so. The violence that took her life is compared to a marriage, the troth that completes the romantic narrative and neatly ties like to like. In "Punishment" and other poems from *North*, Heaney's reliance on the bog killings, which transcend the particular historicities and cultures to foreground a mythical similitude, struck a discordant note for some Ulster writers.⁶⁸⁰ In the collection, Heaney "lays himself open to the charge [of posturing as] the laureate of violence—a mythmaker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, an apologist for 'the situation,' in the last

⁶⁷⁹ Whether or not the community's existence is actually at risk is of no import, although it can certainly be leveraged critically against the speaker. Within the articulation of this particular piece of the Catholic structure of feeling, it matters merely whether the community perceives itself to be endangered by an activity such as cross-group sexual and martial relationships.

⁶⁸⁰ Northern Irish critic Elmer Kennedy-Andrews wrote that Heaney's equation of the Iron Age fertility rites and Republican killing during the 1970s and 80s "is effectively to reduce history to myth, furnishing an aesthetic resolution to conflicts that are constituted in quite specific historical junctures by rendering disparate events as symbolic moments expressive of an underlying continuity of identity. Not surprisingly, the aesthetic which supports that identity here doubles the aesthetic politics of nationalism which finds its intensest symbolism in martyrdom." Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 47.

resort, a ‘mystifier’” inveighed Carson in a now-famous review in *The Honest Ulsterman*.⁶⁸¹ He continues, “No one really escapes from the massacre, of course—the only way you can do that is by applying wrong notions of history, instead of seeing what’s before your eyes.”⁶⁸² (Carson’s later verse, particularly in *The Irish for No*, reacts against the Heaney that surfaces in *North* and his unstudied reliance on language’s mimetic qualities to articulate the Ulster ‘situation.’)⁶⁸³

Yet there is no denying the bog poems their force.⁶⁸⁴ The close of his “The Tollund Man” brings out the perhaps most honest reason for Heaney’s continued return to the bog for material during the first outbreaks of Ulster violence. He writes: “Out there in Jutland/In the old man-killing parishes/I will feel lost,/Unhappy, and at home.”⁶⁸⁵ In Heaney’s later work, he begins to move away from what he calls a public and political voice, which draws him away from the mythical and totalizing narratives. His personal forays into the Troubles and the havoc they can wreak on individual lives. Critics have generally written favorably about Heaney’s two elegies, “Casualty” and “The Strand at Lough Beg.” Both commemorate individuals he knew and cared for, and his attempt to work through the circumstances of their deaths problematizes the Catholic and Protestant territory-based ideologies rather than implicitly substantiating them. To unpack some of the ways that Heaney is revising and complicating his intertwining of place and identity, we move to “Casualty,” which recounts the death of a community stalwart and friend after he ignored an IRA-decreed curfew in the Catholic neighborhoods.

Casualty

I

⁶⁸¹ As Ormsby remembers it, Carson was making a number of points against *North* in Heaney’s face when the three poets were conversing. Heaney asked Carson, ‘Why not review the work for *The Honest Ulsterman*?’ And he did. Ormsby, Personal interview, 31 July 2013.

⁶⁸² Carson, Review of *North*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, 1975.

⁶⁸³ This point is argued forcefully by Neal Alexander in his critical study of Carson’s work.

⁶⁸⁴ Heaney, who generally refrained from reading from *North* throughout his later career, gave the poems one last airing at a public reading in June 2013. He received a standing ovation; at the dinner that night, he made only one comment on the performance: “I wish Carson had been here.” Carson arrived at the conference the next day. Conversations with Eamon Hughes, Queens University-Belfast, and Margaret Kelleher, University College-Dublin.

⁶⁸⁵ Heaney, “The Tollund Man,” *Faber Book* (1986).

He would drink by himself
And raise a weathered thumb
Towards the high shelf,
Calling another rum
And blackcurrant, without
Having to raise his voice,
Or order a quick stout
By a lifting of the eyes
And a discreet dumb-show
Of pulling off the top;
At closing time would go
In waders and peaked cap
Into the showery dark,
A dole-kept breadwinner
But a natural for work.
I loved his whole manner,
Sure-footed but too sly,
His deadpan sidling tact,
His fisherman's quick eye
And turned observant back.

Incomprehensible
To him, my other life.
Sometimes, on his high stool,
Too busy with his knife
At a tobacco plug
And not meeting my eye.
In the pause after a slug
He mentioned poetry.
We would be on our own
And always politic
And shy of condescension.
I would manage by some trick
To switch the talk to eels
Or lore of the horse and cart
Or the Provisionals.

But my tentative art
His turned back watches too:
He was blown to bits
Out drinking past curfew
Others obeyed, three nights
After they shot dead
The thirteen men in Derry.
PARAS THIRTEEN, the walls said,
BOGSIDE NIL. That Wednesday
Everybody held

His breath and trembled.

II

It was a day of cold
Raw silence, wind-blown
Surplice and soutane:
Rained-on, flower-laden
Coffin after coffin
Seemed to float from the door
Of the packed cathedral
Like blossoms on slow water.
The common funeral
Unrolled its swaddling band,
Lapping, tightening
Twill we were braced and bound
Like brothers in a ring.

But he would not be held
At home by his own crowd
Whatever threats were phoned,
Whatever black flags waved.
I see him as he turned
In that bombed offending place,
Remorse fused with terror
In his still knowable face,
His cornered outfaced stare
Blinded in the flash.

He had gone miles away
For he drank like a fish
Nightly, naturally,
Swimming towards the lure
Of warm lit-up places,
The blurred mesh and murmur
Drifting among glasses
In the gregarious smoke.
How culpable was he
That last night when he broke
Our tribe's complicity?
'Now you're supposed to be
An educated man,'
I hear him say. 'Puzzle me
The right answer to that one.'

III

I missed his funeral,

Those quiet walkers
And sideways talkers
Shoaling out of his lane
To the respectable
Purring of the hearse...
They move in equal pace
With the habitual
Slow consolation
Of a dawdling engine.
The line lifted, hand
Over fist, cold sunshine
On the water, the land
Banked under fog: that morning
I was taken in his boat,
The screw purling, turning
Indolent fathoms white,
I tasted freedom with him.
To get out early, haul
Steadily off the bottom,
Dispraise the catch, and smile
As you find a rhythm
Working you, slow mile by mile,
Into your proper haunt
Somewhere, well out, beyond...

Dawn-sniffing revenant,
Plodder through midnight rain,
Question me again.

Straight away, it is apparent that Heaney's strange (and strongly spondaic) poetic is less forceful here; instead of the tight quatrains and its slow, foliating syntax, Heaney lets his prosaic impulses rise to the fore. He retains the short line, although it has lengthened somewhat to encompass longer clauses, and lets the fast-pace prosody spill over the edge of his line breaks in a seemingly disordered and careless attempt at stanzation. All of this serves to provide more breathing space for the narrative tendencies. On the most basic level, we must note that the poem is divided into three sections, each of which focuses on a particular temporal window (not episodic; each section operates on its own logic): the speaker's developed relationship with the fisherman, the accounting of his death, and the speaker's own foray out onto the sea on the day of his friend's funeral. What the narrative allows the poem to do is twofold—first, it asks for more specificity and detail around the verse's subject, the fisherman, and

second, it foregrounds the temporal logic. Drawing a temporal frame rather than a spatial one lets Heaney truly elegize—that is, tell the story of his friendship and its end before moving to the resulting process of mourning and revelation. This is not to say that Heaney discards the territorial imaginary completely; the city surfaces still map the conflict—“PARAS⁶⁸⁶ THIRTEEN, the walls said, BOGSIDE NIL.” But by moving away from the rich sedimentation of images to a more narrative style, he is able to loosen the territorial imaginary from the totalizing stance it possessed in his early work. Strikingly, through the memorializing and confessional turns of “Casualty,” Heaney opens the Catholic community’s place-based identity (and the individual’s relation to it) up to contradiction and the possibility of change.

MacNeice would be proud. Heaney’s elegy of his friend takes after the MacNeician gaze towards the “incorrigibly plural.” The fisherman drinks by himself, but is drawn into the pubs by its promise of gregariousness. “A dole-kept breadwinner/But a natural for work,” who wears his waders to the bar and stays till closing. Adroit in the coded language of the bar where he can “order a quick stout/By a lifting of the eyes/And a discreet dumb-show/Of pulling off a top.” Adroit also in the coded language of the Catholic fisherman who faces always a Protestant official in the fishing permit offices—he trains “his fisherman’s quick eye/And turned observant back” on any regulators who might be checking for an illicit catch. How unlike the wane and predictable girl in “Punishment” this complex and contradictory fellow is, who sits “too busy with his knife/At a tobacco plug/And not meeting my eye/In the pause after a slug/He mentioned poetry.” Heaney does not “almost love” a figment of a myth, but loved this man’s “whole manner.” To the fisherman, Heaney is just as much a curiosity with his verse-making; the two men sit together in the pub, each immersed in craft “soundlessly collateral but incompatible.”⁶⁸⁷ And yet they clearly relish each other’s company; the fisherman continues to ask after Heaney’s art, a bit shy.

⁶⁸⁶ The “Paras” refers to the British Armed Forces’ Parachute Division. Members of the Parachute Division’s First Battalion were responsible for the violent putdown of the Derry civil rights march on Bloody Sunday.

⁶⁸⁷ MacNeice, “Snow,” line 3.

Even when Heaney, “always politic/and shy of condescension,” turns the conversation away from the incommensurables, there exists a great number of fronts on which they can each engage on equal terms: “eels/Or lore of the horse and cart/Or the Provisionals.” There, at the close of the stanza, Heaney inserts a deft reminder—this man and I are both Catholic. We are joined by that. Yet the relationship between the two, as individuals confronting the plurality of the other, catches on another fault line—that which cleaves the “educated man” from the “dole-kept breadwinner.” Or more rightly, from the man schooled in the discourses and techniques of his own terrains.

Heaney spends the opening two stanzas registering his own investment in the fisherman. And so when we learn of his death, implicit from the title and the use of the past tense, the affective loss is rendered without the taint of Heaney’s “artful voyeur.” There is no romanticizing of violence here: only the prosaic understatement, akin almost to a news report both in its tone and its clichéd diction:

He was blown to bits
Out drinking in a curfew
Others obeyed, three nights
After they shot dead
The thirteen men in Derry.

From a narrative perspective, this is the knot at the heart of the entire poem. It gives us the time line, sets up its causal bridges. Heaney tells us matter-of-factly that his friend died three days after the British troops killed thirteen Catholics on Bloody Sunday, that he had been killed by the IRA for breaking their curfew, and that he had been out drinking on this night like any other. Or does he? The seemingly direct prose that Heaney employs also a “deadpan sidling tact.” Heaney never assigns the Catholic community agency for his death; the fisherman “was blown to bits/Out drinking in a curfew/Others obeyed.” As readers unfamiliar with the actual incident or with the practice of IRA-declared and –enforced curfews, we only learn to look to the Provisionals as the poem continues to unwind. And so this narrative pith sets up the situational and affective conflict of the rest of the poem—between the individual’s agency and the community’s security, between the speaker’s friendship and his solidarity with his religious

group, between the Catholic individual who “At closing time would go/In waders and peaked cap/Into the showery dark” and the mythos of the Catholic martyrs, between the radical loss of an intimate and the accounting loss of a tribe. The temporal framing continues into the second and third sections to anchor them against the timeline established here, but these five lines open up the chink through which Heaney can now explore not just the question “what happened” within the life history of the fisherman, but also within the context of the Catholic community’s affective and territorial responses to Bloody Sunday and of the speaker’s negotiation between his intimate and collective grief.

In “Punishment,” the conflict that Heaney set up between the little adulteress(es) and the tribe is an intellectual distinction more than it is a felt one. As readers, we can picture vividly the body of the mummified girl, but we have no sense of the speaker’s own investment in her and her abuse except for the “civilized outrage” of one caring individual confronted with a scene of (perhaps) undue harm. She remains merely a figure for the other pole of his affective struggle. In “Casualty,” the speaker loved the man, and the reader sees the textured and multifaceted individual as he figures in Heaney’s sight. The dialectical tension that the speaker is thrown into the midst of is enacted this time by the poem itself; the “Dawn-sniffing revenant,/plodder through the midnight rain” presents a radical and irreducible challenge to the tribal rage that scrawls the score of the death match on the Belfast wall and shuts the Catholic neighborhood down.⁶⁸⁸

Here too, Heaney provides a material sense of the other term—ie, what the Catholic solidarity and tribal affinity feels like. Section II of the poem locates itself at the public funeral for the thirteen men shot and killed by the British army in Derry on January 30, 1972. “It was a day of cold/Raw silence, wind-blown/Surplice and soutane.” He locates us so deftly in the scene. Heaney layers first the aural image and then the visual: first, the “cold/Raw silence,” which delves into the affective response of the

⁶⁸⁸ Jonathan Hufstader. *Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones: Northern Irish Poetry and Social Violence*. (Louisville, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999) 56. Hufstader notes that Heaney made it a practice of refusing to attend funerals in Northern Ireland during this time.

Catholic community to these deaths. The emotional toll is folded over the line break, allowing the phrase “day of cold” to encompass both temperature and the shock engendered at the killings, inflicted as they were by soldiers that had previously been seen as the community’s saviors. And then the line breaks and we can read the “raw silence,” which speaks louder than any vengeful sermon toward the intimate nature of the deaths—the British struck a blow to me and mine. Heaney then moves to the visual with the tossed white of the priests’ cassocks.⁶⁸⁹ That image of community continues throughout the stanza. Heaney first sends us the image, beautifully rendered, of the coffins leaving the cathedral. The lines play to the Republicans’ almost-mythic stance towards the public funeral on both mimetic and formal levels. Simply, they depict the coffins passing, one by one, from the cathedral doors and into the crowd. The religious community and the social collectivity are colluded and subsumed into one, drawn together by the expressive ritual of the funeral procession. And the formal patterning Heaney packs into these lines enacts this rhythmic pacing.

Raw silence, wind-blown
 Surplice and soutane:
 Rained-on, flower-laden
 Coffin and coffin...

Throughout, the “n” sound echoes as the trailing end of syntactical units. “Silence/wind-blown/soutane/Rained-on/laden/coffin and coffin.” And there is a high degree of vowel repetition. The direct aural link between “soutane” and “rained” folds the listener over the line break. Using a loose ABAB model, the lines parallel each other aurally. The first line and third line use the same imagist foliations broken by the caesura of a comma; both punctuate with heavy stresses; both begin with the “r” that is so powerful and prolonged in “raw.” And then Heaney’s second and fourth lines are structurally identical, repeating syllables, stresses, images. (The surplice and the soutane are almost synonyms, whereas Heaney can rely simply on the immediate doubling of “coffin” by the time he builds to the final

⁶⁸⁹ Surplice and soutane both refer to clothes traditionally worn by Catholic priests.

line in the tight verse.) All of this sound falls into a regular metrical pacing, which is loosely trochaic but foregrounds a regular sense of momentum gathering and releasing. It is as if, formally, all four lines were caught saying “coffin and coffin and coffin and coffin and coffin...” The sounds float past the ear, cosseted by caesura after caesura, “like blossoms on slow water.” Although Catholic deaths and the revenge killings they precipitated are often motivated by rage, Heaney’s images here bear little of that heat. They draw from air and water rather than from earth or fire; the coffins seem to float above the heads of the funeral goers “Like blossoms.” The lines do not lambast the Catholic ritual, but honor its aesthetic and social force.

Yet the rest of the stanza undercuts the grace of the imagery and throws the speaker’s problematic relationship to the emblem of the martyr into relief. Again, we see the Nationalist ideology assert a territorial claim, but this time through a repeated performance that draws bodies into a common space inflected with a common affect. “It was a day of cold, raw silence.” Heaney acknowledges as much by deploying the figure of the “swaddling band,” which was traditionally used to bind an infant tight in cloth to insure (supposedly) that the limbs would grow straight. Much as the Catholic community is bound together, held tightly and stiflingly in alignment for its own well-being. The public funeral performs that binding function, “Till we were braced and bound/Like brothers in a ring.” Already, the idea of a community, braced and standing together, is made also into a straitjacket that constrains and confines the individuals trapped within it. In fact, Heaney would later speak about his dislike of public funerals and his refusal to attend them.⁶⁹⁰ But unlike the angry retorts mobilized by Protestant poets against their own communal rites, Heaney refrains from dismissing the tribe entirely. His view of it is simply skewered, a dialectical perception that MacNeice too turned on the greater Ulster society. In “Casualty,” Heaney does not offer an easy aesthetic synthesis; the mythic elements cannot help us deal with the Catholic swaddling band or the category-confounding death of O’Neill.

⁶⁹⁰ Hufstader, *Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones* 54.

Through the end of section II, Heaney brings the two terms, which thus far had only been linked temporally through his journalistic account's triangulation of the fisherman's death—the Provisionals' curfew—Bloody Sunday, to an irreducible conflict in which one side necessarily breaks and runs ramshod over the other. It begins, ostensibly, with the struggle between the Republican paramilitary groups and the British army over the events of Bloody Sunday. Against the strict surveillance and nightly patrols of the British troops, the provisional IRA exerts its counterclaim over the Belfast cityscape through the curfew. They warn their people by phone, by the posting of black flags—again, the bunting stakes out a territory, even against the arms and might of the Paras—and control movement through negation. The swaddling band is “Lapping, tightening.” We shall not let our people go. With the Catholic residents off the streets at night, the Provisionals are free to bomb the streets, to cast an indiscriminate net through the common ways. Yet one sheep leaves the fold: “But he would not be held/At home by his own crowd.” The issue of home too is contested here: we understand what is conventionally meant (O'Neill refused to remain at his house where the IRA mandated he be), but Heaney has just spent a good portion of the poem describing O'Neill's routine appearances at the pub. He is there so often that he has mastered its implicit language. *Nightly, naturally*. He had left behind the dark kitchen and its solitary table, “Swimming towards the lure/Of warm lit-up places,/The blurred mesh and murmur/Drifting among glasses/In the gregarious smoke.” Where do we position the *omphalos* in this case? Where is the community tap?

We have known for stanzas what the outcome is: the tragic flaw has been defined, the die of fate has been cast. Heaney can imagine the penultimate moment “in that bombed offending place.” O'Neill is caught, a fish on a hook, out of his element. “His quick fisherman's eye/And turned observant back” are forced to change their form; he turns for the last time, facing the Provisionals' trap chest-on. Yet Heaney knows who has cast the die. He asks, “How culpable was he/That last night when he broke/Our tribe's complicity?” Heaney's reliance on the tragic narrative mode now loses its opaque and

apparent surface; the inner workings are left exposed. The tribe mandated the curfew to take its revenge against the British troops; it killed one of its own, who intended merely to find his own way to a place of familiarity. It is telling that Heaney does not pose the question as a speaker; he is the one interrogated—and he is interrogated by O’Neill, by one intimately known and respected by him. And we feel the tug—Heaney makes the irreducibility of the conflict between individual and the Catholic tribe affectively material.

Although the poem’s structure foreshadows how the speaker will come down against the Republicans’ rigid swaddling of the Catholic population by channeling the communal sense of grief, the third section provides the narrative moment for the Heaney’s revelation. He begins by narrating his absence, his displacement, from his friend’s funeral. As opposed to the figurative craftsmanship employed in his description of the Bloody Sunday funerals, Heaney opts this time to portray a different sense of community—one that inheres simply in the people it brings together, “Those quiet walkers/And sideways talkers/Shoaling out of his lane.” Here too, the lines are united by a rhythm as “They move in equal pace/With the habitual/Slow consolation/Of a dawdling engine” behind the hearse and through the winding streets. But this rhythm is not the repetitive refrain of funereal spectacle that ties together the Republican ideology; it is that repetition performed, over and over again, by the bodies of fishermen going about their craft. “The line lifted, hand/Over fist, cold sunshine/On the water.” Again, we see the references to water and cold light. Heaney puts his figures to work setting up these funerals and these communal ligatures as foils for each other.

The speaker, who was absent from the funeral but can imagine its performance, interjects once again. This time, the funereal march blends not with the mythic figure of a mummified skeleton in a bog or any other ritual killing. This time, the common ground lies immured in a different community, that of the fisherman and his territory. Heaney ventured into that world once in O’Neill’s boat: There, “the screw purling, turning/Indolent fathoms white,/I tasted freedom with him.” The insertion of the political

and philosophical term here is a leap. It feels like one; Heaney is, after all, declaring for the radical agency to be found on the sea, where the pioneers do not dig forever downwards and backwards. It is a vision of escape and release from the sedimenting processes of history, to take shelter instead in the labor itself that goes into making a life:

To get out early, haul
Steadily off the bottom,
Dispraise the catch, and smile
As you find a rhythm
Working you, slow mile by mile,
Into your proper haunt

Heaney delineates a new territory, one whose expression is not rooted but is performed daily through the pursuit of a craft. Like a fisherman, the poet too finds himself worked by a rhythm, "slow mile by mile," as he sinks into his proper haunt. The task: to plumb the depths for your catch but not to take it too seriously. There are no idols, only fish. Heaney locates O'Neill's proper haunt "Somewhere, well out, beyond..." It is safe to say this émigré finds his proper haunt outside of the community's general map, its petrifying ground. And yet we should remember too that O'Neill returned to the gregarious smoke of the pub nightly, naturally. "Casualty" is not advocating exile or permanent emigration from the tribe; instead it fixates on places that locate their centre outside of its fold, whether that be in the radical transience of the sea or the localized glow of a pub windows. And both sites should be held together, the poem tells us at its close. "Dawn-sniffing revenant,/Plodder through the midnight rain,/Question me again." Heaney closes this affirmative experience in O'Neill's boat with a rejoinder to the earlier question. Before it had no answer, now, after traversing the terrain of the fisherman rather than that of an "educated man," the speaker begs to be asked it again. As Heaney would later say of O'Neill, "we had a natural, sympathetic understanding of each other."⁶⁹¹

⁶⁹¹ Randall, "Interview with Seamus Heaney."

“Casualty” marks a broader shift that Heaney makes in his later work away from the mythical and towards the personal. The bog, while full of resonances and skeletons to uncover and set up, falls into alignment with the Irish Republican ideology and its explicit territorial claims. In his earlier work, Heaney—like Hewitt before him—situates the collective structure of feeling in a stable place-based form of identity. Heaney complains that Hewitt’s regionalism ultimately fails by ignoring the real historical divide between its Catholic and Protestant communities and foregrounding instead a new political border that had been externally imposed;⁶⁹² his spatial focus eclipses history for a cleanly-founded present. In the bog poems—particularly those in *North*—Heaney too loses site of history, but by bringing it back as an ahistorical and mythic cycle wherein the material differences are eclipsed by an autocratic sameness. The later Hewitt worried at this tendency of the Ulster writers to explore the Troubles through the distancing device of myth, whether that be of the Iron Age bog peoples or of the ancient Greeks. In his poem, “Parallels never meet,” he cautions:

To find focus for my taut feelings
I thrust them all back into a remote setting
dressing the circumstances
in the properties of antiquity...

Yet:

...the heartbreak remains,
the malice and the hate are palpable
the flames authentic,
the wounds weep real blood
and the future is not to be foretold.⁶⁹³

The bog poems, for all their focus on the wounds suffered by the mummified bodies, ignore the heartbreak and the heat of the flames. While he criticizes the Catholic community for its swaddling band of rituals and territorial exertions, Heaney’s early work utilizes a similar logic—its stable view of place, its substitution of ritual repetition for history, its promise of an aesthetic synthesis where an easy political

⁶⁹² Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* 196.

⁶⁹³ Hewitt, “Parallels never meet,” quoted in Ormsby, introduction, *A Rage for Order* (1992).

solution does not exist. “No one really escapes from the massacre, of course—the only way you can do that is by applying wrong notions of history, instead of seeing what’s before your eyes.”⁶⁹⁴ His later verse begins to problematize the Catholic mythos and destabilize its territorial claims. In “Casualty,” Heaney reverts to the argument that he advances in the “Thatcher”—a place is built through the quotidian rhythms of dwelling. “As you find a rhythm/Working you, slow mile by mile,/Into your proper haunt.” O’Neill seeks his community at the local pub, nightly, naturally; he finds his freedom out on the sea with the screw purling, turning, as he hauls a catch off the bottom. And so the territory that exerts a true force, the *omphalos*, still requires a place, but it is one that not tied to the soil or to the Provisionals’ nation-building. Here, Heaney’s criticism is more than an intellectual exercise; he offers up another structure of feeling to counter the funereal homogeneity of coffin after coffin proceeding from cathedral door to the bogland. O’Neill offered another way of living, one that he too realizes that he avails himself of through the practice of his freeing craft. “I rhyme/To see myself, to set the darkness echoing.”⁶⁹⁵

Yet this structure of feeling still gives a primary force to the Catholic community. To avoid its reach, the fisherman must venture “somewhere out, well out, beyond...” The center still retains its territorial claim that the individual can only subvert by pushing out to the margin. Cue Hewitt: “An artist must have a native place, pinpointed on a map, even if it is only to run away from.”⁶⁹⁶ Heaney gives it weight because he too is still motivated by a search for home. “My *patria*, my deep design/To be at home/In my own place within/The proper name,” he writes in his now-famous poem, “An Open Letter.” Place and the proper name are still stable entities for him, still the site of the *omphalos*, even if they no

⁶⁹⁴ Carson, review of *North*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, 1975.

⁶⁹⁵ Seamus Heaney, “Personal Helicon,” *Faber Book* (1986) lines 19-20.

⁶⁹⁶ John Hewitt, “Bitter Gourd: Some Problems for the Ulster Writer,” *Lagan* 3 (1945) 93-105.

longer necessarily inhere in the soil or in the Catholic community's appropriative rituals.⁶⁹⁷ But for Mahon, the margin becomes a kind of home when he writes against the Unionist structure of feeling. Everything comfortable is dislocating and transient, compared to the stultifying confines of his neighbors and their Unionist ideology. Unlike Heaney who draws from Hewitt and his rootedness, Mahon is MacNeician through and through, from the sharp wit down to the émigré sensibility.

⁶⁹⁷ Cue Heidegger: "Man's relation to locations, and through locations to spaces, inheres in his dwelling. The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken." *Poetry, Language, Thought* 155.

Chapter 7: *'This is your country, close one eye and be king:'*
Derek Mahon Brings MacNeice to Bear on the Unionist Structure of Feeling

Derek [Mahon] was never entangled with the Belfast faithful, as it were. I always think of Derek as the Stephen Dedalus of Belfast, the man who is an ironist and who refuses to serve that in which he no longer believes, whether that covers family, church, regional loyalty or whatever.⁶⁹⁸

Mahon was raised in Belfast by a working-class Protestant family. For the most part, his upbringing situated him strongly within the Unionist fold. His parents both belonged to the region's twin pillar industries—ship-building and linen;⁶⁹⁹ Mahon attended Protestant schools all the way through and then set off for Trinity College in Dublin, traditionally considered the “Oxbridge” for those who had not gained access to either of England's preeminent universities. His relatives had Unionist sympathies, if not active allegiances. Yet Mahon divorced himself from the conventional community even as a child. He recalls himself as “a strange child with a taste for verse” as opposed to his “hard-nosed companions [who] dream of war/On parched velt and fields of rain-swept gorse.”⁷⁰⁰ The mythical images held no appeal for him. Yet it wasn't until secondary school that Mahon registered his first sense of displacement. “Mine was a great rugby school, rugby and cricket,” he notes. “I played some rugby and cricket, but then after a certain point I wasn't interested anymore.” Instead of competing in sport, Mahon separated himself out. But on the school's rim, he found a new community: “a little group of us—oddities, weirdos—so I found a coterie, and there I was at home. Age fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen, we would go precociously to something that was just coming into existence in a place like Belfast in the late 1950s . . . a coffee bar. And talk, and read Aldous Huxley.”⁷⁰¹

But even in secondary school, Mahon knew he wanted to write verse. Once at Trinity College, he and Michael Longley, who was two years his senior, became fast friends, neglecting much of their

⁶⁹⁸ Randall, “Interview with Seamus Heaney.”

⁶⁹⁹ Grennan, “Interviews: Derek Mahon.”

⁷⁰⁰ Derek Mahon, “Courtyards in Delft,” *A Rage for Order* (1992).

⁷⁰¹ Grennan, “Interviews: Derek Mahon.”

schoolwork instead to write, read, and discuss poetry.⁷⁰² From university onwards, Mahon's life is a story of migration and voluntary exile. He moves from Northern Ireland to the United States to England, shifting from house to house, day job to day job. And yet, as is clear from his work, Belfast continues to exert a gravitational pull on his imagination, despite—and perhaps through—its absence.

That sense of eccentricity, the self-chosen path against the conventional grain, would chart Mahon's course throughout his writing career. From the outset, he was not swayed by the Unionist ideology, its sacred commemoration of war and its heroes (think of the yearly march remembering the 1690 Battle of the Boyne).⁷⁰³ In "Glengormley," Mahon sets up the mundane landscapes and exertions of the Protestant middle-class against the mythic narratives, scissoring through the ideological premises with his deft wit:

Glengormley

"Wonders are many and none is more wonderful than man"
 Who has tamed the terrier, trimmed the hedge
 And grasped the principle of the watering-can.
 Clothes-pegs litter the window ledge
 And the long ships lie in clover. Washing lines
 Shake out white linen over the chalk thanes.

Now we are safe from monsters, and the giants
 Who tore up sods twelve miles by six
 And hurled them out to sea to become islands
 Worry us no more. The sticks
 And stones that once broke bones will not harm
 A generation of such sense and charm.

Only words hurt us now. No saint or hero,
 Landing at night from the conspiring seas,
 Brings dangerous tokens to the new era—
 Their sad names linger in the histories.
 The unreconciled, in their metaphysical pain,
 Dangle from lamp-posts in the dawn rain;

And much dies with them. I should rather praise
 A worldly time under this worldly sky—

⁷⁰² Clark, *The Ulster Renaissance*.

⁷⁰³ Marches began with the Orange Order in 1795. Banned in 1830s and 40s for causing public disturbances.

The terrier-taming, garden-watering days
Those heroes pictured as they struggled through
The quick noose of their finite being. By
Necessity, if not choice, I live here too.⁷⁰⁴

To pace fluidly through the argument being advanced here: like Heaney, Mahon too poses an opposition of worlds, one that is grounded in the particular details of his residential landscape against the grand figures of the medieval histories. Again, this middle-class territory is delineated by the acts that build and maintain a dwelling. In this instance though, they are performed not out of necessity, but by choice and a socially-codified aesthetic. These Protestant dwellers “have grasped the principle of the watering-can.” Their territorial markers have overcoded those left by their ancestors: the home’s limits are defined now by clothes pegs rather than the long ships, which are left to “lie in clover.”⁷⁰⁵ The thanes, which used to stake out the Protestant settlers’ property, are now delineated by the bunting of the washing lines. And with the rise of the industrial society came the fall, the poem notes, of the epoch of “monsters and the giants.” Here, Mahon references an old Irish myth of giants creating the sprinkle of islands by treating the land itself as projectiles. This other world is made not only through inhuman acts of strength, but is characterized from its outset by a violence that should have no place in the new one. “The sticks/And stones that once broke bones will not now harm/A generation of such sense and charm.” Mahon pushes the form to its limit, setting up a loud pattern of exact rhymes and iambic meter that only heightens his sarcasm. Stones and bones, harm and charm. The sentence brings to bear all of the aural elements of the jingle, so that the listener is left well aware that Mahon intends his own words ironically as a trope, one that even as children we contested.

And then the stanza breaks, and the poem fulfills the expectation it had sown: “Only words hurt us now.” The force of this statement is violent; with dark clouds gathering on the Ulster horizon and Catholics and Protestants throwing stones at each other in Derry, the authoritative frame of the rhyme

⁷⁰⁴ Derek Mahon. “Glengormley,” *A Rage for Order* (1992).

⁷⁰⁵ Sharp, his use of the word “clover,” which reverberates with the stereotypical imagery of Ireland.

comes tumbling down. And with it, the caesura between the two worlds—the mundane Belfast suburb of Glengormley and the fantastical world of giants—begins to blur. In the next sentence, the speaker continues to embrace the ironical turn, and the reader begins to parse the lines with bi-focal lenses. We read both “No saint or hero,/Landing at night from the conspiring seas,/Should bring dangerous tokens to the new era” and “No saint or hero...Should bring but continues to carry forward dangerous tokens” that rightly belong in the dusty tombs of the histories. Yet in Belfast, Mahon makes clear, these historical emblems have real meaning for the “the unreconciled, in their metaphysical pain.” They dangle like flags from the lamp-posts in the dawn-rain. In Heaney’s comparison, the *omphalos* of the village pump and the grand movements of American troops occupy the same moment along the linear axis of the Gregorian calendar, “but all of that great historical action does not disturb the rhythms of the yard.” They exist as two heterogeneous units of space-time that do not communicate, even as they are spatio-temporally adjacent. Mahon’s estimation in “Glengormley” is just the opposite: the “long ships lie in clover” rather than defend the Protestant settlements, and yet the past traverses the spatiotemporal distance and acts with real force in the present.

Mahon presaged this collusion from the poem’s outset when he set up the 1960s suburb through the structuring vocabulary of the heroic. “Tamed the terrier, trimmed the hedge.” But unlike in Heaney’s use of the mythic analogy in his bog poems, Mahon’s comparison gives primacy to the material differences between the two places. The principle of the watering can, indeed. The irony undercuts and destabilizes the ability of the analogy to mimetically hold. In other times and places, this device might make merely an aesthetic claim about the fallibilities of art, but in Belfast during the late 1960s, Mahon’s point is also a political and an ethical one. The blending of these two heterogeneous worlds, of their logics and imaginative horizons, is dangerous. “Much dies with them.” Like MacNeice before him, Mahon foreshadows the trauma of the Troubles and the ways in which Unionist war-myths and Republican martyrdom will take hold of this bourgeois collection of yards and washing lines. The poem’s

closing lines knock the last brick into the argument as the speaker interjects for the first time in the first-person and takes a direct and honest stance. Instead of communicating through the parallax of the ironical statement, Mahon is forthright. "I should rather praise/A worldly time under this worldly sky--/The terrier-taming, garden-watering days." Ultimately, Mahon says, the epoch of monster and giants, of a radical heroic individual who violently wrests his home out of a hostile chaos, never existed—at least not with the glory and splendor and heroism that we imagine. This world of bourgeois security is what "those heroes pictured as they struggled through/The quick noose of their finite being." And it is ludicrous to attempt to bring their epoch back, the speaker warns, even as we might wish for something other than the mundane rituals of letting out the dog or cutting the yard. "By/Necessity, if not by choice, I live here too." Mahon expresses disappointment with both worlds, that of the newly-bourgeois neighborhood's alienation and that of the mythical hero, but as an individual grounded in the former, he does not advocate running into a dangerous other-world that the Unionists might envision.

In "Poem beginning with a line by Cavafy," Mahon takes this critique further. Playing off of the Protestants' limited and reductive image of the Catholic population, he explores how Protestants tended to disavow these worldly times and their terriers and instead overlay a history-obsessed and paranoid sectarianism when it came to dealing with their so-to-speak "Other."

Poem Beginning with a Line by Cavafy

It is night and the barbarians have not come.
It was not always so hard;
When the great court flared
With gallowglasses and language difficulty
A man could be a wheelwright and die happy.

We remember oatmeal and mutton,
Harpsong, a fern table for
Wiping your hands on,
A candle of reeds and butter,
The distaste of the rheumatic chronicler,

A barbarous tongue, and herds like cloud-shadow
Roaming the wet hills

When the hills were young,
Whiskery pikemen and their spiky dogs
Preserved in woodcuts and card-catalogues.

Now it is night and the barbarians have not come.
Or if they have we only recognize
Harsh as a bombed bathroom,
The frantic anthropologisms
And lazarous ironies behind their talk

Of fitted carpets, central heating
And automatic gear-change—
Like the bleached bones of a hare
Or a handful of spent
Cartridges on a deserted rifle range.⁷⁰⁶

The poem begins with a succinct assertion of the Unionist affective position: “It is night and the barbarians have not come.” Mahon’s verse hearkens back to Hewitt’s exercise of Protestant self-definition, “The colony.”⁷⁰⁷ Here too, the poem moves into a reductive historical narrative to unpack the conflict-ridden relationship between the native Catholics and the Protestant settlers from Scotland and England. The poem stereotypes the Irish accoutrements of home: “We remember oatmeal and mutton,/Harpsong, a fern table for/Wiping your hands on,/A candle of reeds and butter.” And it paints the historical landscape in broad strokes, as did Hewitt. Lines like “Herds like cloud-shadow/Roaming the wet hills/When the hills were young” and “They gathered secret, deep in the dripping glens,/chanting their prayers before a lichened rock” could easily have been drawn from either poem (the first is Mahon and the second Hewitt). And it gives consideration to the difficulties that the Protestant settlers have faced in dealing with the “barbarian populations.” Back in the early days when the Catholics existed fully on the cultural and political margins of the territory, the speaker in Mahon’s poem tells us, “it was not always so hard.” The native populations posed a problem for those in the great court, not for the

⁷⁰⁶ Mahon, “Poem beginning with a line by Cavafy,” *A Rage for Order* (1992).

⁷⁰⁷ Hewitt too echoes this affective current of deep fear: “We had to build in stone for ever after./That terror dogs us; back of all our thought/the threat behind the dream, those beacons flare,/and we run headlong screaming in our fear.” “The colony,” lines 36-39.

working classes. "A man could be a wheelwright and die happy." Today, the speaker tells us, the Protestants are motivated by the same fear, yet the affect has now become democratized. Every man and woman worries about the threat of Catholic retaliation.

"Now it is night and the barbarians have not come." Disaster has struck, and yet the barbarian, the image of the radical Other, that we have anticipated for all these years, has not materialized. Here is the first definitive turn of the poem's argument; here we see Mahon's break from the Protestant structure of feeling propagated by Hewitt in "The colony." For Hewitt criticizes the "one or two loud voices [that] would restore/the rack, the yellow patch, the curfewed ghetto,"⁷⁰⁸ but he does not seriously contest the categorization of the Catholics as an exterior and radically different collective from his own. Their deficiencies can be corrected by just treatment, by adequate amounts of bread. While his poem sounds like Hewitt's structure of feeling, Mahon—like with the jingling nursery rhyme of "sticks and stones" in "Glengormley"—is subverting his own speaker. The stage is set in the very first line by Cavafy, which refers to a poem he wrote about a society who has come to a complete standstill on the day the barbarians are supposed to come. After walking through all of the acts of preparation, "their scarlet togas" and "beautiful canes/elegantly worked in silver and gold," Cavafy undercuts the bunker logic of the civilized-barbarian dichotomy:

Because night has fallen and the barbarians have not come.
And some who have just returned from the border say
there are no barbarians any longer.

And now, what's going to happen to us without barbarians?
They were, those people, a kind of solution.⁷⁰⁹

Mahon brings Cavafy's implosion of the barbarian concept into the poem from the beginning; the criticism underpins the rest of the verse and makes the speaker complicit with a Unionist perceptual

⁷⁰⁸ Hewitt, "The colony," lines 101-102.

⁷⁰⁹ C.P. Cavafy, "Waiting for the Barbarians," *Collected Poems*, transl. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, accessed online 24 Oct 2013, <<http://www.cavafy.com/poems/content.asp?id=119&cat=1>>.

field. The aestheticized images of young hills and herds, of fern tables and harpsong, is the figurative equivalent to the nursery rhyme's singsong. The innocence of their depictions now takes on a concrete political cast. After all, "They were, those people, a kind of solution." And Hewitt's decision to temper the Catholics, to bring them into the middle-class fold, is not to collapse the barbarian imaginary. In fact, to do so only leaves the Unionists, from wheelwright on up, hunting for signs that the barbarian has come in every mundane detail. If they have come, "we only recognize" their presence by reading through "their talk/Of fitted carpets, central heating/And automatic gear-change." This time, the Catholic hordes have not come to torch the houses. This time, the barbarism lies with the Provisionals' bombing campaign ("Harsh as a bombed bathroom"); yet the Unionists continue to find the barbarian hiding beneath the veneer of middle-class concerns. As much as they attempt to ape the rhythms of our civilized experience, the speaker declaims, we can still recognize their artifice, "the frantic anthropologisms/And lazarous ironies." The subtext for Mahon's poem: Seek and ye shall find. And so while Hewitt's "The colony" continues to romanticize the past and treat the Catholics as an Other, Mahon deconstructs the Unionist perceptual field. Their mode of seeings is fossilized and insubstantial, "like the bleached bones of a hare;" the barbarian imaginary has the Protestants shooting at a target that no longer exists, in a place that is no longer populated. It is as useful as "a handful of spent/Cartridges on a deserted rifle range."

In "Poem beginning with a line by Cavafy," Mahon takes on the Protestant structure of feeling promulgated by Hewitt but with the formal tools and parallax flexibility wielded by MacNeice. In "Ecclesiastes," he takes on MacNeice's structure of feeling ("I...am astonished by MacNeice's passionate, angry, and *unpoetic* encounters with place"⁷¹⁰) and his poetic musculature.

Ecclesiastes

God, you could grow to love it, God-fearing, God-
chosen purist little puritan that,

⁷¹⁰ Flynn, *Incorrigibly Plural* 70.

for all your wiles and smiles, you are (the
dank churches, the empty streets,
the shipyard silence, the tied-up swings) and
shelter your cold heart from the heat
of the world, from woman-inquisition, from the
bright eyes of children. Yes you could
wear black, drink water, nourish a fierce zeal
with locusts and wild honey, and not
feel called upon to understand and forgive
but only to speak with a bleak
afflatus, and love the January rains when they
darken the dark doors and sink hard
into the Antrim hills, the bog meadows, the heaped
graves of your fathers. Bury that red
bandana and stick, that banjo; this is your
country, close one eye and be king.
Your people await you, their heavy washing
flaps for you in the housing estates—
a credulous people. God, you could do it, God
help you, stand on a corner stiff
with rhetoric, promising nothing under the sun.

The poem doesn't lilt; it spits. *You God-chosen purist little puritan*. The sounds break and fracture against one another. An aural violence. Mahon's anger runs palpably through the lines, which mimic the staccato pacing and direct address of the fiery Protestant preacher. Yet the forceful repetition, both aural and syntactical, along with the dark-edged imagery lets us know that Mahon is lambasting the preacher and those susceptible to his "fierce zeal." After all, the first three lines take the traditional tropes of liturgical oratory and push them to their limit; the speaker uses the word "God" three times in the first line. The strong trochaic meter augments the imperative tense. (Trochees are also used to create a sense of devolution and breakdown.) And the consonants are punishing, as is the rhyme. "Love it" and "little" echo each other across the lines, followed by the immediate doubling—without the expected respite of a common—of "purist" as "puritan," which takes the moral connotation and completely subverts it as insult. In case we missed the ironical undercurrent, Mahon then gives us the

clichéd and singsong phrase “for all your wiles and smiles.” The preacher is clearly not someone we are supposed to respect.⁷¹¹

The momentum of the first three lines then breaks, as the verse runs into the bracketed description of the city; the four appositives too are relentless. The city they depict is little more than a wasteland, a hollow shell of what once might have been when people socialized in the streets and the shipyards employed men and the children played on public swings. The line break of “...you are (the

dank churches...”

is beautiful craftsmanship. By ending the line on three unstressed syllables, Mahon sets up a tremendous sense of expectation in the reader, given how regularly his trochaic and iambic patterns have been thus far. And then that expectation is fulfilled by the monosyllabic punch, “dank,” which evokes a sense of neglect and rot. The double spondees—“dank churches”—slows the reader down and ties together Protestantism and the city’s decomposition. Here, Mahon’s syntactical flexibility makes itself felt, as the reader can see the cityscape, through one eye, as simply the speaker’s attempt to situate the poem and, through the other eye, as directly equated to the Protestant preacher. *You are the dank churches*. This wrecked city is the Unionist preacher’s territory, not in the sense of proprietary ownership but in the Deleuzian sense of belonging to it. Reverend Ian Paisley and the rest of his rabid ilk belong to the empty streets; they are its creatures. Mahon continues in this vein by contrasting the desolate heart of the preacher with “the heat of the world.” (This reliance of heat-coldness imagery appears throughout Mahon’s work, which supports Michael Longley’s point that Mahon is a poet of air and fire, compared to Heaney as earth and water.)⁷¹² He punctuates his laconic critique of puritanical Protestantism with parallel clauses and end rhymes: “from woman-inquisition, from the/ bright eyes of

⁷¹¹ Which is an ironic twist on the source material, Ecclesiastes, which is generally translated as teacher or preacher.

⁷¹² Michael Longley, introduction, *In their element: A Selection of Poems*, Seamus Heaney and Derek Mahon (Belfast: Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1977).

children.”⁷¹³ In place of these familial relationships, the speaker tells us, the Protestant clergyman would adopt the ascetic lifestyle, a la John the Baptist: “Yes you could/wear black, drink water, nourish a fierce zeal/with locusts and honey.” The meter and diction here is equally ascetic—monosyllabic rather than mellifluous, highly stressed rather than lilting, consonantal rather than euphonious, syntactically fragmented rather than sinuous. It too speaks “with a bleak/afflatus.” Or “like a speeded-up corncrake/[whose] sharp ratcheting kept on and on.”⁷¹⁴ Mahon buries the most political critique in the middle of the sentence’s unspooling. This structure of feeling does not call upon “you to understand and forgive/but only to speak” with a sense of divine approval. Nothing in it rings of compromise or negotiation, or even of mutual respect and recognition—merely a cold, self-aggrandizing dogmatism.

Thus far, the poem has confined the Unionist territory to an urban desert of sorts, and that too is done through the bracketed aside. But as the verse continues, Mahon links the aestheticized landscapes of Ulster to the Unionist imaginary—much as the Catholics too exert a claim over images of rural Ireland. There are no warm bodies for the Protestant preacher to love; instead, he loves the romanticized vision of his homeland:

the January rains when they
 darken the dark doors and sink hard
 into the Antrim hills, the bog meadows, the heaped
 graves of your fathers

Again, Mahon’s formal choices foreground the second line in particular by breaking with the expected iambic patterning and condensing strong rhymes into a short space. It begins with trochee—“darken”—and then obsesses over the sound for the next two breaths with the quick repetition of “dark” and then the book-end of “hard.” All of these words, while strong in a poem to begin with, are hammered here acoustically, coating the easily-picturesque landscape in a black and unfamiliar light. In

⁷¹³ Again, the clever turn of the line break sets up the double stress of “bright eyes,” and in turn highlights its cliché so as to make the pastor’s stance seem even more radical.

⁷¹⁴ Heaney, “Casting and Gathering.”

the Unionist mythology too, the graves of your ancestors serve as meaningful markers of territorial extension. And they exert pressure upon those individuals now living to take up their mantle. Forget the personal motivations towards travel or adventure. Try to live differently, the speaker invites, but your dreams of escape are nothing but the emptiness of clichés. The poem instructs, “Bury that red/bandana and stick, that banjo; this is your/country, close one eye and be king.”⁷¹⁵ The trope of the vagabond is set against the nationalist imperative of the homeland where the MacNeician parallax still governs the perceptual field. The Unionist imaginary closes its eye to the real situation and concerns of the Catholic “Other;” their strategies of political control and dominance depend upon. “And now what’s going to happen to us without barbarians? They were, those people, a kind of solution.”⁷¹⁶

Throughout, the poem has contested the notion that this kingdom with its dank churches and cold heart has been worth ruling. Yet in the final few lines, Mahon is at his most prescient. “Your people await you.” Whereas these rabid Protestant preachers might have only existed as a vocal minority when Hewitt penned “The colony” in the 1940s, they have acquired a certain political and affective resonance among the Ulster Protestants as the 1960s wane. To contextualize: Mahon published the poem in *The Honest Ulsterman* on May 1, 1968, just as the radical preacher, Dr. Ian Paisley, was touring the province and giving inflammatory sermons. His followers in the Unionist community would even acquire the moniker, “Paisleyites,” as a result of his growing popularity. Considering that Mahon was abroad in the U.S. at the time—and that he also contemporaneously published the poem in England—his decision to promulgate the verse in the *HU* (as well as Simmons’ acceptance of it) can be read as a kind of political intervention. In Catholic Ulster, the civil rights movement was picking up steam; at the same time, Mahon warns that the more radical Unionists are also stirring on their street corners. “Your people await you, their heavy washing/flaps for you in the housing estates” like a flag calling the preacher to

⁷¹⁵ The speaker in Ecclesiastes is also a king and instructs on the wisdom gleaned from that authoritative positioning at the head of the flock.

⁷¹⁶ Lines from Cavafy, “Waiting for the Barbarians.”

arms. As Gerald Dawe once noted in his response to "Ecclesiastes," Mahon came closer to an understanding of the nature of that community than any other poet I know."⁷¹⁷ His words echo the final chapter of Ecclesiastes and its sense of impending ruin: "Remember now thy Creator...while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble...and those that look out of the windows be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the streets...also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way...and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."⁷¹⁸ The imagery of this apocalyptic vision has percolated through Mahon's reinvention of it. Let the January rains darken the dark doors.

The final lines of Mahon's "Ecclesiastes" provide both a warning and a prayer for the larger community. "God, you could do it, God/help you." The parallelism and repetition finishes off a poem that has already circled itself into an aural frenzy. In biblical verse, the continued use of the Lord's name becomes an incantation; here, its denotation is much suppler. With the speaker's authority and position crumpling, the interjection postures as a curse, as a plea, as an exclamation of disbelief. This polyvocality is aided by Mahon's decision to position the poem in the second-person. Commonly used as a distancing device that implicates the speaker, the second-person confuses the relationship between the subject of enunciation and the subject of the statement. Who is the preacher? Is it Mahon himself? Is it a third person, like Rev. Ian Paisley? the archetypal Protestant? the reader? Through the ambiguity, Mahon is making an argument about complicity and collusion whose efficacy works deeper than a mere declarative statement ("I too feel I am responsible."). The anger and distaste that courses through the poem is not directed solely at an exterior point, but also at a Unionist imaginary that Mahon himself is implicated in by virtue of his birth and upbringing, that the reader becomes entangled with aesthetically.

⁷¹⁷ Gerald Dawe, *The Proper Word: Collected Criticism*, ed. Nicholas Allen (Creighton University Press, 2007).

⁷¹⁸ Ecclesiastes 12: 1-7. King James Bible.

Everyone awaits the coming of the Protestant preacher “stiff with rhetoric;” we are “a credulous people.” But ultimately, Mahon enjoins, this world is unworldly. It promises “nothing under the sun.”

Mahon’s critical articulation of the Unionist structure of feeling—and that of the disaffected Protestant who wishes to escape its bleak afflatus—is triangulated through his early poems, “Glengormley,” “Poem beginning with a line by Cavafy,” and “Ecclesiastes.” But these verses, while aesthetically taut and politically illuminating, do not offer an affirmative solution; he does not enunciate another territory, one whose limits are mapped through different rituals and with different spatial ground. Instead, I will look to two other pieces he published in the 1970s—“Last of the Fire Kings” and “Afterlives”—to trace how the individual wrestles with the swaddling band of a native community.⁷¹⁹ In both, he writes from the margin, either as an individual caught fast in a world he dreams of escaping or as the voyager who traverses worlds into a perpetual displacement. As Mahon later noted, “It’s practically my subject, my theme: solitude and community; the weirdness and terrors of solitude: the stifling and consolations of community. Also, the consolations of solitude.”⁷²⁰ Like MacNeice, he counters rootedness with transience, identity with dialectical subversion, and ground with flux. But unlike MacNeice, Mahon’s politics of flight is ventured more tremulously—as an inherently unstable proposition rather than a declaration. “For this, you implied, is how we ought to live: each fragile, solving ambiguity,” the younger poet told his predecessor. But in war-torn Belfast, out of its unstructurable sea, Mahon is not certain what use his poetry, even with its desperate ironies and bifocal lens, will be:

[The poet’s] posture is grandiloquent and deprecating, like this,
 his diet ashes,
 his talk of justice and his mother
 the rhetorical device
 of an etioliated emperor—

⁷¹⁹ I will also briefly venture over into his poem, “A Disused Shed in County Wexford,” but the analysis will be partial and brief.

⁷²⁰ Grennan, “Interviews: Derek Mahon.”

Nero if you prefer, no mother there.⁷²¹

And yet Mahon writes. He counters this tendency of poetry towards the totalizing and insubstantial assertions “of an etiolated emperor” (how can one not love that phrase) by writing as an individual about what he knows. MacNeice’s quotidian becomes Mahon’s eccentricity. Instead of taking up Heaney’s problematic of the *omphalos* qua the centering point of a world, Mahon explores a world’s liminality and the political possibilities of inhabiting a marginal position. This concern with the frontier consumed him from a young age, and it runs like a live wire through his work. He explained this positioning when speaking about his early attraction to choir songs as intellectual and aesthetic preoccupations rather than theological ones:

For example, let’s take a verse like this (I won’t try to sing, it’d only be embarrassing):
 “From Earth’s wide bounds, from ocean’s farthest coast, / Through gates of pearl
 streams in the countless host, / Singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost: / Hallelujah,
 Hallelujah!”

Very imperialistic, “From Earth’s wide bounds, from ocean’s farthest coast.” But the way this was printed in the hymnal was important to me: it was under the music, *far-thest*, so somehow I created a whole geography of my own, around ocean’s *far-thest*, as it were *far-flung*, coasts. The words themselves became facts, objects; and I believed in those objects, those clumped printed objects.⁷²²

To understand how he unfolds that “far-flung” structure of feeling in his poems, I now turn, briefly, to the “Last of the Fire Kings” and its mythological framing of the individual-community conflict. In the work, Mahon posits a fictitious kingdom that draws from *The Golden Bough*, an anthropological study of the priest-king who presides over the grove of the goddess Diana and its fire rites.⁷²³ Against this insular world of fire sacrifice and sovereignty wielded and won by the sword, Mahon procures a contrarian inheritor, like himself, who wishes to break the community’s rituals of violence.

The last of the fire kings

I want to be

⁷²¹ Mahon, “Rage for Order,” lines 11-16.

⁷²² Grennan, “Interviews: Derek Mahon.”

⁷²³ Hugh Haughton, *The Poetry of Derek Mahon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Like the man who descends
At two milk churns

With a bulging
String bag and vanishes
Where the lane turns,

Or the man
Who drops at night
From a moving train

And strikes out over the fields
Where fireflies glow
Not knowing a word of the language.

Either way, I am
Through with history—
Who lives by the sword

Dies by the sword.
Last of the fire kings, I shall
Break with tradition and

Die by my own hand
Rather than perpetuate
The barbarous cycle.

Five years I have reigned
During which time
I have lain awake each night

And prowled by day
In the sacred grove
For fear of the usurper,

Perfecting my cold dream
Of a place out of time,
A palace of porcelain

Where the frugivorous
Inheritors recline
In their rich fabrics
Far from the sea.

But the fire-loving
People, rightly perhaps,
Will not countenance this,

Demanding that I inhabit,
 Like them, a world of
 Sirens, bin-lids
 And bricked-up windows—

Not to release them
 From the ancient curse
 But to die their creature and be thankful.⁷²⁴

Here, the speaker is the so-heralded “last of the fire kings.” He begins with a statement powered by two similes, each of which present figures of becoming-indiscernible. Both frame individuals who break with mass-modes of conveyance and escape its grid. They strike out on their own, powered forward by their bodies through an unknown and unpeopled terrain. In the first image, “the man who descends/at two milk churns” becomes imperceptible by vanishing from sight whereas the man in Mahon’s second image escapes from the cartography of language; he “strikes out over the fields/Where fireflies glow/Not knowing a word of the language.” He becomes not an invisible body, but a mute one. Within this new discursive frame that he passes into, the world becomes unsayable. “The double-consequence of a poet’s involvement with language is complicity and revelation.”⁷²⁵

The fire king wishes for this kind of indiscernibility not as a passing fancy of anomie, but because it appears to him as necessary for his being. Notably, the very first line break casts into the ontological depths with its definitive “I want to be;” its ripples will spread outward through the rest of the poem, forcing the reader to question what it means to be, both as the specter of an individual passing through and as a situated position within a hierarchical collectivity. Mahon reiterates this reading with his line breaks in the fifth stanza. No matter which of the two indiscernibilities I choose, the speaker tells us, “Either way, I am.” And this ontological argument becomes more complex and nuanced. The fire king “is

⁷²⁴ Derek Mahon, “The last of the fire kings,” *A Rage for Order* (1992).

⁷²⁵ Geoffrey Hill, quoted in Michael Kenneally, *Poetry in Contemporary Irish Literature* (Washington DC: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995) 189.

through with history” and its violent assertions of sovereignty;⁷²⁶ he opts instead for the radical present. *You never step in the same river twice.* There are always fields being crossed, trains to drop out of, lanes to vanish down. To stay within the historical frame is to fall prey to its logic. “Whoever lives by the sword dies by the sword.” Even now, the fire king lives an existence mottled by fear and an ever-present threat. “Five years I have reigned...I have lain awake each night/And prowled by day/In the sacred grove/For fear of the usurper.” The anxiety induces in him an inhuman state, one more akin to a beast who marks and defends his territory. Again, Mahon foregrounds the logic of the bunker and its exteriorized threat; the sacred grove holds as a center. But this time, the fire king does not fear the barbarians but his own people. His paranoia has been internalized, making unstable and uncertain even the home. It is night and the usurper has not come.

Against his eventual death and against the non-being he currently experiences, the “last of the fire kings...shall break with tradition and/Die by my own hand/Rather than perpetuate/The barbarous cycle.” Already, Mahon tells us, there is no Outside; the only escape is death at the hour of your own choosing. But still the fire king can dream. Against this affective logic of precarity and its “barbaric cycle of violence,” the speaker imagines this alterity. It is “a cold dream/Of a place out of time,/A palace of porcelain.” Riffing off the cold-heat opposition, the poem sets up this inert realm as a foil to the fiery logic of the world. The channeling and dissipation of heat occurs in time, not in the petrified zone of an Outside. Here, Mahon plays with the words “place” and “palace” and the one letter that divides them traditionally from one another; he conflates the homology and the homonym. Their adjacency within the lines, along with the apposite syntactical structure, effects an equivocation between them. Occupying a place is necessarily an act of sovereignty; so too is constructing one. The concept of a “place” and that of a “palace” blend into one another, and both exist outside of time in the speaker’s

⁷²⁶ The stanza break here draws an equivocation between “history” and the notion of “living by the sword,” which fits into the Unionist and Catholic ideological origin stories.

imaginative topography. Mahon's leeriness of "placed-based" thinking pops through as unstable, inorganic and conditioning with regards to its contents ("porcelain" *qua* vessel). And then he takes it a step further by identifying which people belong to this cold dream of a territory:

Where the frugivorous
Inheritors recline
In their rich fabrics
Far from the sea.

The speaker's alternative world is ideal, and it is populated by idealized individuals whose appetites run only towards the sweet flesh of fruit rather than that of their sovereign. They wear rich garb; their proper haunt is far from the ocean's flux and radical resistance to definition. "Water and ground in their extremity."⁷²⁷ Mahon positions the frugivorous and their palace at the opposite pole from the "far-flung coasts" he dreamt of as a child singing in the church choir. And so while the reader might be lured in by the images of indiscernibility that the last fire king draws in the first four stanzas, Mahon cautions against too ready an escape from the visual and communicable field. His stance echoes these lines from Paul Muldoon:

In dreams begins responsibilities;
it was on account of just such an allegory
that Lorca
was riddled with bullets

and lay mouth-down
in the fickle shadow of his own blood.⁷²⁸

The dream might exist, yet even its creation does not allow Lorca to step outside of time or to avoid the consequences of the real struggles that Lorca's dream attempts to intervene in or escape from. Similarly, the fire king finds that his people will not him go. "But the fire-loving/People, rightly perhaps,/Will not countenance this." This give, this sense that the fire people might possess a claim on the fire king's presence in their world, marks the turn in the poem; one could read this counterforce as

⁷²⁷ Heaney, "The Peninsula," *Faber Book* (1986) line 16.

⁷²⁸ Paul Muldoon, "Louis," *A Rage for Order* (1992).

an ethical or an ontological assertion. Either way, the heat of the world exerts itself upon the speaker with real force. And with it, Mahon leaves behind the sacred grove for Belfast, for “a world of/Sirens, bin-lids/And bricked-up windows.” The mythical distance collapses, and we see the affective position of the fire king is Mahon’s; he is the inheritor of “the barbarous cycle” and he wishes to be, to drop at night from a moving train and strike out over unnamed, unmarked fields. Mahon cannot leave behind the Northern Irish nor can he break the cycle of violence simply by leaving (either into an otherworldly imperceptibility or into death) or by staying. Instead he is called “to die their creature and be thankful.” In “The Last of the Fire Kings,” Mahon problematizes MacNeice’s double-sight, his insistence on transience and traversal as a way of living. These ambiguities are solving, but fragile,⁷²⁹ and sometimes they cannot hold, rightly perhaps. The fire-loving people—and their territory of bricked-up windows and bombed streetscapes--demand the poet’s presence, the Protestant individual’s complicity. *By necessity, if not by choice, I live here too.*

Yet both options—staying in the grove and escape—remain ultimately unlivable, the poem asserts. While the imagination may push against the historical framing of its native community, it cannot sustain life in its palace of porcelain. The Unionist ideology exerts a steady pull towards its center. One could read “The last of the fire kings” as a nihilistic vision: you may choose to live outside time or to die their creature, but either way you will pass into nonexistence. And certainly that darkness undergirds the verse; with Mahon, there always exists the threat that everything is on a precipice of chaos. Yet, given the poet’s previous critiques of mythic-historicism in the Unionist and Catholic imaginaries, it is telling that he decides to locate his verse in a sacred grove manned by a priest-king. I argue that the ontological failures of the mythic setting problematize the role poetry plays in the propagation of these sectarian imaginaries. As a member of the Protestant minority, Mahon frets in the shadow of his

⁷²⁹ A reference back to Mahon’s elegy for MacNeice, “In Carrowdore Churchyard.” He wrote, “This, you implied, is how we ought to live./The ironical, loving crush of roses against snow,/Each fragile, solving ambiguity.”

community's constructed territory and its "barbaric cycle of violence." To write in the mythic formulation is to put faith in the mimetic power of those figures to adequately represent and map the world. Matters of expression are primarily appropriative. Within the mythical structure—with its clean corners and reductive dichotomies of civilized-barbarian, fire-loving and cold-hearted—there is no other alternative path. "I want to be" indiscernible, the last fire king tells us, but the Protestant community, "rightly perhaps,/Will not countenance this,/Demanding that I inhabit,/Like them, a world of/Sirens." If the poem is content to map these rusticative ideologies' imaginaries, it becomes complicit, Mahon tells us. There might be other maps, other territories that can be drawn that would not support the ideological center as it exerts its controlling gaze over the periphery. Carson will ultimately take up the problem of the discursively-constructed map more fully in his work than Mahon does. But in "The last of the fire kings," Mahon sets up a critique of mimetic language and the poet's faith in its stable ability to represent the world. Many things can be done with the world that cannot be coded in this paper world.

Against the stability of the mimetic, Mahon seeks to move between worlds in his poem, "Afterlives." The voyage, he argues, is in itself a restful step out of time, but in a different way than the petrified dream of a "palace of porcelain."

Afterlives
for James Simmons

I

I wake in a dark flat
To the soft roar of the world.
Pigeons neck on the white
Roofs as I draw the curtains
And look out over London
Rain-fresh in the morning light.

This is our element, the bright
Reason on which we rely
For the long-term solutions.
The orators yap and guns
Go off in a back-street;

But the faith does not die

That in our time these things
Will amaze the literate children
In their non-sectarian schools
And the dark places be
Ablaze with love and poetry
When the power of good prevails.

What middle-class cunts we are
To imagine for one second
That our privileged ideals
Are divine wisdom, and the dim
Forms that kneel at noon
In the city are not ourselves.

2

I am going home by sea
For the first time in years.
Somebody thumbs a guitar
On the dark deck, while a gull
Dreams at the masthead,
The moon-splashed waves exult.

At dawn the ship trembles, turns
In a wide arc to back
Shuddering up the grey lough
Past lightship and buoy,
Slipway and dry dock
Where a naked bulb burns;

And I step ashore in a fine rain
To a city so changed
By five years of war
I scarcely recognize
The places I grew up in,
The faces that try to explain.

But the hills are still the same
Grey-blue above Belfast.
Perhaps if I'd stayed behind
And lived it bomb by bomb
I might have grown up at last
And learnt what is meant by home.⁷³⁰

⁷³⁰ Derek Mahon, "Afterlives," *A Rage for Order* (1992).

The first segment of the poem begins brightly; London is “rain-fresh in the morning light.” Under such a sky, the world and its rhythms serve as little more than ambient noise for the individual to wake up in; it does not impress itself upon him. He can choose to draw the curtains and pay it mind or not. “The orators yap, and guns/Go off in a back-street,” but they remain in the backdrop, akin to the pigeons necking on the white roofs. It is a world apart from the sirens of Belfast where “the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament.” And Mahon identifies it as a world of light where “reason” seeks and stabilizes “long-term solutions” to a worsening Ulster crisis. For the Northern Irish expats living in places like London, “the faith does not die/That in our time these things/Will amaze the literate children/In their non-sectarian schools.” The lines move briskly with the diction and promise of political rhetoric; Mahon hollows out his assertions even as he promulgates them. But the second clause’s use of the present subjunctive (“And the dark places be/Ablaze) implies that faith and desire undergird the statement more so than any bright reason. The verse’s descent in to the general language of “love,” “poetry,” and “the power of good” is capped off with Mahon’s choice of the verb “prevail”—a possibility that seems completely precluded by the bombing campaigns and retaliatory assassinations that riddle the Ulster communities.

The stanza break marks a radical turn in Mahon’s tone. The anger and disbelief that simmered underneath the speaker’s previous statements breaches the poem’s surface. The shift is violent, as is the diction, and it hits the ear with force of a curse: “What middle-class cunts we are.” For the first time, notably, Mahon makes clear that the rabid sectarian imaginaries—along with the bulk of their destructive consequences—find fertile soil in the working-class populations, both Catholic and Protestant. In general, upper-middle class Protestants lived in entirely different portions of Belfast than those neighborhoods that played host to paramilitary action. Mahon tells us that the stability of the bourgeois comforts obfuscates the sight, makes it easy to believe in a resolution that has no force on the

ground in Ulster. The inclusion of the speaker in the epithet invokes Mahon's own guilt; for a middle-class individual also possesses the ability to leave the province, to "wake in a dark flat/To the soft roar of the world" in London rather than to the bombs in Belfast. He criticizes, both himself and others, for forgetting this Unionist structure of feeling and its vehemence. Who are we to consider "our privileged ideals [as] divine wisdom?" Mahon asks. That criticism finds voice as well in the competing registers of his diction. Whereas before the poem flitted through the eloquent and refined terms of an educated elite, the insertion of the derogative and guttural word, "cunts," drops into the coarser tones of a working-class man. The poem blends the two communities' vocabularies; Mahon argues that the collusion and complicity does not stop there. The middle-class idealists should recognize in those "dim forms that kneel at noon/In the city" their own likeness. Mahon finds no relief in London where he is plagued by the guilt of existing at a distance, one that enables him to imagine solving yet false interventions into the political miasma.

Instead, the speaker only finds a moment of respite when on a boat home to Ulster after a years-long exile. There, in between London's reason and Ulster's violence, Mahon is caught in the dreamlike space of the night voyage. "Somebody thumbs a guitar/On the dark deck, while a gull/Dreams at the masthead." In the midst of the sea, no marks nor maps can be made. Instead, the speaker and his companions step into an otherworldly place where "the moon-splashed waves exult." The move towards the aesthetic is not a solution, but a moment of decentering, displacement, self-abeyance in which the speaker does not have to work hard to make, maintain, or work against the dictates of identity. Somebody plays the guitar; it does not matter who. But Mahon's verse tells us the displacement to be found in the voyage (whether that be into art or within the immediacy of the boat deck) is only temporary. "At dawn the ship trembles; turns/In a wide arc to back/Shuddering up the grey lough." The poet makes landfall again, but this time, the imagery is industrial, spare. The boat crosses

the Ulster threshold and into its structure of feeling, moving past “Slipway and dry dock/Where a naked bulb burns.” Yet even though the entry point remains the same, Mahon disembarks to find:

a city so changed
By five years of war
I scarcely recognize
The places I grew up in,
The faces that try to explain.

The Belfast he grew up in exists no longer. Its territory has changed, as have the faces of those belonging to it. Against the “barbaric cycle of violence” in his mythical fire kingdom, Mahon positions “a city so changed/By five years of war” that it is verging on the imperceptible. The knowledge that the speaker had accumulated of its terrain as a young boy has become almost useless; he moves the streets almost like a foreigner who then disappears without a trace. Also, the usual process of discursively mapping Ulster no longer holds up; those individuals who stayed behind cannot narrate. For narration would involve a causal ligature, and they perhaps cannot fathom it. Hewitt might speak for Mahon here:

I was living in England in '68-'69 when the troubles broke out, and I wrote my political poems *The Ulster Reckoning* at that time. Since I've come back to live in Ulster in '72 I've written very few of them. But what I wrote then was rhetoric, politic rhetoric. It was polemical stuff made possible by my distance from the situation as a resident of Coventry. But now I find you can't write about the troubles – they're too immediate.⁷³¹

For this territory is not performed by public funeral processions or by manning the walls for the barbarians' arrival; the war-torn structure of feeling Mahon encounters has been enacted bomb by bomb, siren by siren, death notice by death notice. To take Heaney's promise in “The Peninsula” seriously here: “...now you will uncode all landscapes/By this: things founded clean on their own shapes,/Water and ground in their extremity.”⁷³² While the Antrim hills remain the same in their perch above Belfast, the city itself and its things are changing. Form has become unstable as buildings crumple, streets become barricaded, windows bricked to keep out the gaze. “The cavities/Glow black in the

⁷³¹ Kearney, “Beyond the Planter and Gael.”

⁷³² Heaney. “Peninsula.” Lines __.

rubbled city's/Broken mouth."⁷³³ The hotel has lost its front façade, and now its interior is bared, "a rifled honeycomb."⁷³⁴ Mahon does not recognize these things and their forms any longer. To belong to this surreal scene, the speaker tells us, he could not have left: "Perhaps if I'd...lived it bomb by bomb/I might have grown up at last/And learnt what is meant by home." Mahon does not belong, either to the fire-loving people or to the bombed city, because he did not live its rhythms. He is one displaced, dislocated, left without an understanding of or anchoring in an *omphalos*. (Here, he foreshadows Carson, who does live the Troubles bomb by bomb in Belfast and dedicates himself to a documentation of the changing, unstable, devolving order of things.)

Throughout his work, Mahon has harshly criticized the particular territorial construction effected by the Unionist imaginary, which he finds insular, stale, and ultimately decomposing. His poem, "A Disused Shed in County Wexford," explores such a figure through a meditation on a neglected colony of mushrooms growing in the etoliated environs of the shed. "There have been deaths...and nightmares, born of these and the grim/Dominion of stale air and rank moisture." The speaker becomes a pseudo-anthropologist, telling us that those mushrooms located closes to the periphery are fighting to escape. (Who does this remind me of?) The rest of the community:

dim in a twilight of crumbling
Utensils and broken flower-pots, groaning
For their deliverance have been so long
Expectant that there is left only the posture.

The individuals are begging the poet to articulate their plight. "We too had our lives to live." The swaddling band of community is strangling the individuals, as it does in many of Mahon's poems about the Unionists.

Yet in "Afterlives," the poem does not take a side—home or exile, territory or sea. Instead, Mahon sets them up both as techniques of self-location that can at times be grounding or constraining,

⁷³³ Written of the Derry cityscape, but still evocative. Derek Mahon. "Derry Morning," Lines ____.

⁷³⁴ John Montague. "Cave." line 1.

freeing or meaningless. The speaker cannot access the stable ground of home, but he also deploys a wistful take on the notion of belonging to a place. *Perhaps then I might have finally grown up.* And this co-implication of stability and flight comes back to one of the conceptual breaks that Mahon's work makes from that of MacNeice. To put it simply, Mahon is turns towards entropy whereas MacNeice was drawn in by a more neutral concept, that of flux.⁷³⁵ "I am in a sad state over art and am all for flux as opposed to hard lines," the young MacNeice wrote a friend in 1926.⁷³⁶ His perceptual field remained tied to constant state of movement where particles pass over and through the stable orderings we give it. It is not grounded, but its instability possess no negative valence. Where MacNeice sees order and flux as two oppositional forces, Mahon co-implicates them;⁷³⁷ his poems locate temporary and unstable points that only serve to dissipate energy.⁷³⁸ Through his figuration and his formal choices, Mahon sets up centers of order and regulation within a general milieu of chaos. In Nagoya, Japan, the poet Basho attends a snow party: "There is a tinkling of china/And tea into china;/ There are introductions."⁷³⁹ Yet they gather to watch from the window as the curtain of snow falls "on Nagoya...It is falling/Like leaves on the cold sea." This ordered party is devoid of heat, noise, uncertainty, and other modes of dissipative energy. Yet, "elsewhere they are burning/Witches and heretics/In the boiling squares." Elsewhere, "thousands have died since dawn." Mahon's verse ruminates on the Joycean chaosmos—a "cosmos at the verge of chaos, one that is surging toward the exciting possibility of going out of existence, struggling onward at the edge of the existential abyss."⁷⁴⁰ Edna Longley touched on this difference

⁷³⁵ Haughton, *The Poetry of Derek Mahon*.

⁷³⁶ Quoted in Edna Longley, *MacNeice*.

⁷³⁷ As one critic wrote of Mahon in *Poetry Nation*: "One sometime suspects Mahon finds the whole of human civilization a fragile barely credible brief fluke on the blackness of the universe." Andrew Waterman, "Somewhere, Out there, Beyond: The Poetry of Seamus Heaney and Derek Mahon," *Poetry Nation*, 1981, 39.

⁷³⁸ This analysis echoes with debates today around the nature of entropy and negentropy in the constitution and telos of life. It does not seek to advance a truth claim in that larger debate, but merely to characterize the imagistic and formal tendencies at work in Mahon's verse.

⁷³⁹ Derek Mahon, "The Snow Party," lines 4-6; 10; 14-15.

⁷⁴⁰ Joyce, quoted online, 2 Nov 2013, <<http://echaosmos.blogspot.com/2007/03/james-joyce-used-term-chaosmos-to.html>>.

between the two Protestant poets in her review of Mahon's first volume, *Night Crossing*. "Like MacNeice Mahon answers darkness with light," she wrote. "But just as his darkness is blacker and bleaker so his light is steadier and more complex."⁷⁴¹

⁷⁴¹ Edna Longley, review of *Night Crossing*, *The Honest Ulsterman* 8 (Dec 1968).

Conclusion: “*This, you implied, is how we ought to live. The ironical, loving crush of roses against snow, each fragile, solving ambiguity.*”

F.R. Higgins

I am afraid, Mr. MacNeice, you, as an Irishman, cannot escape from your blood, nor from our blood-music that brings the racial character to mind. Irish poetry remains a creation happily, fundamentally rooted in rural civilization, yet aware of and in touch with the elementals of the future...

Louis MacNeice

I am still unconverted. I think one may have such a thing as one's racial blood-music, but that, like one's consciousness, it may be left to take care of itself...Compared with you, I take a rather common-sense view of history. I think that the poet is a sensitive instrument designed to record anything which interests his mind or affects his emotions. If a gasometer, for instance, affects his emotions, or if the Marxian dialectic, let us say, interests his mind, then let them come into his poetry. He will be fulfilling his function as a poet if he records these things with integrity and with as much music as he can compass or as is appropriate to the subject.⁷⁴²

In lieu of writing an introduction to his 1986 *Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, Muldoon excerpted this segment of a radio discussion held between Irish poets F.R. Higgins and MacNeice in 1939. Apart from saving him the necessity of saying something definitive on the subject, the selection also takes a literary stand against the romantic view of “Irish blood-music.” (The word ‘racist’ also comes to mind, given the contemporary discursive practices.) “...All this nonsense about the ritual, blood music, some notion of purity of Irish poetry...more than anything else, that's a vision of Irish poetry I wanted to debunk,” Muldoon noted in an interview years later.⁷⁴³ To counter it, he turned, like so many others in his generation had, to MacNeice and his view of the poet as a sensitive instrument for recording the meaningful facets of his own experience. In the 20th century, Irish poetry has struggled to define itself as something other than the British's stereotype of bucolic exoticism.⁷⁴⁴ For a number of younger poets,

⁷⁴² Quoted as an extended epigraph/introduction in Paul Muldoon's *The Faber Book of Irish Verse*. 1987. Taken from *Tendencies in Modern Poetry*. Radio discussion between F.R. Higgins and Louis MacNeice broadcast by BBC Northern Ireland. Reprinted in *The Listener*, 27 July 1939.

⁷⁴³ James S.F. Wilson, “Paul Muldoon, The Art of Poetry No. 87,” *The Paris Review* 169 (Spring 2004), accessed online, 4 Nov 2013, <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/30/the-art-of-poetry-no-87-paul-muldoon>>.

⁷⁴⁴ Thwaite, rev. of *Door into the Dark*, *The New Statesman*, 1969.

that contestation has materialized as a rejection of rusticative identities and imaginaries. Even among writers like Hewitt and Heaney, the place-based logic they espoused tied not to a “racial character” but to the daily rhythms and social relationships constitutive of Irish life. Heaney writes poems about rural craftsmen like “The Thatcher” or the “Water Diviner” not as a way of connecting with some idealized notion of the Irish race, but out of a nostalgia for his childhood that calls him to “record these things with integrity and with as much music as he can compass.” Just as the Northern Irish people affirmed a pluralistic view of their communities against the simple black-white dichotomy the British media paints of Ulster in its news reports,⁷⁴⁵ the Northern writers affirmed a multiplicity of aesthetic commitments against the simple and homogenous conception of the Irish poet with his blood-music. The Northern Irish might have done well to borrow from MacNeice when confronting both British and Irish reductionisms: “Nor need you be troubled to pin me down in my room/For the room and I will escape.”⁷⁴⁶

But the Belfast writers, while they did not cohere into an aesthetic school or a literary cohort, did inhabit and write through a common collective assemblage of enunciation. By writing from an Ulster context, they necessarily participated in a shared discursive musculature of subjectivizing claims, implied suppositions, and performative enunciations. This assemblage, like the population as a whole, contained a general divide between the Catholic and Protestant vocabularies. They constituted two differentiated voices in the collective assemblage’s dialogue, but evolved together through their mutual implications and reactions against one another. To return to Deleuze and Guattari: “What comes first is...a collective assemblage resulting in the determination of relative subjectivation proceedings, or assignments of

⁷⁴⁵ “As to the jottings and analyses/Of politicians and newspapermen/Who’ve scribbled down the long campaign from gas/And protest to gelignite and Sten,/Who proved upon their pulses ‘escalate,’/‘Backlash’ and ‘crackdown,’ ‘the provisional wing,’/‘Polarization’ and ‘long-standing hate.’/ Yet I live here, I live here too, I sing.” Seamus Heaney, “Whatever you do say nothing,” *A Rage for Order* (1992).

⁷⁴⁶ MacNeice, “Versions of Heraclitus,” *Selected Poems*.

individuality and their shifting distribution within discourse.”⁷⁴⁷ Carson demonstrates how a collective assemblage of enunciation creates the social grids of perceptual and affective intelligibility in his poem, “The Irish for No.” Here, he points to how the disjunction between the Protestant and Catholic discursive regimes rendering certain words unsayable and certain images imperceptible:

It was time to turn into the dog’s-leg short-cut from Chlorine Gardens
 Into Cloreen Park, where you might see an *Ulster Says No* scrawled on the side
 Of the power-block – which immediately reminds me of the Eglantine Inn
 Just on the corner: on the missing *h* of Cloreen, you might say. We were debating,
 Bacchus and the pardes and me, how to render *The Ulster Bank – The Bank
 That Likes to Say Yes* into Irish, and whether eglantine was alien to Ireland.
I cannot see what flowers are at my feet, when *yes* is the verb repeated,
 Not exactly yes, but phatic nods and whispers.⁷⁴⁸

As a whole, Carson’s poem is a recapitulation of Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale.” He takes a number of lines and phrases directly from the British poet’s reverie: “I cannot see what flowers are at my feet” and “pastoral eglantine” and “drink and leave the world unseen” and “The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.” But unlike in Keats’ famous work, this is not a dreamlike reverie on the otherworldly and death-defying caesura of art. Carson answers Keats with the nightmare of Belfast where just walking the streets is enough to make the speaker ask, “*Was it a vision or a waking dream?*” The nightingale’s warble confuses the perceptual grid for Keats by pulling him out of the world with its deathly finality; in Carson, the *ex cathedra* of the foghorn only serves to ground the speaker more fully in the city where “a puff of smoke...might be black or white.”⁷⁴⁹ To cope with such a death-haunted place, the Northern Irish retreat into drink rather than “poesy” as Keats did.

The source poem sets up the waking-dreaming categorization against the logic of the aesthetic escape/mundane living whereas “The Irish for No” elides the difference between dreaming and waking by pointing out the disjunctions between the Protestant and Catholic grids of discursive and perceptual

⁷⁴⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 84.

⁷⁴⁸ Carson, “The Irish for No” lines 8-15.

⁷⁴⁹ Carson, “The Irish for No,” line 23.

intelligibility. The Catholics do not use the term, "Ulster," and the Irish language contains no word for "no" or for "yes." And so Carson attempts to translate the motto, "The Bank that Likes to Say Yes," from a Protestant institution into one that speaks in the Catholic dialect. (His snide suggestion—"The Bank that Answers All Your Questions"—nods toward the Irish Nationalist ideology and its clean-cut accounts of their martyred past.) When the Irish language affirms something, "when *yes* is the verb repeated,"⁷⁵⁰ Carson can no longer see the British flowers at his feet. "Eglantine," which Keats uses as a bucolic image, "is alien here," and thus within the Irish nationalist assemblage, is unintelligible. The question remains, *Which is dream and which is wakefulness?* But perhaps the question of making an ontological choice between the Protestant sector of the assemblage of enunciation or its Catholic foil is not what Carson finds meaningful. "We live in the Belfast of dreams as much as the physical city."⁷⁵¹ His poem is not in the business of the Ulster Bank—"The Bank that Answers All Your Questions." Instead, Carson points out how all language possesses a phatic quality in its particular enunciative assemblages and how that social discourse renders different bodies and formations perceptible.

The Northern Irish poets too can be divided along the Protestant-Catholic divide, irrespective of their theological commitments. Longley and Mahon are Protestant, Muldoon says, not because of their faith—they are both self-declared atheists—but because they utilize a Protestant discursive logic and inhabit a similar Protestant structure of feeling. Likewise, Heaney and Carson are both Catholic writers. Yet while these poets speak from different ethno-nationalist backgrounds and wrestle with their respective narratives, they fixate on a similar problematic: the strained relationship between the

⁷⁵⁰ Gaelic does not have words for "yes" and "no" but instead possesses affirmative and negative verb conjugations that make clear whether or not a particular action is carried out or not. It is a linguistic construction that belies Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "redundancy" wherein statements double the "subject" position by creating on the one hand, a subject of enunciation, and on the other, a subject of the statement. In Gaelic, even to say yes is to clearly participate in this redundancy. If someone were asked whether they chose to drink and let the world remain unseen, their response would blatantly delineate a subject of the statement and a subject of enunciation. The response: "I do choose to drink and let the world remain unseen" or "I do not so choose." Such a phenomenon is true also to the Protestant English dialect, but it is not as easy to see at work in the grammatical construction.

⁷⁵¹ Ormsby, "Interview with Ciaran Carson," 1991.

individual and his native community. These questions of identity, place, and belonging form the ground for the Ulster structure of feeling; the writers and individuals live out variations of this place-based subjectivity and communal affiliation, ranging from a wholehearted affirmation to a partial revision to a wholehearted inversion of the affective positioning. Through the work of the poets explored thus far, one can lay out four different structures of feeling, which at times reinforce and echo one another and at times controvert and undercut. Hewitt uses a place-based logic to establish the Protestants' territorial claim to Ulster, enacted through their labor, while also making an argument for drawing a new territorial imaginary centered on the region rather than the nation. Heaney also assumes that identities are and should be linked to an investment in the land, but he speaks for the Catholic minority in Ulster. In his later work, that role becomes more strained, and Heaney looks to reground his sense of identity outside of sweeping generalizations and in the quotidian acts of labor. MacNeice, in contradistinction, rejects a coherent, unifocal identity marker, preferring instead the plurality and transience accorded to the traveler. His verse apes those preferences by opening itself to multiple readings and embracing contradiction. And then there is Mahon, who deploys many of MacNeice's formal techniques but applies them much more seriously to the long-standing Unionist hegemony in Ulster. For MacNeice, he speaks for his community only to criticize it and to wish for an escape that he does not manage to find as easily as his literary icon, MacNeice, does. Broadly speaking, Hewitt and Heaney can be placed in contradistinction to the literary lineage traced by MacNeice and Mahon.⁷⁵² But now I want to recapitulate in greater detail how the territorial tradition contrasts with the transient and how the younger generation interrogated and revised their predecessors.

Both Hewitt and MacNeice were Protestants, and their work does clearly wrestle with the guilt the Protestant minority feels for their historical dominance in Ulster and the dislocating lack of native

⁷⁵² The aural mirroring is mere coincidence, obviously, but has a quite nice patterning effect.

origins. “We would be strangers in the Capitol.”⁷⁵³ Yet the poets responded differently to this problem, thereby setting up two distinctive structures of feeling—polar coordinates, if you will, for the younger generation to navigate by. Where Hewitt espoused a place-based identity and the stability of rootedness, MacNeice embraced the émigré’s identity and the flexibility of hybridity. For Hewitt, the answer to the Protestant predicament lay in foregrounding the regional and local investments over the ethno-nationalist. ‘In my experience, people of Planter stock often suffer from some crisis of identity, of not knowing where they belong,” Hewitt recalled. “Among us you will find some who call themselves British, some Irish, some Ulstermen, usually with a degree of hesitation or mental fumbling...I set about deepening my knowledge of Ulster’s physical components, its history, its arts, its literature, its folklore.”⁷⁵⁴ And so Hewitt fell back into the same logic of the rusticative ideologies of Unionism and Catholicism, even as he criticized the “one or two loud voices [who] would restore/the rack, the yellow patch, the curfewed ghetto.”⁷⁵⁵ His work assumes and builds off of the territorialized notions of belonging. What is needed, he argued, is not to sever the link between a community and its topographical domain, but to reconfigure it—to found a new territory based on a more local and tangible community, such as the six counties of the Ulster province. Presciently articulated in his poem, “The colony,” Hewitt’s structure of feeling allowed for the Northern Irish situation to be read through a colonial paradigm. The original Planters had wronged the native populations; “we began the plunder.”⁷⁵⁶ But rather than propose that the Protestants abscond from Ulster, Hewitt argues that his community, the colonists, too have staked a territorial claim in the land over the centuries of “draining, planting,/till half the country took its shape from us.”⁷⁵⁷ For Hewitt, both the Protestants and the Catholics have rights to the soil, albeit through different means (origins versus expended labor), and so they should

⁷⁵³ Hewitt, “The colony,” line 138.

⁷⁵⁴ John Hewitt, “No Rootless Colonist,” *Aquarius* 5 (1972) 90-93.

⁷⁵⁵ Hewitt, “The colony,” lines 101-102.

⁷⁵⁶ Hewitt, “The colony,” line 41.

⁷⁵⁷ Hewitt, “The colony,” lines 53-54.

work out a way of living together in common “as goat and ox may graze in the same field.” Seeing as his solutions would be to bring the native populations into the political, economic, and social folds, so to speak, Hewitt’s structure of feeling aligned nicely with the 1960s’ civil rights movement, its aims and its political imaginary. The political solution required a rooted and egalitarian territorial community, the rational humanist in Hewitt argued:

O windblown grass upon the mounted dead,
 O seed in crevice of the frost-split rock,
 the power that fixed your root shall take us back,
 though endlessly through aeons we are thrust
 as luminous or unreflecting dust.⁷⁵⁸

Hewitt’s verse makes manifest his structure of feeling through certain aesthetic commitments: an untroubled use of mimetic language; accomplished but conventional attention to form; a reliance on imagery and allegory to articulate his affective and perceptual stances; and a univocal, stable speaker. In poems like “Ulster Names” and “Once Alien Here,” the images and landscapes are painted in broad strokes: “the faith of Patrick is with us still;/his blessing falls in a moonlit hour,/when the apple orchards are all in flower”⁷⁵⁹ and “rock and glen/ and mist and cloud and quality of air”⁷⁶⁰ and “All was still/from lamp in glen to star on hill.”⁷⁶¹ The landscapes are evocative but indistinct—the poetic version of an impressionist canvas. For Hewitt, the “rich earth” provided too an aesthetic ground. “The colony” takes the same scenic descriptions and almost mythic images (“They gathered secret, deep in the dripping glens,/chanting their prayers before a lichened rock”⁷⁶²), but uses them allegorically vis-à-vis the vehicle of a former Roman colony. In Hewitt—unlike with other poets—the allegorical remains an unproblematized literary technique. But the allegory, when it functions as a homology, assumes a narrative equivalence between two disparate spatiotemporal localities; it elides the real historical

⁷⁵⁸ John Hewitt, “Freehold II: The Lonely Heart,” *A Rage for Order* (1992).

⁷⁵⁹ Hewitt, “Ulster Names,” lines 18-20.

⁷⁶⁰ Hewitt, “Once Alien Here,” lines 14-15.

⁷⁶¹ Hewitt, “The Hill-Farm,” lines 5-6.

⁷⁶² Hewitt, “The colony,” lines 46-47.

differences between the two contexts (especially in the instance of the fictitious model) and foregrounds instead one dominant account. And so both Hewitt's heavy reliance on a dreamlike imagery and his use of allegory demonstrate the easy relationship he had to language's mimetic capabilities.

"You say the name and I see the place."⁷⁶³

This emphasis on the substance of poetic expression is further heightened by Hewitt's conventional formal commitments. In his oeuvre, a reader can uncover a great variety of formal tools, from the rhyming couplet to blank verse, to the sonnet. Yet unlike the poets who would follow after him in the Northern Irish literary community, Hewitt remained allied to form but never pushed its musculature into uncomfortable or unexpected postures. In fact, the Ulster poet was leery of formal exercises in lieu of meaningful substance: "If writers in an isolated group or in individual segregation are for too long disassociated from the social matrix their work will inevitably grown thin and tenuous, more and more concerned with form rather than content, heading for marvelous feats of empty virtuosity," Hewitt rejoined. His couplets traipse off the tongue, and the musicality is harmonious but largely unexciting. "I had gone there a vacant hour to pass,/to see the sculpture and admire the glass,/but left as I had come, a protestant,/and all unconscious of my yawning want."⁷⁶⁴

MacNeice and his structure of feeling set themselves in contradistinction to Hewitt on a number of grounds. Whereas Hewitt took a stand in the soil, he preferred the countless moods of the sea. Where Hewitt constructed an Ulster territory, MacNeice deconstructs the territorial claims of the Irish Republicans and the Protestants. For him, the mud brings petrification, sterility, the terror of a univocal viewpoint. He prefers the escape promised the traveler who rides the trains. "But I will not give you any idol or idea, creed or king,/I give you the incidental things which pass/Outward through space exactly as

⁷⁶³ Hewitt, "Ulster names."

⁷⁶⁴ Hewitt, "Freehold II: The Lonely Heart."

each was."⁷⁶⁵ For to remain fixed is to adopt only one identity, one way of viewing the world, to toast one creed or king, which MacNeice rejects:

Time and place—our bridgeheads into reality
But also its concealment! Out of the sea
We land on the Particular and lose
All other possible bird's-eye views, the Truth
That is of Itself for Itself—but not for me.⁷⁶⁶

In "Carrick Revisited," MacNeice makes clear how he feels about exacting adherence to spatiotemporal position. He scorns the fixity of territorial claims and their rigid perceptual regime. "We land on the Particular and lose/All other possible bird's-eye views." In his work, neither subjectivizing identity markers nor the perceptual grid that locates them are fixed. In this structure of feeling, we "peel and portion/A tangerine and spit the pips and feel/The drunkenness of things being various." And so MacNeice's pays close attention to the plurality of things by documenting the quotidian. Against Hewitt's rain and rock and glen, *Autumn Journal* offers "the trucks of the Southern railway" and "presents, jewelry, furs, gadgets, solicitations." His poetry is, as he puts it in his discussion with F.R. Higgins, impure. But the firm allegiance to mundane objects and events allows him to depict positive differences, the incompatibility of snow and roses, rather than merely negative ones. *The smoke is neither black nor white or it is both black and white*. MacNeice's dream-figures are dialectical; they turn and pull against their own metastability as affective emblems. "O delicate walker, babbler, dialectician Fire/O enemy and image of ourselves!"⁷⁶⁷ Continually, MacNeice's speaker makes claims from a position of contradiction; he lives the parallax and manages to contain its opposites. With this litany of uncanny figures—the reader recognizes them as familiar and yet there remains something off—the dream

⁷⁶⁵ MacNeice, "Train to Dublin," lines 28-30.

⁷⁶⁶ MacNeice, "Carrick Revisited," *Selected Poems* (1988) lines 16-20.

⁷⁶⁷ MacNeice, "Brother Fire."

imagery of Hewitt turns to nightmare beneath MacNeice's star. "Crawly crawly/Went the twigs above their heads and beneath/The grass beneath their feet the larvae/Split themselves laughing."⁷⁶⁸

The nightmarish quality of his work is further bolstered by his subversion of traditional poetic form. In contrast to Hewitt's close attention to imagery as the lyric's substance of expression, MacNeice becomes wedded to form—not as it is conventionally and stifling trotted along, but form as a supple muscle to be worked over and against. He reinvents the nursery rhyme and its singsong cadences, but always to give up a surrealscape rather than a nostalgic one. "*Come back early or never come./When my silent terror cried,/Nobody, nobody replied./Come back early or never come.*"⁷⁶⁹ MacNeice's formal subversions, accompanied by a fine sense of dark irony, open up space in the poem for multiple readings and for the speaker to inhabit a sometimes contradictory position. The black Belfast humor might have stemmed from MacNeice's upbringing, but the firm stance that he takes on affirming the world as "crazier and more of it than we think" governs his politics. No idol, creed or king—only the shapes of things as they pass. MacNeice does not want to elide pure differences by reducing the Northern Irish situation to a simple Protestant-Catholic dichotomy. After all, to lift the Catholic residents up into a Protestant hegemonic system may provide resources but also elides their community's real and material differences. Instead, MacNeice wants Ulster to embrace the possibility of other bird's-eye views than the black-and-white sectarianism. "What ish my nation?" asks Captain MacMorris. MacNeice's speaker answers: "I would like to give you more but I cannot hold/This stuff within my hands and the train goes on."⁷⁷⁰

But as the Troubles turns Ulster's deep-seated antipathies into outright violence, their respective structures of feeling no longer seem adequate to the times. MacNeice, who died in 1963,

⁷⁶⁸ MacNeice, "The Introduction."

⁷⁶⁹ MacNeice, "Autobiography."

⁷⁷⁰ MacNeice, "Train to Dublin."

never had an opportunity to respond to the devolving situation, but Hewitt did attempt to revise his earlier work and its easy articulation of a territorialized identity. In "Postscript, 1984," he writes:

These verses surfaced thirty years ago
when time seemed edging to a better time,
most public voices tamed, those loud untamed
as seasonal as tawdry pantomime,
and over my companionable land
placenames still lilted like a childhood rime.

The years deceived; our unforgiving hearts
by myth and old antipathies betrayed,
flared into sudden acts of violence
in daily shocking bulletins relayed,
and through our dark dream-clotted consciousness
hosted like banners in some black parade.

Now with compulsive resonance they toll:
Banbridge, Ballykelly, Darkley, Crossmaglen,
summoning pity, anger and despair,
by grief of kin, by hate of murderous men
till the whole tarnished map is stained and torn,
not to be read as pastoral again.⁷⁷¹

In "Postscript," Hewitt demonstrates that territorial identities can provide both stability in times of peace and a terrible impetus for slaughter in times of conflict. The once-bucolic images he associated with each Ulster name in the original poem has now been inverted; the placenames now pace "through our dark dream-clotted consciousness/hosted like banners in some black parade." Hewitt watched his regionalist dream devolve into nightmare, and now "the whole tarnished map is stained and torn, not to be read as pastoral again." Hewitt has not turned his back on his aesthetic commitments—the form is conventional, the images stable and cleanly mimetic—but he is no longer secure in the politics of his stance. And so while his message in "Postscript" opposes the territorial struggle between the Unionists and Catholics, the verse ultimately fails to radically break from its perceptual and affective apparatus. The regionalist map is done for, but Hewitt still insists on a notion of place-based recognition. "Now with

⁷⁷¹ Hewitt, "Postscript, 1984," *A Rage for Order* (1992).

compulsive resonance they toll:/Banbridge, Ballykelly, Darkley, Crossmaglen,/summoning pity, anger and despair.” He attempts to dismantle the master’s house with the master’s own tools, and it leaves him cornered.⁷⁷²

“We are all now dispossessed,” Muldoon wrote, “Each loads...into a covered wagon/and strikes out for his Oregon.”⁷⁷³ Heaney and Mahon take up where Hewitt and MacNeice left off, but their work revises and refigures their respective aesthetics and structures of feeling. While Heaney also demonstrates a greater preoccupation with the substance of expression—his search, after Yeats, for “fitting emblems of adversity”—he articulates a predominantly Catholic structure of feeling, compared to Hewitt’s Protestant guilt. They both are engaged in the construction of different territories and the subjects who belong to them. And while MacNeice and Mahon both choose to play with form rather than rely on the figurative, Mahon shows a greater entanglement with the Unionist community. MacNeice more easily leaves behind the Protestant ideology for the multifocal view possible on the open sea. Mahon too wishes to escape the Unionist imaginary and its violent ethos, but finds himself less able to escape guilt-free. Taken together, their work decries, “Time and place—our bridgeheads into reality/But also its concealment!”⁷⁷⁴ But the revisions that Heaney visits on Hewitt and Mahon on MacNeice are significant and stand out against the nuance and complexity of the Troubles. Unlike their predecessors, who were born to a yet-united Ireland, Heaney and Mahon both came of age, so to speak, as poets during the Troubles and their work had to reckon much more immediately with the ethno-nationalist communities who perpetuated the violence. As Heaney would reflect in an interview, Northern Irish society pressured poets to articulate and understand its trauma:

The trouble with, I think, poetry in a more settled and literary climate than Ireland is that it is in danger of becoming just literary. In Ireland and in the north of Ireland in particular the poets were given...there was a kind of pride in them, to begin with, in the community. Then when this thing came along, the poets in some way were expected to

⁷⁷² To pull a metaphor from Audre Lorde and *Sister Outsider*.

⁷⁷³ Muldoon, “7 Middagh Street.”

⁷⁷⁴ MacNeice. “Carrick Revisited.”

reflect what they thought about it in their poetry. There was a kind of pressure on them to reveal the roots of the conflict, a simple-minded pressure also to speak up for their own side...And it has forced every one of them, myself included, to quest closely and honestly into the roots of one's own sensibility, into the roots of one's own sense of oneself, into the tribal dirt that lies around the roots of all of us.⁷⁷⁵

Much more was at stake for the younger generation than simply reflecting on their individual experiences with conflict. And it made both structures of feeling—that of rootedness and that of escape—more fraught and affectively-nuanced than it appeared for Hewitt or MacNeice in the decades before.

To give Heaney his due: he possessed an almost unparalleled command of English language sounds (from “hush and lush” to the “sharp ratcheting” of a “speeded-up corncrake”),⁷⁷⁶ and his talents turned his poems into craftsman-like renderings of his world and his experience. He remained devoted to questions of belonging, identity, and place, even as that territorial focus shifted and mutated through his career. In his early work, drawing particularly from the first two collections, he wrote of the rhythms and cadences of his rural upbringing. As a county boy cast adrift in the industrial urbanity of Belfast, Heaney pinned down his world, handful by handful, like the thatcher whose work he romanticizes. Following Hewitt, his verse expresses a firm investment in the land, but unlike his Protestant precursor, Heaney’s pastoral scenes come uninflected by the planter guilt. Bereft of a native claim to the land, Hewitt turns instead to the labor his ancestors expended, yet the unease lingers. Heaney also focuses on the labor that reshapes the physical terrain into a knowable and familiar territory. In one of his most famous poems, he writes, “Under my window, a clean rasping sound/When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:/My father, digging. I look down/Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds/Bends low, comes up twenty years away/Stooping in rhythm through potato drills/Where he was digging.”⁷⁷⁷ The

⁷⁷⁵ Brian Donnelly, “Interview with Seamus Heaney,” Danmarks Radio, 1977, accessed in Heaney papers, MARBL, Emory University.

⁷⁷⁶ Heaney, “Casting and Gathering.”

⁷⁷⁷ Heaney, “Digging.”

repetition of digging in the potato drills, in the self-same field, takes Heaney back in time twenty years; twenty years ago, his family inhabited the same place, Mossbawn, and his father dug his livelihood out of its fields with the same rhythmic motion. For a Catholic boy growing up in rural Derry, the past is purely a familial record rather than an ethno-nationalist one. It sits easily on his shoulders. Instead of linking the land to outwardly political claims, the young Heaney uses his rural community as both a bunker from the anomie of the streetscape and as a defiant marker of his Catholic identity against “all of that great historical action” and its cosmopolitan staging. “I would begin with the Greek word, *omphalos*, meaning the navel, and hence the stone that marked the centre of the world, and repeat it, *omphalos, omphalos, omphalos*, until its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside our back door,” Heaney said of his early work. “It is Co. Derry in the early 1940s.”⁷⁷⁸

As the civil rights movement is overwhelmed by the Unionist paramilitary killings and the Provisionals’ growing bombing campaign and daily life in Belfast devolves into a fearful bricking of windows, the Catholic “swaddling band” is lapping, tightening, bracing and binding its community together against the combined threats of the Protestant guerillas, the Protestant-dominated police, and the British armed forces. In turn, Heaney continues to search his rusticative imagery for a Catholic structure of feeling, and he arrives at the bog poems: “‘Bogland’ is an attempt to make the preserving, shifting marshes of Ireland a mythical landscape, a symbol of the preserving, shifting consciousness of the Irish people. History is the soft ground that holds and invites us into itself, century after century.”⁷⁷⁹ Heaney felt that his literary endeavors had become necessarily political, particularly given that he had

⁷⁷⁸ Heaney, *Preoccupations* 17.

⁷⁷⁹ Radio interview with Seamus Heaney, broadcast on 22 Nov 1977, transcript accessed in Heaney papers, MARBL, Emory University.

become the most visible poet out of the Belfast group—at least in Britain and internationally.⁷⁸⁰ The bog poems, which were both loved and eviscerated by critics and audiences, attempted to locate fitting emblems of adversity in the Danish bogs and the ancient ritual sacrifices that were unearthed from them. In the “kind, black butter” of the bog, Heaney found a vehicle to articulate the Irish Nationalist ethos—its sense of cyclical violence, its honor through sacrifice, its communal affiliation to the soil.⁷⁸¹ “Our pioneers keep striking/Inwards and downwards.”⁷⁸² By training its gaze on the harm done to ancient bodies, his work turns the rawness of violent acts into dreamlike and mythic images. As in Hewitt’s work, Heaney’s poems pay more attention to the substance of expression—to mimetic figures and their abilities to resonate within particular contexts; no ironic quips here. The speaker is tender in “Punishment:” “she was a barked sapling/that is dug up/oak-bone, brain-firkin:/her shaved head/like a stubble of black corn.”⁷⁸³ His images in the bog poems would be nightmarish if the speaker described the tarring and feathering of actual girls in Northern Ireland’s ghettos, but because of the mythic distance Heaney interposes, the figures become akin to the dream—ghastly but fascinating. “As if he had been poured/in tar, he lies/on a pillow of turf/and seems to weep/the black river of himself.”⁷⁸⁴ The poems certainly resonated affectively with those who read them, but they hit upon a Nationalist sensibility of martyrdom, honoring the fallen. *Laureate of violence, anthropologist of ritual killing*, charged his more vehement critics. And so while the poems are beautifully wrought, their politics tended to be collusive rather than contrarian.

⁷⁸⁰ In large part, Heaney’s decision to leave Belfast in 1972 was motivated by his desire to write as himself again rather than always as a public poet speaking for the Catholic community, or more broadly, for the Northern Irish situation. Randall, “Interview with Seamus Heaney.”

⁷⁸¹ “While I did have a fair hoard of resentment against the Unionist crowd, I still felt hesitant about hammering a sectarian job, declaring...for the Catholic/Gaelic sensibility. That would only have ratified the sectarian categories which had us where we were. I wanted to find a way of registering refusal and resentment and obstinacy against the “Ulster is British” mentality, but at the same time I wanted my obstinacy to leave the door open for repentant Unionists.” Randall, “Interview with Seamus Heaney.”

⁷⁸² Heaney, “Bogland.”

⁷⁸³ Heaney, “Punishment.”

⁷⁸⁴ Heaney, “Grauballe Man,” *North*, lines 1-5.

It is not until Heaney himself escapes Northern Ireland for the Republic that he breaks from the bog imagery and the fierce Catholic tribe. In an interview given in 1979, he noted that his work in *Wintering Out* and *North* had politicized the territory and the places he had demarcated in his early poems. "There was a definite attempt to widen the scope of the thing," Heaney acknowledged. "But you know, I want to pull back from all that because I have begun to feel a danger in that responsible, adjudicating stance towards communal experience. I just feel an early warning system telling me to get back inside my own head."⁷⁸⁵ Parsing through his later work on the Troubles, including the moving elegies "Casualty" and "The Strand at Lough Beg," reveals that Heaney is questioning the Catholic ideology and the violent means by which it polices its borders. Wrestling with the death of a good friend who violated the Provisionals' curfew, he asks: "How culpable was he/That last night when he broke/Our tribe's complicity?"⁷⁸⁶ And in the same verse, Heaney returns to the territory-making labors that he foregrounded in his earlier poetry. "I tasted freedom with him./To get out early, haul/Steadily off the bottom,/Dispraise the catch, and smile/As you find a rhythm/Working you, slow mile by mile."⁷⁸⁷ In this instance, Heaney no longer ties the home so firmly to the land; the fisherman makes his proper haunt on the open sea. Even here Heaney's substantive attempts to break with the ethno-nationalist structure of feeling and to find space for the individual do not disavow the territorial problematic.

Also working under the political demands of the Troubles, Mahon in turn wrestles with the Unionist ideology and the larger Protestant structure of feeling. An outsider and contrarian from the start, the poet borrows heavily from MacNeice's work but he also takes the older writer into a more serious engagement with the Northern Irish situation. "In this respect he is the heir and disinheritor of MacNeice," Edna Longley noted in her review of Mahon's first collection, "starting at the point where

⁷⁸⁵ Randall, "Interview with Seamus Heaney."

⁷⁸⁶ Heaney, "Casualty."

⁷⁸⁷ Heaney, "Casualty."

MacNeice leaves off.”⁷⁸⁸ Mahon takes the aesthetic commitments of his predecessor—his irony, his formal subversion, his fierce attention to sound, his dialectical and contradictory imagery as well as his politics—and reads them into Ulster. For MacNeice had lambasted quite thoroughly the romanticisms of Irish Republicanism and the bitter divisions of the island’s northern counties in *Autumn Journal*, but his émigré schooling and adult life kept him largely out of the Unionist community. As the Unionist paramilitaries began to form and the civil rights movement faced backlash from the more rabid Protestant constituencies, Mahon picked up where MacNeice left off by turning the critical eye on the romantic mythos and rusticative ideology of his fellow Protestants. In poems like “Glengormley” and “Poem beginning with a line by Cavafy,” Mahon set the dreamlike figures of these otherworldly imaginaries against a MacNeicean preoccupation with the mundane. The reader receives images like “saint or hero/Landing at night from the conspiring seas,”⁷⁸⁹ and “oatmeal and mutton,/Harpsong, a fern table for/Wiping your hands on,”⁷⁹⁰ but the formal choices of each poem reveals that they are meant ironically, that the speaker has greater faith in the “worldly time under this worldly sky—the terrier-taming, garden-watering days.”⁷⁹¹ Mahon’s dedication to the quotidian subverts the idealized historical accounts of the Battle of the Boyne. In “Glengormley,” he demonstrates a close affinity with MacNeice’s irony, his dark humor, and his subversive and nursery-song-like aural patterning. Yet where MacNeice tends to use his ironic wit and parallaxic vision to move across place-based identities and contexts, Mahon finds himself tethered more fully to the Unionist community. “Of necessity, if not by choice, I live here too.”⁷⁹²

And his verse more broadly deconstructs how the Unionist community thinks of the Catholic minority and otherizes them, even as Northern Irish society has moved into the consumer-driven age.

⁷⁸⁸ Edna Longley, rev. of *Night Crossing, The Honest Ulsterman* (Dec 1969).

⁷⁸⁹ Mahon, “Glengormley.”

⁷⁹⁰ Mahon, “Poem beginning with a line by Cavafy.”

⁷⁹¹ Mahon, “Glengormley.”

⁷⁹² Mahon, “Glengormley.”

“We only recognize...the frantic anthropologisms/And lazarous ironies behind their talk/Of fitted carpets, central heating/And automatic gear-change.”⁷⁹³ His reference to Cavafy complicates the poem’s argument; not only does Mahon characterize the Unionist view of Catholics as outdated and functionally inept (“spent cartridges on deserted rifle range”), but he criticizes the Protestant establishment for making use of the barbarian-civilized logic for their own ends. As Cavafy puts it, “what’s going to happen to us without barbarians?/They were, those people, a kind of solution.”⁷⁹⁴ But Mahon most fully encapsulates the Unionist structure of feeling in “Ecclesiastes” where the speaker convinces himself to take on the role of a Protestant preacher. Following in MacNeice’s footsteps, Mahon uses the poem’s formal choices to open up a space between the subject of the statement and the subject of enunciation. The reader is not swayed by the speaker’s zeal, but repelled by it: “God, you could grow to love it, God-fearing, God-/chosen purist little puritan that,/for all your wiles and smiles, you are (the/dank churches, the empty streets,/the shipyard silence, the tied-up swings.”⁷⁹⁵ In case the reader missed the black corrosiveness operating on each and every one of the speaker’s statements, Mahon closes with the preacher’s inability to deliver to his flock anything of sustenance.

In poems like “The Last of the Fire Kings” and “Afterlives,” Mahon explores how the individual strives to separate himself from this Unionist community and its ideological demands. How does an inheritor in this situation separate himself from the territory of his ancestors and the violent rituals that accompany it? To step outside of time is not a sustainable option, even as both Mahon and MacNeice dream of it. Yet here, Mahon revises MacNeice a bit—takes him to task for his easy emigration and transience. The latter compares the jaunt out of time to occupying a purchase in the midst of the ocean, where all other birds’-eye views are yet possible. It is a freeing place that is not firmly marked, “a

⁷⁹³ Mahon. “Poem beginning with a line by Cavafy.”

⁷⁹⁴ Cavafy, “Waiting for the Barbarians.”

⁷⁹⁵ Mahon, “Ecclesiastes.”

somewhere, well out, beyond.”⁷⁹⁶ Mahon, on the other hand, compares timelessness to a cold porcelain palace whose very otherworldliness is ultimately unlivable. For him, the traverse between settled territories is always a brief moment of respite that can be enjoyed but not retained. While at sea, “Somebody thumbs a guitar/On the dark deck, while a gull/Dreams at the masthead,/The moon-splashed waves exult.”⁷⁹⁷ Unlike MacNeice who easily inhabits the transience of the voyager “who drops at night/from a moving train/and strikes out over the fields,” Mahon recognizes that the community’s pull is strong and, at times, useful. Rootedness can be constricting and dangerous when it “speaks with a bleak afflatus,” but Mahon envies the stability that belonging-to and –in a place offers. At the close of “Afterlives,” he acknowledges that his escape from Belfast has prevented him from truly growing up, from learning “what is meant by home.” For Mahon, order and disorder are imbricated. Sites of order work against chaos; entropy unmakes and pulls apart the constructed.

And so one could say that Hewitt and MacNeice had it easy in a way. In their verse, both Protestants only had to negotiate their own relationships to Northern Ireland and their native community; they might tend towards residual guilt from long-ago wrongs (Hewitt) or just a general dislike (MacNeice), but the community itself seemed a force that could easily be rearticulated (Hewitt) or left behind (MacNeice). As the sectarian conflict turned hot once more—and unexpectedly, given the liberalizing trends of the early 1960s⁷⁹⁸--the Unionist and Nationalists circled their respective wagons, and everyone had to take a side. The days of easy exile were no more. Even to leave Northern Ireland (as Heaney did) was an act loaded with political implication. Heaney and Mahon, a Catholic and a Protestant respectively, had to reckon more substantially with their relationship to their native

⁷⁹⁶ Heaney, “Casualty.”

⁷⁹⁷ Mahon, “Afterlives.”

⁷⁹⁸ “In the 1960s there’ was for a while, I think, a sense of discovery and exhilaration among my generation that we were moving an inch or two past the old pieties, and rigidities, and the old divisions. It was a liberal as opposed to any kind of radical political action, a coming together. But it wasn’t advanced on the kind of banter and suspicion of the earlier generations.” Randall, “Interview with Seamus Heaney.”

communities as well as their territorial claims. And while Heaney followed Hewitt along a rooted structure of feeling and Mahon followed MacNeice towards the margin, both were searching for a way to position the individual within a strong community-first mentality and against the romanticized antagonisms these communities held against one another. Ultimately, the next generation of Belfast poets would turn even further towards MacNeice by loosening the hold of the Unionist and Republican rusticative ideologies. (They also embraced his formal play and took it further by working to deconstruct and renegotiate traditional forms.)⁷⁹⁹ Muldoon, McGuckian, and Carson each dismantled the place-based notions of identity in their own ways: Muldoon by embracing diasporic notions of identity, McGuckian by subverting the common narratives with a feminist wedge, and finally, Carson by problematizing place and the stability of its representations. All would prove fascinating studies; to foray into where Northern Irish poetry moved after Heaney and Mahon, I now turn, briefly, to Carson and his work on Belfast.

II

For a map to work, it has to use shorthand, or symbols, or metaphor; and in this it resembles poetry.⁸⁰⁰

Ciaran Carson remained in Ulster through the Troubles. And his oeuvre from the 1980s forward attempts to document this new Belfast and its structure of feeling. Born and raised in a working-class Catholic neighborhood in Belfast, Carson grew up speaking Irish at home and only learned English through playmates or in school. An English student at Queens University during the early 1970s, he participated in the final meetings of the Belfast workshop group and came into contact with the stable of writers, from Heaney to Longley to Ormsby, who had put Northern Ireland on the literary map. In 1975, Carson secured the post of the Traditional Arts Officer for the province's Arts Council, putting him

⁷⁹⁹ Muldoon, for example, has written a long poem that is composed of a set of exploded sestinas. Carson has written a number of pieces that rethink the haiku and border upon prose. And McGuckian pulls at the constraints of the sonnet form.

⁸⁰⁰ Ormsby, "Interview with Ciaran Carson," 1991.

solidly in Belfast for the next two decades and beyond. His first pamphlet, called *The Insular Celts*, contained fourteen poems that criticized the romanticized Gael. He published the pamphlet and his first volume of verse in 1973 and 1974, respectively, but Carson would not release another full collection of verse until 1987's *The Irish for No*. He would later attribute his long literary silence to his interest in traditional Irish music, which had a "very attractive immediacy."⁸⁰¹ But Carson also struggled for space in a poetic community dominated by Heaney. His next poetic outpouring would take its hold in the urban landscapes, and it would replace the short, highly stressed line from his earlier work with a dramatically long line. "The length of the line is a story-teller's deliberate, fast-paced gabble," notes Carson.⁸⁰² He also left behind the more conventional bucolic imagery that *The Insular Celts* worked with. Distinctly, the verse in *The Irish for No* focused precisely on the here-and-now instead of looking for mythic analogies or "fitting emblems of adversity," after Yeats. In his articulation of the Ulster structure of feeling, Carson wanted to avoid the tendency that he sees in Heaney's bog poems of excusing the violence as a destined historical return.

By the time he began working on *The Irish for No*, Carson had learned to reject not just Heaney's structure of feeling, but also the poetic allegiances that enabled it. He turned away from the mimetic figure and its ahistorical resonances to MacNeice. His imagery turned towards the documentation of the city he knows and walks so often. Instead of an anthropologist, Carson fashioned himself as a sort of cartographer. Formally, Carson played with the tension between line length and syntax in the poem to create either a sense of overwhelming momentum (long syntax pulled over parsing line breaks) or the staccato stop-start (syntax fragments padded with caesuras and the forceful close of an annotative line). The shift to poetic form and away from imagery allowed Carson to explore language's potentiality outside of the mimetic; as he once noted when describing his early 1970s work, "I wrote the poems to a

⁸⁰¹ Corcoran, *Ciaran Carson: Space, Place, Writing*.

⁸⁰² Corcoran, *Ciaran Carson: Space, Place, Writing*.

kind of preconceived idea of negation; that is, I wanted to put forward a series of images which I then could pull apart and show how false they became when compared with any real situation. Perhaps the poems are about the plausibility of poetry.”⁸⁰³ In *The Insular Celts*, Carson tried to use images to destabilize their own capacity to represent. In his later work, he reverted to a more complete toolkit of formal techniques, from syntax, to sound patterning, to the antimimetic image. Carson turned towards an exploration of what language can do in particular contexts rather than what it can represent. And so his verse calls attention to the real differences between language and the bodies that can be worked on or work on others.

To better explore how Carson takes after MacNeice and foregrounds a new Northern Irish structure of feeling, consider “Belfast Confetti:”

Suddenly as the riot squad moved in, it was raining exclamation marks,
Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys. A fount of broken type. And the explosion
Itself—an asterisk on the map. This hyphenated line, a burst of rapid fire...
I was trying to complete a sentence in my head, but it kept stuttering,
All the alleyways and side-streets blocked with stops and colons.

I know this labyrinth so well – Balaclava, Raglan, Inkerman, Odessa Street –
Why can’t I escape? Every move is punctuated. Crimea Street. Dead end again.
A Saracen, Kremlin-2 mesh. Makrolon face-shields. Walkie-talkies. What is
My name? Where am I coming from? Where I am going? A fusillade of question-marks.⁸⁰⁴

The poem’s figures are nightmarish in quality, but not mythic. They take after MacNeice by giving a journalist’s eye to the cityscape. But in this instance, Belfast itself has descended into a surreal and otherworldly place populated by “Makrolon face-shields” and “Kremlin-2 mesh.” As Carson commented later, “For years, I had nightmares of Belfast.”⁸⁰⁵ In “Belfast Confetti,” the nightmare is made manifest. But Carson is not content to merely paint a dark picture; he also wants to problematize the poem’s ability to represent the real horrors breaking both bodies and building facades. And so

⁸⁰³ Letter from Ciaran Carson to Frank Ormsby, late 1972, Ormsby papers, MARBL, Emory University.

⁸⁰⁴ Carson, “Belfast Confetti,” *A Rage for Order* (1992).

⁸⁰⁵ Ormsby, “Interview with Ciaran Carson.”

Carson makes a strong argument against mimetic language and its ability to capture the real in a meaningful sense. By turning the poem itself into a map, the speaker sets up an analogy whose inadequacy is readily apparent to us: "The explosion/Itself—an asterisk on the map." Clearly, the explosion wreaks havoc on bodies; it performs a violence for which the asterisk will always be a pale and reductive translation. By showing us the risks inherent to constructing a visual analogy (or representation), Carson undercuts both the logic of the map and that of mimetic language. To poet Robert Hass' claim, "It is good sometimes for poetry to disenchant us,"⁸⁰⁶ Carson answers, "It is necessary sometimes for poetry to disenchant us." Instead, his poem is concerned with how language becomes performative. What is at stake, he asks, in answering the "fusillade of question-marks?"

Carson problematizes the ability of language to represent the world through an intense revision of poetic form rather than a focus on its imagery. Borrowing from MacNeice, one of his primary literary influences, Carson stresses the relationship between syntax and lineation. Formally, the most striking thing is how prosaic the poem is, even as the syntactical movement is continually arrested and prematurely cordoned off. The lines can contain as many as nine or ten accented syllables, and they follow no regular pattern. Carson releases his speaker from the tightly-constructed, spare models of English blank verse. Like Mahon and MacNeice before him, he lets the muscle of the syntax propel the reader at a gallop through the lines. Carson opens with a strong narrative impulse, heralded most strikingly with the change indicator, "Suddenly," but enacted by the temporal linkage of the two clauses ("the riot squad moves in" and "it was raining exclamation marks"). Yet the rest of his sentences never

⁸⁰⁶ Robert Hass also explores this problem of representative language in a more casual setting in his poem, "The Problem of Describing Trees." An excerpt:

And the tree danced. No.
The tree capitalized.
No. There are limits to saying,
In language, what the tree did.

It is good sometimes for poetry to disenchant us.

make it off the ground: "I was trying to complete a sentence in my head, but it kept stuttering." The staccato of clauses and stressed syllables percuss the ear like "a burst of rapid fire." The second line begins with five stressed syllables in a row, broken by the interjected caesuras of commas. It then continues into three syntactical fragments. "A fount of broken type" becomes an ironical quip of self-reflection, and the explosion is marked by the speaker's extended silence in the em dash. The burst of rapid fire trails into an ellipsis that leaves the reader ominously guessing at what it hits. By way of explanation, the speaker offers, the sentence "kept stuttering,/All the alleyways and side-streets blocked with stops and colons." An explosion has made the traditional route impassable; the surveyed and regulated city streets continue to block Carson's attempts to take off down any alternative pathways. The poem performs the city; the poem enunciates the individual's position within that city as he scrambles for an escape that does not open. It does not merely trace the labyrinth of streets but takes their measure as the riot squad moves in and all sensible speech explodes into "a fount of broken type."

Carson takes on the problem of mimetic language through the vehicle of the map,⁸⁰⁷ which clearly possesses a long colonial history and tends to reify a power differential between the native populations and the cartographers. (Hewitt: "But here and there the land was poor and starved,/which, though we mapped, we did not occupy,/leaving the natives, out of laziness/in our demanding it, to hold unleased/the marshy quarters, fens, the broken hills." Already, we can see the Planters creating a center and a periphery on this new terrain they colonize.)⁸⁰⁸ Likewise, the British troops too will enter the periphery armed with maps and surveying techniques so as to wrest control over foreign terrain from the native populations. *All the alleyways and side-streets blocked with stops and colons.* The speaker's attempted enunciation marks his passage through the urban terrain. "I was trying to complete a

⁸⁰⁷ The original cover image of *The Irish for No* consisted of old street maps of Belfast.

⁸⁰⁸ Hewitt, "The colony."

sentence in my head, but it kept stuttering." As Carson makes immanently clear: in Ulster, the Catholics and Protestants (as well as the British forces) are not fighting merely over geological terrain. "It was raining exclamation marks,/Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys." They bring into conflict different discursively-propagated maps. "And of course the war, or whatever you want to call it--civil disturbances?--is as much a war of words as anything," Carson said. "That's partly what "Belfast Confetti" - the phrase - means to me: bits and pieces of language littered across the streets of Belfast...slogans, graffiti, scrawls."⁸⁰⁹ The mapping is at work across multiple spheres, from the generalizing reports of journalists to partisan rhetoric to the school textbooks to the swaddling band of public funerals. These territorial imaginaries also populate the literary; hence the insistent clamoring of Irish literary critics over Heaney's *North* and its potential for aestheticizing violence or colluding with a Republican ideological frame.

Each community must imaginatively compose its center and plot its mobile, stable coordinates by taking measure of its domain.⁸¹⁰ Its ideological instruments are commonly-held images and words, which can act as nodular points in connotative registers. Joyce's infamous contrarian, Stephen Dedalus, charts the conflict of these two discursive territorial regimes:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.⁸¹¹

Likewise, Heaney recognized how discursive signposts indicate one's communal affiliation and identity: "Etymology, vocabulary, even intonations—and these are all active signals of loyalties, Irish or British, Catholic or Protestant, in the north of Ireland, and they are things that I had an instinctive feel for, as a writer and a native."⁸¹² Yet, the speaker in "Belfast Confetti," can no longer navigate by the markers he

⁸⁰⁹ Ormsby, "Interview with Ciaran Carson," 1991.

⁸¹⁰ Here, the use of "measurement" draws not from the fixed instrumentation of the astrolabe but follows from Heidegger's conception of a taking measure.

⁸¹¹ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987).

⁸¹² Randall, "Interview with Seamus Heaney."

once relied on. Both the cityscape and the discursive assemblage are failing him in this reshaped place. "I know this labyrinth so well," he marvels. "Why can't I escape?" His native ground has become unfamiliar, his movements regulated and controlled by an outside surveying force.

In looking at the political seams that Carson's poem mines, I argue that, in focusing on the map and its visual appropriations of space, he breaks open the stultified conversations around the "Northern Irish situation" in two key ways: first, by introducing the British forces back into the contest as a dominant and self-interested actor rather than as a neutral overseer; and second, by turning the map (and more broadly, visual representation of place) into a dialectical technique that can be used both to control territory and to escape into indiscernibility. In "Belfast Confetti," he renders visible the power differentials between the police, the Catholic residents, and the Catholic paramilitaries rather than merely falling back into the trope of a simple sectarian division. The conflict is more complicated, Carson rejoins, and lived more immediately and locally than such discourses admit. "Suddenly, as the riot squad moved in, it was raining exclamation marks." Previous Ulster structures of feeling did not contend much with the British; while some animosity might percolate through the Catholic ranks, the United Kingdom remained a sideline act to the sectarian encounter. Yet after the British armed forces intervened in the province in August of 1969, they put thousands of boots on the ground (and scores of helicopters in the air) to survey and regulate the circulation of bodies in the urban centers. *Belfast is like a police state.* Barricades, duck patrols, bag checks, road blocks, house raids—the British armed forces set themselves up as a heavily-militarized police force to quell the violence and restore order. They were heralded as a neutral party, yet force does not provide a neutral valence. "Whoever lives by the sword/Dies by the sword." The battalions' gun-toting presence is a double-edged sword for the Ulster Catholics: *PARAS 13, BOGSIDE NIL.*

Then Carson gives us an inescapably-British cartography through the litany of place-names; this dwelling on the street names is quite different from the ahistorical sensibility Hewitt establishes in his

verse, "Ulster Names." There is nothing bucolic and affirming in this frantic jumbling-together of streets that no longer lead where they are supposed to. "The names of a land show the heart of a race," Hewitt wrote.⁸¹³ Balaclava, Raglan, Inkerman, Odessa Street—all roads in the Catholic neighborhood of the Lower Falls, all named for British commanders or battles during the Crimean War in which Great Britain, France, and Russia wreaked havoc in eastern Europe in a contest of nationalist power machinations. Carson's place-names reveal a destructive nationalist struggle over territory rather than aestheticize—"There will be no gorse."⁸¹⁴ And so his question, when it comes, has already been answered by the English maps. "Crimea Street. Dead end again." Carson's reading of Ulster's "barbarous cycle of violence" traces its history to British imperialism, whose "every move is punctuated." The flexibility of the verb "punctuate" allows for the bifocal reading where the city map is both another exertion of territorial appropriation and a discursive representation.

Carson too reintroduces power into the narratives of violence where other writers tended to attribute it to a mythical determinism or a native sickness. For while the poem does mention the brutality—the riot squad inundated with nails and car-keys and the explosion and the "burst of rapid fire"—its gaze is trained instead on how forces are blocking and controlling the movement of bodies in the city. For Carson, like Deleuze, "violence acts on specific bodies, objects or beings whose form it destroys or changes, while force has no object other than that of other forces, and no being other than that of relation: it is 'an action upon an action, on existing actions, or on those which may arise in the present or future.'"⁸¹⁵ In the poem, the speaker cannot escape; he is trapped like a rat in a maze by the blocked alleyways and side-streets. He then runs smack into another punctuating (and punctuated) barricade of "A Saracen, Kremlin-2 mesh. Makrolon face-shields. Walkie-talkies." Replete with a machine gun and large enough to fit ten soldiers, the six-wheeled armored Saracen made its name a

⁸¹³ Hewitt, "Ulster Names."

⁸¹⁴ Alan Gillis, "The Ulster Way," *Somebody, Somewhere* (Oldcastle, Ireland: Gallery Press, 2004).

⁸¹⁵ Deleuze, *Foucault* 70.

common point of identification for the Belfast residents during the Troubles. As a visual marker of the British army's regulative and disciplinary force, it communicates not merely a territorial claim, but an affective one. *Thou shalt be afraid*. Joining the Saracen tank are the other hallmarks of the highly-militarized police force—kremlin-2 mesh and Makrolon face-shields. Again, Carson dwells on the power differential that these technologies reflect. The Catholics are armed only with the punctuation of rage; out of anger, they throw “exclamation marks” at the riot police, anything they can get their hands on. Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys. “A fount of broken type.” In contrast, the British police manning the barricade possess weapons graced with proper names. Their equipment's technical monikers belies the British's strategic deployment of force against the Ulster province. And it remakes the city's pathways into its own specifications. *Thou shalt not take that street. Thou shalt submit to searches*. And ultimately: *Thou shalt stay indoors*. And so already, the introduction of a third-party into the conflict departs from the Unionist and Catholic mythologies of Protestant hegemony and Catholic martyrdom, respectively. While a number of arguments can be made for and against the salience of the British intervention in this instance, Carson's decision to include it solidly within the poem reintroduces a colonial element to the conflict. Unlike Hewitt, who situates “The colony” far in the past, Carson reveals the power strategies still operating within the Belfast context in the present.

But the most revealing exchange comes in the poem's final line when the British troops catch the speaker in their perceptual field. They interrogate him, forcing him to give up his identity and to plot his own movements on their map. “What is/My name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going?” Carson's use of the self-reference here gives the questions two valences: the soldiers interrogate the speaker in the police state; and the speaker doubts his own discernibility within a surreal and unstable streetscape. In the first articulation, the speaker is the force acted upon. Just so Carson returns the confessional model of truth production to its power relations. Foucault notes, “An immense labor to which the West has submitted generations in order to produce...man's subjection: their constitution as

subjects in both senses of the word.”⁸¹⁶ And so the first reading of Carson’s final line is caught up in the second. By doubting his own ability to locate himself within a name or on a spatiotemporal grid, the speaker problematizes language’s capacity to mimetically represent (I could say produce) his own identity. Carson allows that he is “deeply suspicious of language in general.”⁸¹⁷

This ambivalence at the end of “Belfast Confetti” raises the specter of a problem that Carson considers in other poems—the Belfast natives’ abilities to evade the British mechanisms of capture and the general atmosphere of precarity that resistance poses for the soldiers and residents alike. The British Paras may be better armed with their Makrolon face-shields, yet they too are navigating an unfamiliar and hostile space where guerillas could await them around every corner. They are, in a manner of speaking, sitting ducks. In his poem, “Army,” Carson narrates the progression of a British patrol making its way through the Bogside neighborhood, and he takes the perspective of a Provisionals sniper. “The duck patrol is waddling down the odd-numbers side of Raglan Street,/The bass-ackwards private at the rear trying not to think of a third eye/Being drilled in the back of his head.”⁸¹⁸ The Provisionals man walks the patrol through the streets, counting down all the while. Carson’s work pushes into the cinematographic; the reader is weighed down by the dramatic irony, as “They stop. They check their guns. Thirteen. Milton Street. An iron lamppost/Number one. Ormond Street.” The speaker continues, addressing himself: “*Two ducks in front of a duck and two ducks/Behind a duck, how many ducks? Five? No. Three.* This is not the end.”⁸¹⁹ Considering that the Catholic residents often used to take down the street signs to confuse the British troops, it becomes apparent that the map acts as a tool for both control and resistance. Once in the streets, anyone becomes visible and susceptible to violence. Carson writes several verses about the experience of heading out to the pub during the Troubles where anyone

⁸¹⁶ Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Vol. I*. 60.

⁸¹⁷ Alexander, *Ciaran Carson: Space, Place, Writing*.

⁸¹⁸ Carson, “Army,” lines 1-3.

⁸¹⁹ Carson, “Army.”

could be carrying a gun. "How simple it would be for someone/Like ourselves to walk in and blow the whole place, and ourselves, to Kingdom Come."⁸²⁰ Identities, names, places—all become precarious, destabilized, susceptible to violence and to losing their forms.

"Belfast Confetti" reveals the double-edged nature of the map as a perceptual tool and posits a politics of becoming indiscernible rather than one of emigration. Given that poetry too becomes a project of map-making—one that possesses the potential for both complicity and revelation, Carson's poem advocates for the subversion of traditional place-based communities and territorial identities. Identities become even more mobile as the British police barricades launch their fusillade of question marks. For the first time, Carson is not an individual trapped in the dialogue of "To be or not to be" Catholic. (Or Protestant, in the case of MacNeice and Mahon). The territory he once knew so well no longer makes sense. And so "Belfast Confetti" does not end with political rhetoric or grand assertions, but with "a fusillade of question marks." The violence and conflict has destabilized the *omphalos* and the individual's comfortable relationship to it. And that instability contains dialectical possibilities for both constraint and escape, in a true MacNeician fashion. "We too have lives to live," Mahon asserts on behalf of the Northern Irish in his poem, "A Disused Shed in County Wexford."⁸²¹ Carson adds, you are not stuck as the fire king. Every city that an individual inhabits requires a bit of imaginative mapping. "We live in the Belfast of dreams as much as the actual city."⁸²²

Carson's city is a war-ravaged, splintered, surveyed landscape, and his images necessarily problematize their own ability to mimetically represent the lived world. As Carson worries, "I can't as a writer take any moral stance on the Troubles beyond registering what happens. And then as soon as I say that, I realize that registering is a kind of morality. Nor can one, even if one wanted to, escape

⁸²⁰ Carson, "Last Orders."

⁸²¹ Mahon, "A Disused Shed in County Wexford."

⁸²² Ormsby, "Interview with Ciaran Carson," 1991.

politics.”⁸²³ The Ulster structure of feeling runs aground again and again on the perceptual. Yet this time, Carson is performing his maps of the city as acts of resistance. “Every move is punctuated,” and still he insists on circulating and moving through the streets. He refuses to know the territory through the mediation of the British and their reductive representations. Like Louis O’Neill from Heaney’s “Casualty,” Carson insists on establishing himself in space and time by his own rhythmic pacing. “And smile/As you find a rhythm/Working you, slow mile by mile,/Into your proper haunt/Somewhere, well out, beyond...”

MacNeice’s time has come politically with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and the pledge to include Northern Ireland’s plurality of voices in its governance, Edna Longley and Fran Brearton conclude in their 2012 book on his work and influence. But MacNeice’s political imaginary and his aesthetic have suffused the Belfast group’s writing for decades now. His ability to write from contradiction and to live without a fixed anchor have inspired Carson and his generation to proliferate notions of Northern Irish identity outside of the rusticative ideologies so powerful during the early Troubles. And so like MacNeice before him, they find their escape in a radical attention to the world passing in front of them. From Heaney and Mahon through to Muldoon and Carson, the Belfast writers are engaged with the project laid forth by Heidegger when he wrote, “Man’s relation to locations, and through locations to spaces, inheres in his dwelling. The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken.”⁸²⁴ Yet the acts of dwelling the poems recount—and the territories they draw—no longer remain fixed firmly in the Ulster soil. Instead, they draw from the MacNeician attention to the quotidian and from the mundane rhythms of living that establish individuals in space, time, and relationality. For, as Mahon put it in 1964, “This, you implied, is how we ought to live:”⁸²⁵

Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:
World is suddener than we fancy it.

⁸²³ Ormsby, “Interview with Ciaran Carson.”

⁸²⁴ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 155.

⁸²⁵ Mahon, “In Carrowdore Churchyard.”

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.⁸²⁶

⁸²⁶ MacNeice, "Snow."