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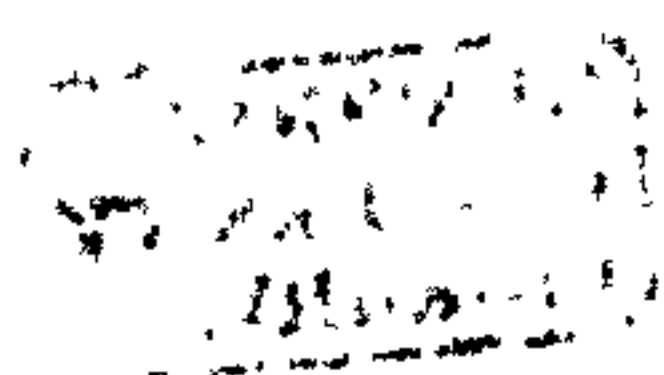
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STRUCTURES OF BELONGING: THE POETRY OF SEAMUS HEANEY

A thesis presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English Literature at the University of Glasgow, May 2003 by Kirsty Williams BA (Hons).



Abstract

This thesis is divided into three parts - Word, Body and Transubstantiation. Collectively these are the central motifs of Catholicism's Eucharist. According to Scripture, Christ is the word made flesh. The Eucharist recalls his words and actions at the Last Supper when he shares bread and wine with his disciples and tells them that they are his body and blood. In the Catholic faith partaking of wine and bread during the communion of mass is believed to be a partaking of the real presence of Christ. By consuming the body (bread) and blood (wine) of Christ, the participating community symbolise their collective belonging in and to Christ. The Catholic Eucharist consequently explodes difference in a utopic leap of faith whereby transubstantiation conflates and reconciles language and physical being, *sub specie eternitatis*.

Whilst it is a religious formation, a relationship between word and body and their overlap also maps into preoccupations in recent philosophical and cultural theory which bear on Seamus Heaney's poetry. Rather than converging word and body through a utopic leap of faith (transubstantiation), poststructuralism (following Saussure) posits an irreconcilable interstice between signifier and signified and (in the language of Derrida) infinitely defers meaning. Psychoanalysis (following Lacan) suggests desire is a consequence of the space between signifier and signified. Anthropological and sociological body theories (following Foucault) propose a disparity between corporeality and discursive constructions of bodies. Questions of a persistent gap in secular philosophy are therefore opposed to a sacred structure (converging word and body in a utopic leap of faith) that is most clearly marked and symbolised in the Catholic Eucharist. By appropriating this religious structure and these cultural theories, an ongoing secularisation of belonging in Heaney's poetry emerges.

In his endeavour to create a coherent self which can speak for a unified community, Heaney points to the universal spirit of Catholicism (which has largely been read from a liberal humanist perspective as Heaney's adherence to bourgeois values) only to refute the possibility of embodying communal belonging in and through language. What emerges in the course of this thesis is that the more clearly desire for spiritual belonging is articulated in Heaney's poetry, the more evident its failure in contemporary society becomes. This causes a pivotal ambivalence to emerge around poetry's role in contemporary society. An ongoing recognition of disparities between words and bodies demarcates literature from materiality, yet Heaney repeatedly evokes a desire for poetry to effect substantial changes to society. The poetry of Seamus Heaney thereby manifests contrary structures of belonging which work simultaneously, one emphasising a gap between word and body, and one seeking to erase that gap by embodying words.

For Nicola, whose Norton Anthology first introduced me to poetry, and who, like those poems, remains ever present within me.

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Preface

Each part of this thesis will address a different aspect of a dialectic between material reality and its representation in Heaney's poetry.

The majority of Heaney's critics have hitherto read him through a framework extracted from his critical writing, or in a frame which finds what is extracted from his prose alien. This thesis proposes a third ground: a redressing of his poetry that chooses as its critical framework what seem to be the implicit drives and sympathies of the poems themselves - the relationship between word and body. Before beginning this rereading, the dominant critical tendencies from which Heaney is approached will be considered. Thereafter, 'Word' will address language's mediatory role in relation to people, history and the material world. Poetry analyses in this part will look at ways Heaney engages with ambivalence within speakers' voices, irresolvable gaps between language and history, and history and its representations. Heaney's concern with gaps between signifier and signified will be read as emphasising ways in which language constructs senses of reality and is, consequently, pivotal to ideas of identity and belonging. Rather than reading Heaney as a poet of universal emotions or critiquing him for upholding (bourgeois) ideological premises of universality (as the tendency has been), this part will read his poetry as recognising and displaying ways in which language helps to transmit ideological principles that imagine status quo social conditions as natural.

The first chapter of 'Body' will chart Heaney's early representations of bodies in poems that address gender relations, marriage, history and violence. Subsequently, 'Body' will focus on absences of corporeality consequent to representation and examine inscriptions of power on bodies. The middle chapter will address Heaney's bog people poems, from *North*, and will read them as foregrounding a tension between a subsumption of bodies within

processes of legitimating and displaying power, and bodies as individual sensory systems. Rather than uniting word and body, representation continually occludes the corporeality of existence. Language thereby serves to conceal physically oppressive conditions that participate in the formation and performance of state and counterstate power. A movement between political and personal suffering in body poems subsequent to *North* will be emphasised in the final chapter of 'Body'. This will reflect back upon Heaney's developing response to the Troubles and will look towards issues of guilt and complacency that are addressed in 'Transubstantiation'.

The poems analysed in 'Transubstantiation' are largely drawn from Heaney's later works. In the first chapter, usage of Christian motifs to evoke desires for translation, transfiguration and transubstantiation in literature and the material world will be analysed to show how this is a continuing, yet impossible, drive in Heaney's poetry from 1984 onwards. Drawing on interpretations of themes surrounding words and bodies from previous parts of this thesis, 'Transubstantiation' will display how Christian symbolism in Heaney's poetry no longer embodies possibilities of communal transcendence, and is instead bound by its own discursive form. This will be demonstrated in the middle part through analyses of 'object' poems. In opposition to Catholicism's host objects that transubstantiate into Christ's body and blood, objects in these poems embody their speakers' communal, political and social desires, all of which are undercut by their enunciation in language. A developing tension between feelings of guilt and ineffectuality and feelings of complicity in Heaney's poetry will be read as part of a desire to transcend discursive and corporeal reality. However, this desire is constantly undercut by a secularisation of the spiritual structure which enacts such a transubstantiation. Poetry can never resolve the tension between corporeal and discursive realities (between word and body), and it is this realisation which Heaney's work unfolds. Yet, paradoxically, his

desire to resolve this tension recurs, ensuring that belonging remains perpetually ambivalent in the poetry of Seamus Heaney.

In the following text initial capitals in prose quotations are altered to lower cases (as indicated with square brackets) so as not to disrupt sentences. This is not done with poetry quotations which maintain their original cases throughout. Unless explicitly given a female gender, speakers in poems are discussed as male.

References to Heaney's poetry, unless otherwise stated, are to individual collections rather than to selected or collected editions of his work and page references are to the start of each poem or group of poems; capitalisation and punctuation also correspond with these initial publications. Because this text adheres to the MHRA's author-date referencing system this indicates a rough chronological movement in the thesis itself which it is important to maintain.

An index of cited Heaney poetry precedes the bibliography. This gives page references to the thesis and, where appropriate, page references to *New Selected Poems: 1966-1987* and to *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996*.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Gerry Carruthers, whose academic supervision was surpassed only by his unswerving words of encouragement and support over the past few years; and to Paddy Lyons, whose observations have helped shape this thesis. Thanks to Gilbert Markus for his theological insight, and to Richard Price for helping me locate and read *Gorgon*. Beyond these intellects, the love and support of my friends and my family has been a talisman to me. I thank my mother, who never refused to read excerpts of my work, even when she was on holiday; my father, for cheering my spirit (and giving me relativity) with his endearing renditions of 'The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck (the flames he could not stop them)'; and Peter, who has preserved my sanity and, more importantly, my laughter.

Author's Declaration

This thesis is my own work, and no part of it has been submitted previously for any academic qualification. The views expressed are my own and not those of the University of Glasgow.

1. Introduction: Canon and Criticism

In the 1980s a centralisation of theoretical positions such as feminism, new historicism and post-colonialism brought with it a self-reflective debate about canons and critical practises in literary studies. Publications such as *Re-Reading English* (1982) edited by Peter Widdowson, Chris Baldick's *The Social Mission of English Criticism* (1983) and David Lloyd's introduction to *Nationalism and Minor Literature* (1987) assert the ideological nature of literary institutions. With differing emphases these texts all affirm the essence of Louis Althusser's thesis that educational establishments teach obedience and participate in the perpetuation of 'the established order': 'the school [...] teaches "know-how", but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its "practice" (1984, 6-7).¹

Brian Doyle's essay in *Re-Reading English*, 'The Hidden History of English Studies' charts the birth of English as a curricular subject. He argues that changing social and economic conditions, particularly in relation to nineteenth-century gender roles, and consequent developments in education drastically affected the place of literature as a cornerstone for perceptions of self and nation.² Doyle suggests that because 'the reading of English literature' was used to shape 'an understanding of the "English spirit"' it helped to produce, promote and perpetuate cultural paradigms (in Widdowson 1982, 23-24). This significantly contributed towards an Arnoldian formulation of literature as a reflection of an organic and homogeneous nation. In *The Social Mission of*

¹ For instance, Brian Doyle's essay 'The Hidden History of English Studies' in *Re-Reading English* explores the way that the teaching of literature became caught up with paradigmatic ideas of national identity. Baldick reflects on the academy's role in perpetuating dominant ideological assumptions. And Lloyd challenges these assumptions as producing relations of power which marginalise and exclude classes and people who do not reflect the paradigms imagined in canon formations.

² Doyle argues that the rising surplus of unmarried women in the mid-nineteenth century was gradually 'absorbed into a quasi-professional and at the same time quasi-maternal composite function whereby women educated the children of the national "corporate body"' (in Widdowson 1982, 23).

English Criticism, Chris Baldick relates similar ideas to the history of criticism, highlighting its role within ideology. Baldick's premise is that traditional critical practices seek to imagine themselves and their approaches as universal, transhistorical entities, and see themselves in opposition to alternative practices (such as feminism and Marxism) that are responsible for importing ideological positions into a domain of epistemological truth (1983,1).

David Lloyd's introduction to *Nationalism and Minor Literature* argues that canon formation is part of a tradition of critical practice which perpetuates 'the ideology of bourgeois individualism' and romanticised nationalism.³ Literary texts become canonical (transmitted in and through educational establishments), he suggests, because they embody features that are seen to be paradigmatic of a society or nation. According to Lloyd the canon is:

not merely analogous to the State, nor is it a contingent product of an arbitrary attempt to establish order and hierarchy to perpetuate the mediation of values. A major literature is established as such precisely by virtue of its claim to representative status, of its claim to realize the autonomy of the individual subject to such a degree that that individual subject becomes universally valid and archetypal (1987, 19).

By formulating a sense of individual identity that encodes a set of national or universal ideals, bourgeois ideology and romantic nationalism perpetuate social and economic inequalities because they fail to acknowledge people who do not identify with their ideals (1987, 17).

Doyle's argument exemplifies an ongoing problem in literary criticism which relates to Lloyd's ideas about marginalisation and exclusion. Similarly to Lloyd, Doyle proposes that 'selective uses of English as a language and literature

have [...] been of great importance in mediating power relations between classes and other groups in British society' (in Widdowson 1982, 18). This politicises and thereby challenges any perpetuation of such practices. However, by speaking about 'British society' whilst discussing a development of a national culture that reflects an 'English spirit' (1982, 24), Doyle simultaneously critiques and participates in a selective use of 'English as a language and literature'.⁴ This confusion of terms is a form of marginalisation which renders British voices that do not belong to the English nation anomalous. Whilst Doyle critiques ways in which English literature has become a vehicle for producing and perpetuating class relations, he speaks from a position that, paradoxically, does not recognise its own participation in social narratives of exclusion and marginalisation. The subversive potential of Doyle's essay is thus effectively contained by a self-perpetuating dominant centre which canonises a formulation of self and nation in which British identity is measured by a concept of 'the English spirit'.

Whilst Doyle's theoretical position unconsciously imposes this paradox upon itself, a similar movement can be charted in relation to the criticism of writers who have attained canonical status: even when subversive potential exists within their work, it is occluded by an assimilating drive towards established interpretations or interpretative strategies. One such writer where this critical situation pertains is Seamus Heaney.

Seamus Heaney was born 13 April 1939 into a Catholic family on Mossbawn farm in County Derry, Northern Ireland. In 1972 he moved to the Republic of Ireland, and in the pamphlet poem, *An Open Letter* (1983) he critiqued Andrew

³ I have critiqued and endorsed the work of David Lloyd in this thesis. Whilst I am in agreement with Lloyd about power relations inherent in social frameworks (Lloyd 1987; JanMohamed and Lloyd 1990), I believe his critique of Heaney is misdirected (Lloyd 1993).

⁴ In his essay 'Varieties of Nationalism: Post-Revisionist Irish Studies' Willy Maley discusses the interchange of 'English' and 'British' in post-colonial criticism, proposing that this 'keeps in place, naturalises and perpetuates a stultifying notion of Britishness' (in Briggs *et al* 1998, 270).

Motion's and Blake Morrison's inclusion of him in *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (1982), stating that his 'passport's green' (1983, 9).⁵ By denying his status as British, Heaney points to the cultural suppression of his marginalised Irish identity perpetuated by encoding him as 'British', a term which continues to be interchanged with 'English'.⁶ These acts, in addition to his Catholic upbringing, point towards a nationalist tendency in his life and work. Yet his continuing preoccupation with cultural and political contexts of Northern Ireland remains fundamental to his writing. By considering these issues, Heaney's poetry can be read as challenging the hegemony of 'Britishness', ideas of a single English literary tradition and consequent notions of canonicity.⁷ However, whilst his poetry itself and his anomalous position between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland *should* continue to pose problems of assimilation,⁸ Heaney is an exemplary instance of a writer embraced and simplistically transmitted as a poet who embodies transcendental universal emotions by critical establishments across the world.

⁵ Peter McDonald proposes that this poem contributes to 'a process whereby the meaning of "British" is broken down into the exclusivist discourse of identity: "British" is taken as "English" (1997,194). Whilst McDonald suggests that Heaney's act serves to further inscribe an 'exclusivist discourse of identity', he does not acknowledge that the discursive interchange between the terms remains a paradox for the poet.

⁶ Essays such as Antony Easthope's 'How Good is Seamus Heaney?' serve to continue to justify Heaney's disavowal of Britishness. Easthope only acknowledges Heaney's birthplace once in this essay (1997, 29), and whilst unproblematically discussing him within the context of 'Englishness' ('the English subject', 'the English real' (1997, 21), 'the English cultural tradition', and 'the heartlands of English ideology') (1997, 22) he concludes his discussion under the heading 'In England - Now' (1997, 34).

⁷ Moreover, they should make it difficult to place or theorise Heaney simplistically. The fact that he was brought up within an economically and politically marginalised Catholic community in a part of Ireland that is still politically tied to the UK problematises *post*-colonial readings of his work. This also makes it difficult to fully integrate his poetry into a discussion of contemporary Irish literature which does not account for the ongoing partition of the geographical space we call Ireland. And yet, equally, to discuss him as a British writer fails to consider his alienation from, and criticism of, the UK State.

⁸ The Government of Ireland Bill was passed at Westminster in 1920. This marked the official splitting of Ireland into Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State, each was to have its own parliament to deal with domestic affairs. On 6 December 1921 the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed by the British Government and Sinn Féin which 'gave the Irish Free State Dominion status within the British Empire' (Dixon 2001, 4). In April 1949 the Irish Free State became the Irish Republic. Following the heightening of sectarian violence subsequent to the Irish Civil Rights movement of the late 1960s, the Northern Irish Parliament was dissolved, and in March 1972 full governing power transferred back to Westminster.

From the outset of his career Seamus Heaney has been unusually exposed to critical and media attention, and a consequent blurring of the boundary between his public persona and his poetry has occurred which exacerbates his paradoxical position as a canonical figure. He has frequently received literary awards; this heightened in 1995 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and subsequently the Whitbread 'Book of the Year' for *The Spirit Level* (1996) and *Beowulf* (1999a).⁹ Beyond his ten collections and two collected editions of poetry to date,¹⁰ Heaney has edited two poetry collections with Ted Hughes,¹¹ published five translated poetry texts, one translated play,¹² various pamphlets and four collections of prose and criticism.¹³ His interaction with the academy on both sides of the Atlantic has not only increased his publicity but also ensured his continuing interest in literary criticism.¹⁴ In 1981 Heaney joined the Field Day Theatre Company's Board of Directors which also comprised Seamus Deane, Brian Friel, David Hammond, Tom Paulin and

⁹ 1967 - Eric Gregory Award and Cholmondeley Award; 1968 - Somerset Maugham Award and Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize; 1972 - Irish-American Cultural Foundation Award for *Wintering Out*; 1973 - Denis Devlin Award; 1975 - W.H. Smith Award and E.M. Forster Award for *North*; 1976 - Duff Cooper Prize; 1982 - Bennett Award; 1983 - Lannan Foundation Award; 1987 - Whitbread Award for *The Haw Lantern*; 1996 - Commonwealth Award for *The Spirit Level*.

¹⁰ *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door into the Dark* (1969), *Wintering Out* (1972), *North* (1975a), *Field Work* (1979), *Station Island* (1984a), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), *Seeing Things* (1991), *The Spirit Level* (1996), *Electric Light* (2001); *New Selected Poems 1966-1987* (1990b), *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996* (1998).

¹¹ *The Rattle Bag* (1982) and *The School Bag* (1997).

¹² *Sweeney Astray* (1984b), *The Cure at Troy* (1990a), *The Midnight Verdict* (1993/2000), *Laments* (1995), *Beowulf* (1999a), *Diary of One Who Vanished* (1999b).

¹³ *Stations* (1975b), *An Open Letter* (1983), *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (1980), *The Government of the Tongue: The T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (1988), *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures* (1995), *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (2002).

¹⁴ In 1966 Heaney became a lecturer at Queen's University, Belfast, and in 1982 Queen's awarded him with an honorary D.Litt. In 1970 he worked as a guest lecturer for a year at the University of California, returning to the USA in 1979 as visiting professor for a term at Harvard, where, in 1982, he took up a five year post teaching one semester a year and in 1984 was appointed Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard. In 1989 he began his elected post as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, giving three public lectures a year for five years, and in 1996, after resigning from the Boylston Professorship, was appointed Emerson Poet in Residence and expected to visit Harvard in a non-teaching capacity for six weeks every second year.

Stephen Rea.¹⁵ The response to Heaney's place within Field Day, and the consequent political and ideological assumptions made because of this is one instance of the way that critical reception of his poetry has been coloured by his other professional activities.

In his introduction to *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (in which Field Day pamphlets by Edward Said, Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson are collected) Seamus Deane argues that Field Day was formed as a response to a political crisis in Northern Ireland and that its 'analysis of the situation derives from the conviction that it is, above all, a colonial crisis' (in Eagleton *et al.* 1990, 6). Deane also suggests that their approach has been unpopular in some political and academic establishments as a result of forces such as historical revisionism in Irish studies, and proposes a conscious and specific ideological perspective from which Field Day's work is constructed (in Eagleton *et al.* 1990, 6-7). This sets an agenda for Field Day through which it is now predominantly read.¹⁶

Steven Matthews criticises David Lloyd's use of a post-colonial framework in his interpretation of Heaney's poetry, suggesting that such an approach 'seems premature' (1997, 230). However, he subsequently notes that 'the premature attempt to see all of Ireland as a post-colonial state is very much a part of the later thinking of the Field Day Theatre Company, of which Heaney was a director' (1997, 229-230). This implicitly proposes that if Heaney can participate in such 'premature' theorising then so can his critics; the extension of this

¹⁵ Initially the company produced a play each year. In September 1983 it began to publish a series of pamphlets exploring issues relating to Ireland, and in 1991 it published a three volume work edited by Deane - *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. Beyond his editorial and directorate duties Heaney published *An Open Letter* (1983) as a pamphlet poem, and translated Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (*The Cure at Troy*) which was performed in Derry by Field Day in 1990.

¹⁶ For instance, in a subsection of 'Revising "Irish Literature"' entitled 'Field Day and the Canon' from *The Living Stream*, Edna Longley proposes that 'by 1980 one group of writers [...] has espoused an explicit and interventionist cultural politics behind the banner of the Field Day Theatre Company' (1994, 22). In 'From Cathleen to Anorexia' she says that '[c]ertainly, critics associated with Field Day approach the Irish Literary Revival both as a colonial manifestation and as a present hegemony' (1994, 183).

reasoning allows for interpretations of his poetry that are qualified in relation to his public persona and his critical writings. Although Heaney's affiliation with Field Day can be seen as an instance in which he has adopted a publicly political position, to judge his poetry by the theoretical framework of such a group, or to justify a similar argument by pointing to statements made by other directors of Field Day, problematises Heaney's poetic autonomy.

Marilynn Richtarik's study of Field Day's formative years, *Acting Between the Lines*, is significant in relation to this. By differentiating the company's overall position from Deane's it challenges perceptions of Field Day as explicitly and specifically political. Although Field Day 'has always insisted that it is engaged somehow with politics', Richtarik argues, 'the precise nature of this engagement has never been spelled out' (1994, 75). Deane, she proposes, became the company's 'unofficial spokesman' by 1985, 'largely because he was more willing than the other directors to discuss the project in abstract terms'. Consequently, 'his opinions [...] were taken to reflect company policy' (1994, 243). This problematises Matthews's justification of Lloyd's position on Heaney in relation to Field Day's use of post-colonialism. As Richtarik's analysis points out, assumptions about one person's representative status can be misleading.

More significantly than Heaney's place within Field Day is the pivotal role his critical writings and interviews have played in establishing ideas about his poetry. The ease with which Heaney has been canonised can be partly understood in relation to this. For instance, some essays in Heaney's first book of collected prose, *Preoccupations*, meditate on childhood memories of the countryside in which he grew up and on his development as a poet.¹⁷ Indeed, before Heaney had finished his undergraduate degree he was already shaping

¹⁷ 'Mossbawn' (1980, 17-27) is the first essay in *Preoccupations* and explores ideas of belonging, language and Heaney's childhood in Northern Ireland; 'Feeling into Words' (1980, 41-60) is a self-reflective meditation of experiences of writing poetry and influences upon that poetry.

the future standard by which his poetry should be read. In 'The Seductive Muse (A superfluous and unsolicited editorial)' which he wrote for the 1961 Hilary Term issue of *Gorgon*, a Queen's University undergraduate magazine, he asserts that:

in my experience, the only people genuinely interested in university poetry as poetry - as opposed to reading matter - are the poets themselves. Poems, like my own, which pander to Sixth Form conceptions of the poetic tend to be the more popular, if less valuable (1961, 4).¹⁸

As Heaney's poetry, particularly his earlier work, can be read as simple lyrics of rural childhood experiences that make use of recurring images and metaphorical analogies, it is easily taught as such to a large span of people of varying abilities.¹⁹ The fact that his output of critical writings can serve as a framework with which to read his poetry as such only furthers his appeal. Not only can he be easily traced into a literary tradition of rural poets who adopt lyric forms to reflect upon themselves, but he also provides the material to validate such reading practices.²⁰

¹⁸ The angst ridden rhetoric of this piece continues throughout, and ends ironically in retrospect with Heaney discounting any possible literary success and announcing the end of his poetic career:

Finally, I would like to make two things clear. First, the poets under discussion here are not those who will be adorning future editions of the 'Oxford Book of Irish Verse' but those people who are prompted to creation by a poster demanding contributions for a magazine. And secondly, I am not an ex-editor of *Gorgon* but something (I have convinced myself) more despicable, an ex-poet (1961, 6).

¹⁹ Pointing to an article published in 1992 in the *Guardian International* announcing that 'Shakespeare takes second place to Seamus Heaney as the writer whose name appears most in English Literature courses at polytechnics and colleges of higher education [in Britain]', Rand Brandes highlights Heaney's canonical status (1994, 63). A footnote in Antony Easthope's essay 'How Good is Seamus Heaney?' emphasises this, '[a] survey of the English syllabus at 47 British colleges and polytechnics reported that "Seamus Heaney is taught in every college but one"' (1997, 36). Easthope's data comes from 'Pace Canon Survey Report', *PACE Newsletter*, 5 (March 1992).

²⁰ For instance, Neil Corcoran prefaces every chapter of *Seamus Heaney* (1986) with a quotation from Heaney's prose or from him in conversation (1986, 11, 43, 71, 95, 127, 153) and uses Heaney's own descriptions of influences, experiences and poetry throughout to qualify his complementary interpretations. From the outset, Sidney Burris's *The Poetry of Resistance* (1990) bases his reading of Heaney on Heaney's critical writing, as does Henry Hart's extensive

In his introduction to the Icon guide, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, Elmer Andrews celebrates the use of Heaney's prose, suggesting that 'some of the most important insights into Heaney's poetry come, of course, from the poet himself who, in his three volumes of prose [to date], seeks, as [...] Helen Vendler says, "to articulate a comprehensive and responsible poetics"' (1998, 5):

Heaney's prose is read to elucidate the poems and the success or failure of the poems is evaluated by the conformity with the project articulated in the prose; or, more implicitly, the poems are evaluated in terms of a critical orthodoxy that values the New Critical ideal of the 'well-made poem', an orthodoxy to which Heaney himself conforms, and which he thus reinforces, in his own poetic practice and literary criticism (Andrews 1998, 5-6).²¹

Validating arguments about Heaney's poetry by quoting his prose allows critics to make assumptions that more thorough close analyses would often problematise. As Steven Matthews proposes,

Heaney's own poetry from relatively early on has shown an unease with the kinds of traditional, organic independence, coherence and reconciliation frequently envisaged in his prose. Indeed, the poetry emerges as more unsettled, contingent and modern than the traditional terms of Heaney's celebratory prose might seem to allow (1997, 165).

study of Heaney in *Seamus Heaney: Poet of Contrary Progressions* (1992), Helen Vendler's *Seamus Heaney* (1998) and Edna O'Brien's essay "Inner Émigré" or "Artful Voyeur"? Seamus Heaney's *North*' from *Poetry in the Wars* (1986). Eugene O'Brien similarly foregrounds his use of Heaney's prose by dedicating a whole chapter to a discussion of his prose and translations 'in order to explore the thinking behind the poetry' (2002, 6).

²¹ This is further emphasised when he dismisses the cultural criticism which is set in opposition to the Vendlerian critical approach, describing David Lloyd's work as a 'relentless and coldly savage critique of Heaney's poetry' (1998, 6).

It is, then, primarily the overlap between Heaney as poet and Heaney as critic which has caused most problems in critical evaluations of his poetry. Because this overlap continues in Heaney criticism, canonical readings of his poetry remain self-perpetuating. Much as canonical ideals of Englishness remain latent in Brian Doyle's essay, 'The Hidden History of English Studies', Heaney criticism is largely limited by a continued revision of established and dominant readings of his work that suggest his poetry is representative of a collective group. Indeed, even opponents of celebratory readings of Heaney's work serve to entrench an established perception of him, as will be seen in relation to David Lloyd. This thesis is posited on the belief that a return to close textual analysis, independent of intentional interpretation and critical appropriation, produces radically different and problematic readings of an established writer.²² Before turning to the poetry itself, the ideas of three critics who have been pivotal to the reception of Heaney will be outlined. These critics represent different positions on Heaney, but despite this they all reproduce similar underlying assumptions which entrench Heaney as a canonical figure.

Helen Vendler was the first major critic in the United States of America to spotlight Heaney. Influenced by New Criticism's concern with formal and stylistic elements of poetry, and with what she describes as lyric poetry's aim 'to grasp and perpetuate, by symbolic form, the self's volatile and transient here and now' (1999, 10), she dismisses contextual readings as 'beside the point' (1999, 6). This allows her to assert some fundamental premises. Firstly that poetry stands outside politics, and secondly that it can be read autobiographically: '[l]yric poetry neither stands nor falls on its themes; it stands or falls on the accuracy of language with which it reports the author's emotional responses to the life around him' (1999, 6). This is clearly evident in Vendler's *The Music of What Happens* when she critiques the tendency to group poets

²² Whilst social and historical contexts will prove significant in the following parts of this thesis, Heaney's own critical position and developing biography will not be addressed.

along national lines, in order to propose a mode of interpretation which delights in poetry as an aesthetic construct informing universal experiences of human development:

Heaney is usually discussed [...] as an Irish poet [...] but that emphasis distorts the beauty and significance of his work: he is as much the legitimate heir of Keats or Frost as of Kavanagh or Yeats, and the history of his consciousness is as germane to our lives as that of any other poet (1988, 149).

By emphasising style and form, other aspects of poetry are occluded - 'the life around' poet and poetry is insignificant as long as 'the author's emotional responses' are accurately expressed through words. Consequently, historical and social complexities are disregarded. Specificity is replaced with a persistent return to supposed universal qualities of 'the self'. Vendler thus abstracts the emotion rendered in Heaney's poetry from contemporary contexts to frame him as a representative of universal values and emotions. This is especially notable in her discussion of the effect of the reception of Bloody Sunday and Westminster's resumption of direct rule over Northern Ireland in Heaney's work, when she argues that,

such changes could not fail to influence his writing. Heaney's may be an extreme sequence, but a similar passage from a sequestered childhood to a forcibly socialized adulthood *happens to us all*: we are constrained to acknowledge evil, violence, and *our* individual helplessness in history (1988, 149, my emphasis).²³

Statements like this reflect what Lloyd has argued is a paradox of bourgeois ideology - positing individualism which is actually based on an assumption of universality. As Steven Matthews suggests, Vendler is 'the primary advocate in

²³ Heaney was approaching his 33rd birthday in the January of Bloody Sunday (1972).

America' of a critical community 'championing [Heaney's] work [...] to prove the poetry's transhistorical and transcultural importance' (Matthews 1997, 15). By invoking Heaney as an Everyman, Vendler frames his poetry in an exclusive and excluding narrative of belonging.

Following the precedent of Helen Vendler, Anglo-American criticism largely interprets Seamus Heaney's poetry as foregrounding an aesthetically imagined self, assimilating it into a canon of lyric poetry that celebrates individual poets as exemplars of universal feeling. A younger generation of poetry critics are adopting contrary positions in the USA; for instance, Catherine Malloy foregrounds ideas of polyvocality in Heaney's work (1994, Malloy & Carey 1996). However, Vendler's influence endures in critics such as Jonathan Hufstader. In his monograph, *Tongue of Water: Teeth of Stones* (1999), Hufstader points directly to Vendler as a positive precursor (1999,4), whilst critiquing David Lloyd and Seamus Deane (among others) for denying 'poetry's traditional claim to a separate, nonhistorical status with its own aesthetic rules of interpretation and its privileging of subjectivity' (1994,2).

Steven Matthews, Peter McDonald and Richard Kirkland have commented on the Vendlerian tendencies of Heaney's liberal humanist critics.²⁴ Matthew's introduction to *Irish Poetry: Politics, History, Negotiation* frames his summary of the critical debate in Irish literature around receptions of Heaney (1997, 14-26). Whilst he outlines similarities in Edna Longley's (Irish) critical position and those of Helen Vendler (American) and Tony Curtis (British) (1997, 21), he suggests that non-Irish critics have a greater propensity to step outside history in their response to Northern Irish literature - 'it is striking how often non-Irish

²⁴ See "Unconscious Partitionism": Northern Criticism in the Eighties' and "Just Another Twist in the Plot": Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon and the Final Institution' in Kirkland's *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965: Moments of Danger* (1996); 'Introduction: Making History?' in Matthews's *Irish Poetry: Politics, History, Negotiation* (1997); and "A Sixth Sense" and "Silly Like US": Anglo-Irish Accommodations' in McDonald's *Mistaken Identities* (1999).

critics are ready to remove the work from its context, or at least to see “the Troubles” as some kind of rude intervention into the privileged, harmonious space of the poems’ (1997, 16).

Edna Longley integrates historical and geographical contexts in her criticism, and so differs from Vendler’s transcendental approach. Where Vendler celebrates what she sees as universal emotions rendered in literature, Longley’s criticism is more particularly localised. By incorporating an awareness of authors’ specific contexts, she points to a relationship between writer and society, and thereby indirectly challenges Vendler’s more abstract approach. However, Longley’s engagement with locality is problematised by reading Heaney’s poetry as projections and explorations of selfhood. In “Inner Émigré” or “Artful Voyeur”? Seamus Heaney’s *North*, Longley proposes that ‘[f]rom the outset [Heaney’s] poems have travelled a rich boundary between conscious and unconscious, or instinctual, experience’ (1986, 141). Whilst Longley does address historical and geographical contexts, propositions like this suggest that literature is a privileged space that can be read independently from social contexts. Her infamous statement from *Poetry in the Wars* is exemplary of this idea:

Poetry and politics, like church and state, should be separated. And for all the same reasons: mysteries distort the rational processes which ideally prevail in social relations; while ideologies confiscate the poet’s special passport to *terra incognita*. Its literary streak, indeed, helps to make Irish Nationalism more a theology than an ideology (1986, 185).

By suggesting the possibility of writers exploring a ‘*terra incognita*’, Longley imagines that poetry stands outside ideology. In the opening passage of *The Living Stream*, Longley elaborates on this view:

although these essays have a political dimension, I see them as expanding rather than retracting a statement in my earlier book *Poetry in the Wars*. There I wrote: 'Poetry and politics, like church and state, should be separated.' By politics I meant predatory ideologies, fixed agendas and fixed expectations [...] I did not claim that art was independent of politics, but that it could provide for political independence, for dissidence and reinvention (1994, 9).

Both these statements suggest Longley's locality is paradoxical. Whilst she integrates political and historical awareness in her critical practice, she prefers Heaney's poetry when it can be read as exploring 'different parts of the hidden self' (1986, 141). Indeed, where Heaney addresses political or historical situations, Longley criticises him; 'his poetry suffers when he forsakes the hovering suggestiveness of thresholds, the actual process of discovery, a slowly opening door, and comes to or from political conclusions' (1986, 142). This serves to further embroil Longley's criticism in a rhetoric which attempts to mask her own ideological position.²⁵

In *Poetry and Posterity*, Longley's most recent collection of essays, for instance, she criticises non-Irish critics who study Irish literature:

The credentials of *Irish* exponents of Irish studies come under scrutiny in a highly politicised field where exclusion/inclusion is itself an issue [...] when foreign critics' cultural and intellectual dispositions explicitly enter their dialogue with Irish literature, the results are more interesting than when they think no barriers exist. Going native, the usual result of unexamined premises, is no use to the natives as they struggle with their

²⁵ Richard Kirkland expresses this point:

[w]hile Longley's writing has aspired to, and I think achieved, a mode of criticism which envisages itself as highly serious, and engaged with promoting the ideal of poetry as a gold standard, this should not disguise her considerable skills as a polemicist nor her use of rhetorical sleights of hand in order to convey her opinions (1996, 92-93).

own partial viewpoints. When Yeats wanted criticism to be 'as international...as possible', he did not ask us to recruit a global fan-club for the national literature (2000, 236-7).²⁶

International critics, adopting a nationalist perspective on Ireland, marginalise the Protestant tradition; the 'partial viewpoints' which they adopt are not unionist enough for Longley. A need for more understanding and tolerance of both unionist and nationalist positions in literary studies ensures the import of Longley's voice. However, her tendency to mask unionist sympathies undermines her position, and serves to further confuse her underlying assumptions regarding literature as a privileged space. Whilst her readings of Heaney's poetry are lucid and thought provoking, her constant recourse to a position which implicitly declares unionist voices as internationally marginalised disparages any attempt to deny that her readings of poetry are connected with her 'predatory ideologies, fixed agendas and fixed expectations'. Thus, as Kirkland suggests, 'Longley's work has continually forced the poem as aesthetic object into the bear-pit of the social arena while consistently denying that it should have to function in such a manner' (1996, 90).

David Lloyd is also concerned with a relationship between society and aesthetics, but contrasts with Longley by foregrounding and accentuating politics and cultural theory. By abstracting poetry from its social context and reading into it transcendental values, Vendler's practise imagines poets write in a '*terra incognita*'. Whilst Longley is concerned with ideas about locality, at times she also suggests that art exists in an independent and privileged realm from material reality. For Lloyd, such privileging of the arts is part of a bourgeois

²⁶ Similarly in the opening page of *The Living Stream*, part of which is quoted above, Longley asserts that 'culture and context, never uncontroversial, bear unusually heavy political inscriptions where Ireland is concerned'. She then suggests that '[m]isty-eyed Americans add to the confusion' of 'reading-difficulties' and '[c]omplicity between Irish axes and foreign tears compounds it' (1994, 9).

ideological project that reinforces concepts of universality and serves to further exclude marginal voices:

the apparent freedom of the aesthetic realm from politics is in itself a crucially political conception. The political function of aesthetics and culture is not only to suggest the possibility of transcending conflict, but to do so by excluding (or integrating) difference, whether historically produced or metaphysically conceived, insofar as it represents the threat to an image of unity whose role is finally hegemonic. The poetics of identity is intimately involved in both the efficacy and the contradictions of aesthetic politics and political aesthetics (1993, 19).

According to Lloyd, lyric poetry enforces bourgeois ideology's expectations of a solving relationship between words and speakers:

that it will crystallize specific emotions out of an experience; that the metaphorical structure in which the emotion is to be communicated will be internally coherent; that the sum of its ambiguities will be an integer, expressing eventually a unity of tone and feeling even where mediated by irony; that the unity will finally be the expression of a certain identity (1993, 35).

Moreover, because the form's origin lies in an imperial tradition of English literature that participated in oppressing Irish culture, Lloyd proposes that Irish writers who use it perpetuate a paradox:²⁷

²⁷ Lloyd proposes that questions of identity are linked to bourgeois aesthetics, which he defines as:

understood here to be ultimately the concept of man as producer and as producer of himself through his products, posits an original identity which precedes difference and conflict and which is reproduced in the ultimate unity that aesthetic works both prefigure and prepare. [...] Aesthetic politics [...] represents images of origin and unity to convey an ethical demand for the political coherence which will override whatever differences impede a unification in continuity with original identity (1993, 17).

the specific relation of an 'Irish identity' to the English literary - and political - establishment provides not only the language, but the very terms within which the question of identity is posed and resolved, the terms for which it is *the* question to be posed and resolved. For it is not simply the verse form, the melody, or what-not, that the poet takes over; it is the aesthetic, and the ethical and political formulations it subsumes, that the Romantic and imperial tradition supplies (1993, 23).²⁸

Notions of identity, aesthetics and bourgeois ideology are, for Lloyd, central cultural forces which help perpetuate hegemonic state power; when literature reflects and enunciates these values it serves to further legitimate the status quo.

Lloyd assumes that Heaney's use of the lyric form entails an inherent structure of revelation that formally renders unified subjects (bourgeois individuals), and argues that this reflects an image of national identity. Thus, although Lloyd's stance opposes Vendlerian criticism, he nevertheless adopts a similar framework. Vendler interprets Heaney's poetry as reflecting universal values, and so to does Lloyd. However, where the former celebrates this, the latter politicises and critiques it. Lloyd's argument that Heaney's poetry participates in 'a resurgent politics of identity' which 'attempts to contain and interpret the Northern Ireland conflict outside of colonial and class paradigms' (1993, 3), is laid out in "Pap for the Dispossessed": Seamus Heaney and the Poetics of Identity'.²⁹ As Tom Herron proposes, Lloyd's critique of Heaney's bourgeois

²⁸ In opposition to this, Catherine Malloy's essay 'Discerning Dialogues in *Field Work*' argues that utterances in Heaney's poetry:

are not the utterances of a conventional lyric speaker whose voice is unitary. Because there is a continuous intrusion of dialogues orchestrated by the speaker, a polyphony of discourses is created which bears directly on the speaker's perception of discourse as an informer (1994, 17).

Whilst Malloy's essay concentrates on *Field Work*, 'Ambivalent Voices' -the following chapter in this thesis - suggests such dialogic forces have, from the outset, shaped Heaney's work.

²⁹ In his introduction to *Anomalous States*, in which he republished "Pap for the Dispossessed" in 1993, Lloyd maintains a continuing legitimacy for his critique of Heaney (1993, 3-4). Like Lloyd, this thesis critiques Heaney's canonical status. Rather than seeking to further entrench

poetic is 'among the most forceful readings of Heaney's poetry' (1999, 183), and whilst Lloyd's work has been of influence to this thesis, it is necessary to offer a brief critique of his position on Heaney.

Lloyd's interpretation of Heaney is open to two major criticisms. Firstly, he frames his reading within an ambiguous vacillation between a discussion of Northern Ireland and of the Republic of Ireland, consequently confusing the line between what can now be seen as a post-colonial nation and what remains part of the United Kingdom. For the first five pages of "Pap for the Dispossessed" Lloyd discusses Ireland without noting the ongoing partition of Northern Ireland. For instance, he refers to '[t]he peculiar and largely anomalous position of Ireland as an ex-colonial state in a Western European context' (1994, 17), thus suggesting that he can effortlessly and coherently take account of Heaney in a discussion of a previously colonised state.

In *Nationalism and Minor Literature* Lloyd argues that,

while nationalism is a progressive and even a necessary political movement at one stage in its history, it tends at a later stage to become entirely reactionary, both by virtue of its obsession with a deliberately exclusive concept of racial identity and, more importantly, by virtue of its *formal* identity with imperial ideology. Ultimately, both imperialism and nationalism seek to occlude troublesome and inassimilable manifestations of difference by positing a transcendent realm of essential identity. The limitations of an oppositional nationalism become apparent in post-colonial states where political unification around the concept of national identity obscures continuing exploitations of class and cultural difference (1987, x).

established assumptions about Heaney's work, however, it will return to the poetry and dismantle canonical readings through reinterpretation.

Adopting a similar position in *Anomalous States*, Lloyd makes reference to Ireland's partition, but then overlooks it to read Ireland as a post-colonial nation. He proposes that 'politics of identity' play a role in 'producing the form of the current civil war in Ireland':

[t]he combined effect of political thinking on each side of the border has been to perpetuate not only nationalist ideologies, but their articulation along sectarian and, effectively, racial grounds. The real basis of the present struggle in the economic and social conditions of a post-colonial state, and the peculiar twist given to class differences by such conditions, has consequently been systematically obscured (1993, 19).

Lloyd's insertion of Heaney's poetry into this post-colonial frame is more problematic than his prose suggests. By interpreting Heaney within such a framework, Lloyd's analysis seeks to occlude differentiation in an anticipation of unity. Moreover, he inadvertently critiques Heaney's failure as a post-colonial subject to move beyond the imperialist framework of identity discourse.

Heaney's homeland remains part of the UK, and (from a nationalist perspective) remains colonised. If Lloyd's thesis that nationalism is necessary up until decolonisation is applied to the ongoing partition of Northern Ireland, then Heaney should surely be seen as a nationalist desiring such a point. Lloyd's critique of Heaney effectively denies nationalists from Northern Ireland rights of enunciation because their counterparts in the former Free State have assumed a deterritorialised status and now live in the independent Republic of Ireland.

Lloyd's discussion of economic inequalities, occluded by an overshadowing burden of sectarian division, is an issue which needs urgently to be foregrounded. He argues that in Northern Ireland,

'Protestantism' acted for bourgeois politicians as a means to divide Protestant and Catholic workers along sectarian lines [...] [T]he border played a crucial role in externalizing the threat of difference, placing it outside the Protestant community and the ideally Protestant state, and permitting the definition of the Catholic population as alien (1993, 19).

Sectarian divisions among the workers perpetuate a situation in which they remain disparate rather than creating a united front, consequently workers remain largely disempowered against social and economic inequalities. However, the process of highlighting Heaney's socialist shortfall actually overshadows issues of state and counterstate violence that Heaney's work does address.³⁰

In *Anomalous States* Lloyd prefaces all three sections of "Pap for the Dispossessed" with a critical quotation from Heaney's prose and interviews, underscoring theoretical and discursive precision with biographical and intentional suggestiveness.³¹ This is the second major criticism of Lloyd's

³⁰ In *After History*, Lloyd asserts that:

though the Northern Irish Troubles constitute probably the most massively documented conflict ever, remarkably little analytical or theoretical work has been done to comprehend its dynamics outside the conventional historical and journalistic terms that are often underwritten by the logic of counter-insurgency in any case. Most accounts, that is, replicate the narrative by which violence is seen as a sporadic and irrational expression of discontent which the state rationally seeks to contain from a position of externality and in the interests of benevolent reform (1999, 47).

An endnote continues this, pointing to some 'theoretically suggestive exceptions' (1999, 118) that includes Allen Feldman's *Formations of Violence* (1991). This anticipates what follows in this thesis. 'Body', particularly where the bog poems are discussed, makes use of Feldman's work as a means to redress Heaney's representations of violence, reinterpreting them outwith the tradition Lloyd critiques here and sustains in "Pap for the Dispossessed".

³¹ For instance, "Pap for the Dispossessed" begins with a quotation from 'Englands of the Mind' in which Heaney is discussing the poetry of Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill and Philip Larkin (1980, 150-169):

I believe they are afflicted with a sense of history that was once the peculiar affliction of the poets of other nations who were not themselves natives of England but who spoke the English language [...] A desire to preserve indigenous traditions, to keep open the imagination's supply lines to the past [...] to perceive in these a continuity of communal ways, and a configuration of an identity which is threatened - all this is signified by their language (1980, 150-151; in Lloyd 1993, 13).

position. As noted earlier, this tendency is not peculiar to Lloyd - it is evident in the majority of critical work on Heaney. Before assimilating the poetry itself, Lloyd therefore validates his critique of Heaney's poetry via Heaney's prose, assuming the latter can speak for the former. The consequence of using Heaney's prose as a framework for critical analyses of his poetry is, therefore, readings which 'occlude troublesome and inassimilable manifestations of difference by positing a transcendent realm of essential identity' (Lloyd 1987, x) around the poems themselves. This is exacerbated because by demonstrating how Heaney's poetry only superficially 'relocates an individual and racial identity' (1993, 20) rather than challenging such assumptions with new and opposing interpretations of the poems themselves, Lloyd replays an account of Heaney as a representative figure. This inevitably contains aspects of his poetry which could be read as challenging assumptions of universality.

The ease with which Heaney has been canonised reinforces the proposition of this thesis that a critical centre remains very much in place. In relation to Heaney, even critics who attempt to assert marginalised positions actually serve to bolster the centre by reading his poetry within limits set by it. Canonisation perpetuates what it establishes by upholding writers and texts as universal or national embodiments, consequently glossing over problems of anomaly. Whilst much is being done to redress the exclusion of marginal voices in literary canons, the mere fact that a poet such as Seamus Heaney can be so easily assimilated, and subsequently only critiqued within the frame that placed him there in the first instance, suggests a continual need for alert and dynamic approaches to texts. The analyses which follow step outside the established critical framework and structure readings on themes which are prevalent within Heaney's poetry itself. Finding and exploring ambivalence and tension within Heaney's poetry challenges simplified ideas about its representative status and suggests that far more interesting and complex issues recur within his structures of belonging.

PART ONE

WORD

2. Ambivalent Voices

St John's Gospel announces the significance of the Word in Christianity: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' (John 1.1). In poststructuralism the origin of the word is the word - word begets word in an infinite system of differences.¹ No language thus considered can offer any finality or truth, only an uneven distribution of power in language and its use. Homi Bhabha's Third Space theory is influenced by poststructuralism.² Because the gap between signifier and signified is irresolvable, Bhabha argues that language is a site of perpetual ambivalence, and proposes the gap ('unrepresentable in itself') as the space of interpretation (1994, 36-37). As Lloyd argues, bourgeois individualism and romantic nationalism attempt to erase the gap between image and reality, signifier and signified, in order to present their cultural and material ideals as natural and inevitable. This is maintained in the arts by received strategies of reading which replicate and celebrate conceptions of centred selves and coherent, stable contexts. Bhabha's Third Space allows for a reading strategy which denies such homogenous interpretations, as no one position is privileged. Bhabha and Lloyd

¹ Don Cupitt's theology is interesting in this respect as he retains his ultimate faith in Christianity whilst addressing biblical issues from a poststructuralist perspective. In *Creation Out of Nothing* he foregrounds the dilemma from which much of his work develops:

the world of language has no outside. Nothing wholly extra-human can get through to us in it, and we cannot use it to transcend itself so as to make contact with something extra-human [...] there are of course no historical events without a description in language [...] there is no Jesus of Nazareth until he is named and described in language (1990, 73).

Christianity's relationship with this dilemma is one of faith: it is the power of faith which allows the ultimate conjoining of language and materiality symbolised most emphatically through the conflation of word and flesh in Jesus.

² This section draws on Homi Bhabha's writing on culture and colonialism because, although Northern Ireland remains in an ambiguous position between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, the issues which Bhabha raises achieve interesting and positive outcomes when applied to Heaney's speakers. However, it must be recognised that writing about Northern Ireland from this position inevitably assumes a nationalist perspective in relation to the UK's contribution to Ireland and Northern Ireland. Undoubtedly the implicit suggestion is that Heaney writes from the perspective of a colonised context, and yet with a contemporary understanding of the close interconnection between colonised and coloniser, especially in relation to colonial conditions in the British Isles in which the economic, ethnic and demographic aspects of colonialism are disrupted by proximity to the imperial centre.

both foreground an articulation and celebration of cultural difference as a necessary direction for cultural theory and practice (see JanMohammed and Lloyd 1990). They differ, however, in their reading of parallels between coloniser and emerging colonised (Bhabha 1994; Lloyd 1987, 1993). Lloyd critiques a similarity between the two as an ultimate failing of the emerging nation. Instead of freeing itself from imperialist ideology, he argues that parallels simply replay imperialism's paradigms. Bhabha focuses on ambivalence and instability once more. Colonised people mimic rather than replay colonial ways, which he proposes to be an ironic misrepresentation rather than a total re-presentation of the coloniser's ways (1994, 86).³ Thus Bhabha formulates a way of re-reading an adaptation of a coloniser's ideology by a colonised people as a process of reinscription that is never final, remaining open to the play of interpretation. This inadvertently critiques attempts to fix meaning.

Seamus Heaney's poetry vacillates between various identities and spaces. Through such vacillations, it explores ways in which language constructs reality. The relationship between language, origin and authority is inscribed in *St John* with clarity and precision. In opposition to this, Heaney's poetry focuses on the gap between words and meanings, questioning origins and displaying ways that authority is harnessed in language. By emphasising this through textual analysis, Heaney's poetry can be read as foregrounding how ideologies, such as romantic nationalism, present constructed realities as natural. Rather than reading it as participating in the naturalisation of constructed realities (as Lloyd has done), the following analyses explore ambivalence in relationships between language and belonging. Looking at early examples of Heaney's speakers, this chapter will demonstrate how, rather than inscribing unity, they embody and display a multiplicity which points towards personal and national hybridities.

³ In his essay 'Spectaculars: Seamus Heaney and the Limits of Mimicry', Tom Herron develops Bhabha's theory of mimicry and, as I do, uses it to oppose Lloyd's critique of Heaney's poetry (1994, 183-191).

Throughout *Death of a Naturalist*, Heaney's first Faber collection,⁴ there is a tension between nature and writing as means of self-revelation. Many poems present childhood memories in which the speaker's interaction with nature has deepened his consciousness. Contending philosophies of representation and subjectivity are present in Heaney's poetry. Romanticist notions of coherent and unified selves and a revelatory relationship between man and nature are set against poststructuralist decentred subjects. Heaney's poetry simultaneously denies and evokes unification and self-revelation by presenting and fracturing the very concepts on which romantic holism is grounded. In *Death of a Naturalist* the possibility that writing and nature can project and clarify the self is foregrounded but is, on the whole, marked by its own impotence.

Heaney incorporates the materiality of agrarian production into his representation of the natural world. By extending his frame of reference in this way he suggests that an agrarian lifestyle is an extension of nature. His implied binaries favour rural over urban worlds: rural-urban natural-unnatural, et cetera. This is most explicitly articulated in 'The Early Purges' (1966, 11). The speaker explains how he grew to accept drowning unwanted animals as a necessity. From this he learnt that 'living' an agrarian life 'displaces false sentiments'. The disparity between country and city life is emphasised as Heaney weighs out his binaries:

⁴ *Eleven Poems* (1965) preceded Heaney's Faber collections. With the exception of 'Peter Street at Bankside', a poem about the Globe theatre, all the poems published in *Eleven Poems*, appear in *Death of a Naturalist*. Although there are some differences in punctuation, there are few other changes to the poems between these collections (in 'The Diviner' [1966, 13] the second stanza is altered in *Death of a Naturalist* by the absence of 'down' - 'The rod jerked [down] with precise convulsions' - and 'Through a green aerial' becomes 'Through a green hazel'; in 'For the Commander of the 'Eliza' [1966, 21] 'There was' in line seventeen becomes 'Since' in *Death of a Naturalist*, and the 'clearly' from line eighteen is deleted; finally, in 'Death of a Naturalist' [1966, 3] there is an additional 'too' at the end of line nineteen in the Faber collection).

'Prevention of cruelty' talk cuts ice in town
 Where they consider death unnatural,
 But on well-run farms pests have to be kept down.

In 'Personal Helicon' (1966, 44), the closing poem of *Death of a Naturalist*, the agrarian world's materiality is represented as 'wells' and 'old pumps'. Agrarian lifestyle is rendered as an extension of nature: wells complement this as they physically bridge human production and natural resources. The wells not only connect material conditions of agrarian production to nature, but are envisaged as emanating from and encapsulating nature: 'I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells/ Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss' (1966, 44). The speaker incorporates himself into this relationship: 'When you dragged out long roots from the soft mulch,/ A white face hovered over the bottom'. Thus far, the poem develops notions which adhere to Wordsworth's theoretical view of poetry. A central motif of Wordsworthian Romanticism is the concept of finding oneself through an interaction with nature: '[p]oetry is the image of man and nature [...the Poet] considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting qualities of nature' (1802/1984, 605- 606).

Predominant readings of 'Personal Helicon' reinforce it as a poem of self-referential awareness which extends its sense of control outward to cultural and communal awareness. Edna Longley has read Heaney's incorporation of wells, 'with their varying depths and contents', as representing 'different parts of the hidden self'; and extends their significance as 'symbolically summarising *Death of a Naturalist*' (1986, 141).⁵ Elmer Andrews states that the poet articulates

⁵ Similarly to Vendler, Longley suggests that the basic theme of Heaney's first volume is an exploration of the subconscious. She excludes the possibility of finding within it a political unconscious by adhering to a notion of 'real poems' expressing transcendental values ('the particular to the universal') (1986, 10), and by critiquing any suggestions of an impinging politics (1986, 142).

himself 'as conscious, confident controller of his means' (1992a, 212); Michael R. Molino emphasises this interpretation in his suggestion that the last line wills 'to create a text in which all the elements of consciousness, one's cultural consciousness in conjunction with one's personal experience, reverberate or echo, which is an act of seeing one's self, of self-creation through a process of centreless repetition' (1994, 12).

However, the poem's penultimate stanza problematises the simplicity of this correlation:

Others had echoes, gave back your own call
 With a clean new music in it. And one
 Was scaresome for there, out of ferns and tall
 Foxgloves, a rat slapped across my reflection.

Despite the speaker's double rendering of possession ('your own call'), the well, and thereby nature, alter and transform his voice. Nature does not offer a verisimilitude of the speaker's identity (through his voice) but a mimicry of it.⁶ As noted, Bhabha discusses mimicry in colonial contexts suggesting that colonised people mimic rather than fully adopt their coloniser's ways. This, he argues, is a subversive strategy of resistance. It is never a full representation of coloniser's ways, the colonised become '*almost the same, but not quite*': 'the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference' (1994, 86).

In 'Personal Helicon', when the speaker's voice returns to him altered, it mimics rather than represents him, thus suggesting an interstice between man and

⁶ Sidney Burris's reading of 'Personal Helicon' in *The Poetry of Pastoral Resistance* also argues that the poem 'ultimately refuses to indulge the narcissistic fantasy ["confusing the reflection of the thing for the thing itself"]'; but he does not recognise a fundamental rupturing of the speaker's relationship to nature when he suggests that 'the poem comes to rest in the post-Freudian age, substituting the indulgent fantasy of writing prosodically formal verse for the fantastic indulgence of mirror-watching' (1990, 50).

nature which alludes to and negates Wordsworth's view of poetry.⁷ The speaker cannot be coherently unified and represented through nature, an ambivalence is rendered which undercuts such a possibility. The rat, which crosses and disrupts his image, reinforces this. The closing lines hold within them an ironic recognition of the disparity between contending notions of representation: 'I rhyme/ To see myself, to set the darkness echoing'. The closing passage 'to set the darkness echoing' alludes back to the textual moment in which an echo is acknowledged as a transformation. The idea that the speaker can see himself through writing is thus undermined. Unity developed through the text is fractured as the speaker's representation is turned back on himself, its 'clean new music' suggesting it is 'almost the same, *but not quite*' (Bhabha 1994, 86).

A disruption of romantic notions of the relationship between nature and man occurs throughout this collection. The closing lines of 'Death of a Naturalist' (1966, 3), for instance, violently inscribe an interstice between man and nature:

The great slime kings
Were gathered there for vengeance, and I knew
That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it.⁸

⁷ Romanticism has undergone a reappraisal in recent literary criticism. For instance, Jerome J. McGann suggests that '[t]he poetry of Romanticism is everywhere marked by extreme forms of displacement and poetic conceptualization whereby the actual human issues with which the poetry is concerned are resituated in a variety of idealized localities' (1983, 1), and critiques critical history for having 'come to possess [the works of the Romantic tradition] in the name of various Romanticisms' (1983, 91).

⁸ Reading Heaney's poetry as explicitly challenging Wordsworthian poetics flies in the face of Nicholas Roe's sectarian reading of Romantic influences in 'Death of a Naturalist'. In his essay "'Wordsworth at the Flax-Dam": An Early Poem by Seamus Heaney', Roe finds Heaney's poem 'curiously divided against itself' (in Allen & Wilcox 1989, 168). He contrasts this to unity in Wordsworth's 'The Prelude', proposing that - in 'Death of a Naturalist' and Heaney's bog people poems - there are 'unreconciled promptings of a Wordsworthian, Protestant imagination' (in Allen & Wilcox 1989, 169). 'Heaney's exploitation of myth', he continues, 'was accelerated by the present war in Northern Ireland, and finds its deepest root in the primary tensions of that conflict: his catholic unwillingness to admit the efficacy of a protestant redemption' (in Allen & Wilcox 1989, 170). Whilst Heaney's work is often influenced by Wordsworthian Romanticism, Roe's essay fails to address the poetic significance of refusing the unity of a Wordsworthian position. And, overriding literary qualification, Roe thus reads into Heaney's poetry a power relation between Protestantism and Catholicism that unashamedly replays colonial paradigms of the ungrateful Catholic and the civilising Protestant.

In 'The Barn' (1966, 5), the poem which follows this, the final stanza imagines the speaker's consummation by, rather than revelation in, nature: 'I was chaff/ To be pecked up when birds shot through the air-slits'. 'Digging' and 'The Play Way', incorporate a similar investigation of poetry as a process of self-awareness to 'Personal Helicon'. In the penultimate poem, 'The Play Way' (1966, 43), it is language and music which are rendered as vehicles with which the self is explored. The speaker is a teacher:

My lesson notes read: *Teacher will play*
Beethoven's Concerto Number Five
And class will express themselves freely
In writing.

The text ends with a suggestion that expression influenced by music allows a 'blundering embrace of the free/Word' in which pupils 'trip/To fall into themselves unknowingly'.

'Digging' (1966, 1) opens *Death of a Naturalist* and highlights the speaker's sense of belonging to, and being dislocated from, an agrarian heritage. The speaker's personal history is explored from a point in time in which he has become a writer. A questioning of his role as a writer is integrated.⁹ The poem opens: 'Between my finger and my thumb/ The squat pen rests; snug as a gun'. The ambivalence of the first stanza contrasts starkly with what follows. Where the opening lines depend on metaphor to evoke meaning, the next stanza is more solidly descriptive:

⁹ 'Digging' and 'Personal Helicon' - the first and last poems of *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) - both address agrarian memory and roles of the speakers as writers, whilst the vast majority of poems between these - 'Death of a Naturalist', 'The Barn', 'An Advancement in Learning', for instance - recall childhood events.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
 When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
 My father, digging. I look down

The speaker's description of his father digging is both auditory and visual, capturing an image precisely and with an economy of words. The poem, from here until the closing lines of the penultimate stanza, becomes firmly grounded in physical description. Although it is a retelling of the speaker's memories, it avoids temporal uncertainty - shifts in time are marked clearly. Descriptions of memories are rich in imagery and alliteration. This heightens as the poem draws to a close:

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
 Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
 Through living roots awaken in my head.

The poem's textuality is emphasised here. It works simultaneously as a form of auditory art and as an exploration of the speaker's memory. The line 'Through living roots awaken in my head' performs a zeugmatic function, connecting imagery of agrarian life with the life of the mind. Juxtaposing the opening stanza with simple and descriptive language highlights the ambiguity of the former and the solidity of the latter. This serves to differentiate clarity of agrarian memories in relation to the speaker's present fluxing state of mind. The display of poetic ability which his presentation of memory entails, becomes his justification for an alternative form of digging:

But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
 The squat pen rests.
 I'll dig with it.

These final lines imply a development from uncertainty to assurance, transferring a sense of surety, previously equated only with the agrarian world, into the speaker's present role as a writer. The metrical stresses on 'I've' and 'I'll' highlights and strengthens this developing assurance. Significantly, these lines repeat those of the poem's opening, but erase its initial simile 'The squat pen rests; snug as a gun'.¹⁰

The pen-gun simile connotes a relationship between language, art and power. This is particularly pertinent here. The cultural context of this imagery points to a relationship between Irish nationalism and literature, and the violence it, arguably, propagated.¹¹ Ciaran Carson's allusion to 'Digging' and its pen-gun analogy in 'Bloody Hand' (in Fallon & Mahon 1990, 327), critiques Heaney's poem. Carson explicitly politicises Heaney's images by placing them within a violent context:

I snuffed out the candle between finger and thumb. Was it the left
hand
Hacked off at the wrist and thrown to the shores of Ulster? Did

¹⁰ John Wilson Foster suggests that, '[s]ince the poem is about digging', incorporating the pen-gun simile is 'a piece of gratuitous menace' (in Garratt 1995, 32). Michael R. Molino, on the other hand, argues that the poem is violent. 'Digging', he proposes, reinscribes and thus ruptures, tradition because the act of digging is itself an act of violence which 'with a spade or with a pen not only uncovers but also severs the living roots of the past' (1994, 9). 'Digging', therefore, is a violent disruption of an agrarian and a literary tradition. More precisely, through the speaker's self-contained ambivalence, his own stability is disrupted which ruptures the ideals on which Lloyd's understanding of lyric poetry are based. Rather than being gratuitous, the simile's significance lies in its absence in the poem's final lines.

¹¹ The literary renaissance in Ireland which began in the last decades of the nineteenth century has been read as a major force in raising the nation's political consciousness. Writers such as Yeats believed there to be a direct collocation between the political and physical struggle for independence in the first decades of the twentieth century and the literary struggle to reclaim a cultural tradition. More recently, the history of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland has proved a major topic for contemporary Irish writers (from both sides of the border). Heaney famously notes that after 1969 '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' (1980, 56). Although the statement was made in 1974, years after Heaney's first collections were published, the concern with sectarian division and violence apparent in the preceding centuries of Irish history have always been foregrounded in his work. 'At a Potato Digging' (1966, 18), 'For the Commander of the *Eliza*' (1966, 21), and 'Requiem for the Croppies' (1969, 12) are the most explicit examples from Heaney's first two collections.

Ulster

Exist? Or the Right Hand of God, saying *Stop* to this and *No* to that?
 My thumb is the hammer of a gun. The thumb goes up. The thumb
 goes down.¹²

Whilst Carson's poem implicitly suggests that Heaney's should be more political, and register rather than pacify violence, it fails to recognise a significant lack which 'Digging' points towards. In 'Digging' it is precisely the failure of language to transform itself into physical, violent activity which renders the poem's evocation ultimately impotent.

Lloyd critiques the pen-gun simile's absence in the last stanza, arguing that its 'suppression' enables the writer to 'forget or annul the knowledge of writing's power both for dispossession and subjection', allowing him to 'represent it instead as the metaphorical continuation of a work which has already been taken as a metaphor for writing' (1993, 21). In a sense, the absence of the simile central to the poem's opening points to a form of symbolic self-constitution, representing, therefore, an act which denies the power structure inherent in literature. However, the poem at once presents and denies this. Arguing that Heaney overrides 'the problematic relation of writing to identity' through a 'formal or aesthetic' gesture which renders 'the identity of the subject in the knowing of objects the very knowing of which is an act of self-production', Lloyd proposes that 'Digging' presents 'the identity of the subject as a seamless continuum' (1993, 22). This reading fails to see the subtle fracturing of identity which can be traced through Heaney's poetry and which becomes all the more resonant precisely because it works from within traditional poetic forms, and thus simultaneously critiques and denies the ideological status of a unified self.

¹² Carson's poem has far reaching cultural associations of which Heaney's text is but one; for instance, his appropriation of the motif of the red hand of Ulster opens up various levels of political and historical commentary.

The implications of 'squat' set up a tension between the pen-gun analogy and the speaker's state of mind. Heaney's poem draws on three different definitions of 'squat'. The term creates a correlation between the speaker's work (as writer), and that of his father and grandfather, both of whom are envisaged in the process of digging; however, this relationship is not fully realised until the poem's end. An initial ambiguity is created through a disparity between the solid materiality of the pen-gun simile and the overtones of squat's other meanings.¹³ The speaker's ability to live up to his own analogy between power and poetry is questioned by undertones of uncertainty and instability in 'squat'. This fractures the speaker. His identity is split as he attempts to amalgamate his role in relation to his community with his role as a writer. In the final lines of 'Digging', when the pen-gun simile is erased, a shift within the poem from uncertainty to assurance in the speaker's understanding of the relationship between poetry and power is implied. However, the trace of the pen-gun analogy and the temerity it invoked remains through the echo of its absence; thus its erasure can also be read into the text's reflection of the speaker. Unity is questioned. The speaker's relationship with history, memory and his present is formally resolved, but the latent uncertainties of 'squat' remain. This not only destabilises the closure and certitude of the text's end, but also undercuts the aesthetic resolution inscribed by removing 'snug as a gun'. 'Digging' offers the reader an artistic attempt to analogise a traditional agrarian way of life with the act of writing. However, writing remains, in stark opposition to materiality, inactive and impotent in the physical world.

'The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon' (1969, 6) from *Door into the Dark* follows on from *Death of a Naturalist's* inquiry into self-revelations. Once more, this is developed in relation to nature, and occurs through the speaker's empathy with the salmon's desire to return home:

¹³ Nothing at all; to settle on new, uncultivated, or unoccupied land without any legal right (OED).

you flail
 Inland again, your exile in the sea
 Unconditionally cancelled by the pull
 Of your home water's gravity.

Political undertones are integrated through the incorporation of 'exile' which suggests an exterior force has participated in the salmon's expulsion. The salmon's return home is paradoxical: 'here you come/ To grief through hunger in your eyes'. By relating this experience to the speaker's, a sense that a gravitation towards one's homeland is intrinsic and unconditional is proposed.¹⁴ As elsewhere, the speaker's unity is subverted through an exposure of interior contention.

The closing lines problematise the speaker-salmon analogy:

We're both annihilated on the fly.
 You can't resist a gullet full of steel.
 I will turn home, fish-smelling, scaly.

Here, the collective pronoun 'we' turns what was previously an identification into a shared experience.¹⁵ The image of annihilation echoes a powerlessness initially related to the salmon's 'exile' and desire to return home. As no reason or resolution is given for the speaker's feeling of annihilation, this powerlessness is emphasised and linked to him. Significantly their commonality is announced at the moment the speaker catches the salmon. This places the speaker in a position of paradox, once more linking speaker and salmon through formal echoes. By catching the salmon, the speaker's position shifts

¹⁴ This has been previously explored and directly related to Ireland in 'Gravities' (1966, 30).

¹⁵ 'The Pulse' from the sequence 'Three Drawings' (1991, 10) in *Seeing Things* ends with a similar image of identification without, however, the communal pronoun; 'you were glad',
 when you reeled in and found
 yourself strung, heel-tip
 to rod-tip, into the river's
 steady purchase and thrum.

from an identification with its paradox, to a position of self-aggrandising advantage through it. There is, therefore, a moment of erasure in which his initial identification with the salmon's exile and desire to return home, is turned back on him, and he becomes the perpetrator of the salmon's homecoming 'grief'.

Bhabha develops an argument about the way in which political and theoretical stances emerge, suggesting that they cannot be seen as having a fixed origin or centre, as they develop out of 'a process of translation and transference of meaning' (1994, 26). This suggests that, as discursive positions are formed through a process of translation and differentiation, then each political position necessarily develops through hybridity. Further, a cultural text is not created and validated autonomously. It depends on the other for legitimation: 'the act of cultural enunciation - the *place of utterance* - is crossed by the *différance* of writing' (1994, 36). Each discursive position develops out of a dialogue with previous and possibly contending positions, and is validated by the very presence of contention. Discursive legitimation thus entails Derridean *différance*. If validation is obtained through difference, then it follows that any cultural enunciation at the moment of its legitimation produces its own slippage: defers its own possibility of totalisation. This heterogeneous principle of discursive positions takes on striking resonance when related to the issue of negating cultural and personal homogeneity. Much of Heaney's poetry can be read as moments of cultural enunciation which, through their very validation, produce their own slippage. They therefore deny the possibility of homogeneous identification and representation. A cultural text (or discourse) cannot be created and validated autonomously as each text depends on the differentiation made possible by the existence and contention of other texts.

Heaney's poetry, consciously or otherwise, incorporates this dialectic; the other which both validates the enunciation and defers its truth (as totality) status, is

intrinsic to these texts. By incorporating this slippage, the texts deny the univocal status which they seem (or, rather, have been seen) to articulate. Heaney's poetry does not attempt to fabricate a prediscursive identity; rather it renders the plural and contending nature of any sense of identification heralded, necessarily, in discourse. When, in 'The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon', the speaker voices his own annihilation as he catches the salmon, he articulates a moment of fracture in which he becomes consciously split. Heaney's word choice is imperative here. Annihilation means not only a total destruction or reduction to powerlessness, but also a moment of conversion. The text pushes the speaker's identity to a limit at which he finds his self as multiplicitous, holding within it contending identifications. This reflects the hybrid state Bhabha coins 'the otherness of the Self' (1994, 44).¹⁶

The speaker in 'The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon' identifies with the salmon as an exiled being. This aligns them, but the speaker subsequently defers that identity in order to capture the salmon. The enunciation of their commonality ('We') comes at the moment of conversion in which power comes into play, and the speaker's position shifts. The process of validating an identification thus entails a slippage which differentiates speaker (oppressor) from salmon (oppressed). Describing both as annihilated suggests that the movement from identity to oppression converts not only the man's relationship with the salmon, but also with himself. The fisher articulates the otherness of the self as he

¹⁶ In 'Widgeon' (1984a, 48), this self-other slippage becomes a literal possibility in which the margins of each identity are broken down:

It had been badly shot.
While he was plucking it
he found, he says, the voice box -

like a flute stop
in the broken windpipe -

and blew upon it
unexpectedly
his own small widgeon cries.

recognises the oppressor (or possessor) in himself. By exposing the speaker's internal differentiation, the text defers any possible unity for him, he becomes fragmented and plural as he recognises that '[t]he "other" is never outside or beyond us, it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously "between ourselves"' (Bhabha 1990, 4). The speaker returns home carrying with him the scent of his initial identification ('fish-smelling, scaly') - but the relationship has been refracted, the smell is now inscribed with a newly realised, contending sense of self. The previous discourse, the identification of the speaker with the salmon, undergoes a process of reinscription. It is translated, its meaning transformed, and in the emerging discourse both encodings (newly realised and old) are displaced as the self is denied its unity (or grounding) through its awareness of interior contention.

In Heaney's early poetry, intentionally or otherwise, a dismantling of traditional axioms of the unity and grounding of self-origin begins. Bhabha argues that the concept of cultural difference 'focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority' (1994, 34). The question of such authority becomes threatened during the moment of enunciation, as that moment holds within it the possibility of exposing the mythic basis of hegemony:

[t]he enunciative process introduces a split in the performative present of cultural identification; a split between the traditional culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference, and the necessary negation of the certitude in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as a practice of domination, or resistance (1994, 35).

In the case of 'The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon', the sense of a fixed and united identity is demystified, exposing instead hybridity and multiplicity. The poem does not attempt to address this issue - it presents a moment of

enunciation in which the speaker is consciously split. A sense of plural and contending positions begins to subvert traditional axioms, voicing the 'split' of cultural, political, personal and linguistic identification. As a conscious awareness of space and plurality is announced, Heaney's poetry begins to erase unity. Emphasising ambivalence, it thus confirms Molino's statement that 'far from being the remembrance of some extratextual union with a stable meaning or origin', Heaney's poetry 'constitutes a space for the free-play of meaning that defers the possibility of a "correct" or univocal interpretation' (1994, 37). It constantly returns to questions of cultural identification. In his earliest poetry collections an investigation of the identity of the self in relation to nature and cultural heritage is developed. Within such moments of cultural enunciation a split can be traced which, when focused on, implies that far from constituting a coherent, monologic self, the performative present renders polyvocality. In moments of self-identification, the presence of this contention (the presence of differentiation) subverts the demand for a homogeneous self (which would validate a homogeneous culture) and displays fluidity and ambivalence within speakers and between them and their cultural context. This fracture, present as it is in Heaney's poetry, destabilises the community it addresses. Heaney's early poetry can thus be read as constituting an engagement with ideological conditions of his contemporary experience: displaying and negating the possibility of homogeneous narratives through an exploration of the ambivalence of any speaker's voice.

3. Anamnestic Histories, Encoded Landscapes

In religious terms, the anamnesis is a point in the Eucharist when Christ's sacrifice, his resurrection and his ascension into heaven are recalled. In Catholicism, communion wine and bread are understood as the actual body and blood of Christ; past is embodied in present, and Christ's sacrifice is remembered by the worshipping community. William T. Cavanaugh discusses this, noting that, 'if the present is governed by the past, it is only because of the promise made in the past for the consummation of history in the future [...] in the Eucharist the future fulfilment of the past governs the present' (1998, 228).

Ireland's history is very prominent in Heaney's poetry. By conflating images from the past into the speaking present, history is rendered as part of the present's imagined context, and past is filled with present perceptions. Heaney's use of history is anamnestic, but secularised. He neither creates a space untainted by its history, nor reinscribes that history with promises of an altered future; instead he sustains a situation in which past, present and future fuse and interact without producing a possibility of overcoming tensions which imperialism has propagated.¹ Because the future promise of the past's consummation is subverted, Heaney's anamnesis can be understood in contradistinction to time represented in the Eucharist. Just as Heaney's early poetry can be read as fracturing homogenous notions of the self, his exploration

¹ The concept of history to a colonial or post-colonial country is often emphatically involved with a reclamation of its country's identity and autonomy. As Edward W. Said suggests in 'Invention, Memory and Place':

[m]emory and its representations touch very significantly upon questions of identity, of nationalism, of power and authority. Far from being a neutral exercise in facts and basic truths, the study of history, which of course is the underpinning of memory [...] is to some considerable extent a nationalist effort premised on the need to construct a desirable loyalty to and insider's understanding of one's country, tradition, and faith (2000, 176).

of history can be interpreted as undercutting totalised or idealised versions of history, such as those transmitted in religious or nationalist mythology.²

'At a Potato Digging' (1966, 18) intermingles an historical moment, the potato famine, with an ambivalent sense of the present.³ The 'forty-five' is the only specified temporal moment within the poem sequence. Although a vague sense of time is implied by a 'mechanical digger', which highlights a re-viewing of the famine, time is destabilised by a fluid movement between past and present moments. By fusing these, an anamnestic continuum is created which overrides the actual temporal gap between both moments. Shifting tenses formally emphasises this:

A people hungering from birth,
grubbing, like plants, in the earth,
were grafted with a great sorrow.
Hope rotted like a marrow.

The continuous present of 'A people hungering' collapses the time between 1845 and now, and suggests that an indissoluble union between communal

² Paul Scott Stanfield, in his essay 'Facing *North* Again: Polyphony, Contention', suggests the dangers of Heaney's technique of multiple temporal and subjective points of view. Relating Heaney's poetics to M.M. Bakhtin's notion of polyphonic texts, Stanfield argues that the conflation of differing temporal moments and emotional points of view risks:

confounding real historical differences [...] and risks having one dimension of the poet's emotional response taken as its totality, but when it succeeds it lets us see all at once, as in a cross-section, the historical and emotional strands that become entangled in the knot of the presence (in Garratt 1995, 102).

Where Stanfield critiques Heaney's technique for risking totalisation, I would suggest that this is a risk of reception, and thus a question of interpretation.

³ Marianne Elliott notes that an estimated one million died through disease and starvation during the Great Famine, whilst another one and a half million emigrated, and proposes that the suffering undergone through this 'would become a centrepiece of Catholic nationalist tradition, driving a further wedge between the rest of Ireland and Ulster (for not suffering enough)'. Although suggesting that this permitted 'extreme Protestants to claim the heavy losses in the south as yet another token of Catholic fecklessness', she reminds her readers that '[b]eneath all the propaganda, it was easy to forget that Protestants also died in the Famine' (2000, 306). Heaney returns to this theme in 'For the Commander of the *Eliza*' - the poem which follows 'At a Potato Digging' in *Death of a Naturalist*. This juxtaposition emphasises the context and cultural implications of both poems.

memory and the famine still resonates. Moreover, using the indefinite article to evoke the affected group ('A people') extends the specificity of that collective outwards from the historical moment. Temporally and numerically indefinite, their commonality becomes spatial. This dramatically emphasises a sense that images of famine are grafted onto, or into, an enduring communal memory. Rather than emancipating 'A people' from the history of famine, there is a suggestion of it being re-dispersed. Memory is propagated and the past is fluid: 'and where potato diggers are,/ you still smell the running sore'.⁴ Shifting into a second person address at this point is pivotal. This is the only moment in the poem sequence where the speaker moves from a position of observation to one which incorporates both himself and the reader.⁵ By incorporating all who read the poem, and by using the present tense, the speaker evokes a place where this 'running sore' will constantly persist - the poem itself.

Heaney uses a similar technique in 'Requiem for the Croppies' (1969, 12) in which the speaker assumes a communal voice, and is represented as one with the Croppies from the 1798 rebellion: 'The pockets of our greatcoats full of barley'. The speaker's repeated use of 'we' implicitly inscribes the Croppies' right of ownership onto the land evoked: 'We moved quick and sudden in our

⁴ Ronald Tamplin has read the conflation in 'At a Potato Digging' in a way that suggests Heaney's historical perspective is passive and totalised:

'At a Potato Digging' projects the past into the present, and finds no discontinuity between the two [...] the ancestral continuity which had been claimed in 'Digging' is amplified and widened from the family alone to the sense of a nation, one in history and experience. The horror is outfaced and assuaged in an act of devotion, libations spilt on the ground [...] It is not to be read as sociological comment on the power and circumstance of famine but as an act of love (1989, 26).

That Tamplin finds no discontinuity between past and present in the poem is justified, yet the way in which the text politicises and displaces past in the present is largely ignored. Further, by reading the worship imagery of the poem's final lines ('stretched on the faithless ground, spill/ Libations of cold tea, scatter crusts.') back into the text as an aspect which dissolves tensions of 'Centuries/ Of fear and homage to the famine god', the poetic significance of social power relations is erased. The poem's political portent is similarly pacified by Roland Mathias who suggests that both 'At a Potato Digging' and 'For the Commander of the *Eliza*' (1966, 21), 'arise naturally from the heritage of the poor on the land: they carry with them an ineradicable memory of what it is to be hungry, starving even, when the meagre harvest fails' (in Curtis 1982, 22).

⁵ 'Languages of Belonging' in this thesis suggests that Heaney's use of second person pronouns and collective pronouns is very significant. Molino (1994, 63) also discusses Heaney's use of collective pronouns.

own country'. This inscription of possession is subsequently extended to incorporate an indefinitely expansive group: 'A people, hardly marching'. The gaps between the temporal moments in 'At a Potato Digging' and 'Requiem for the Croppies' are thus blurred and omitted.

'At a Potato Digging' and 'Requiem for the Croppies' view communal history as something which remains evocative for individuals. Other poems invert this, presenting a structure in which personal history is expanded beyond itself and becomes symbolic of communal histories.⁶ 'Ancestral Photograph' (1966, 13) is an exemplary instance of this. It opens with the speaker's description of his great uncle's photograph:

Jaws puff round and solid as a turnip,
 Dead eyes are statue's and the upper lip
 Bullies the heavy mouth down to a droop.

Just as photography creates a fixed time, the tense of this description fixes the uncle's image in a perpetual present. By capturing one moment like this, the image is transformed into an object of perception. His 'Dead eyes' emphasise the uncle's reification. Photographically transformed into an object, the speaker paradoxically transforms him into a subject.

My father's uncle, from whom he learnt the trade,
 Long fixed in sepia tints, begins to fade
 And must come down. Now on the bedroom wall
 There is a faded patch where he has been -
 As if a bandage has been ripped from skin -
 Empty plaque to a house's rise and fall.

⁶ The elegies of *Field Work* can be read as infusing individual histories with communal signification. 'In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge' (1979, 59), for instance, assumes the body and words of Ledwidge as symbols of the paradox of Catholic Irishmen fighting in the First World War: 'In you, our dead enigma, all the strains/ Criss-cross in useless equilibrium'.

The first line of this stanza names the subject of the photograph, but only in relation to the speaker. The uncle is significant for the speaker because he conjoins his father and his family's 'trade'. A growing preoccupation with 'the trade' rather than the uncle (even though the poem is called 'Ancestral Photograph') serves to highlight a shift from personal to communal signification. For the speaker, the uncle has become a signifier of an external and contextual signified. The uncle as a subject is subsumed into a symbolic signification in which his image represents a way of life rather than his life. A 'faded patch' on the wall 'where he has been' marks 'a house's rise and fall' - the dissolution of a way of life 'when the fairs were stopped'. Metaphorical images of containment which are used to evoke the photograph emphasise this. Indeed, such images extend beyond the photograph. A chain of association links image, man and cattle: the uncle's watch chain 'girds him like a hoop', whilst the photograph's frame pens 'This barrel of a man' in. This last image is followed by one of the uncle in motion: 'I see him with the jaunty hat pushed back/ Draw thumbs out of his waistcoat'. A tension between the uncle as a symbol of a dying trade, and as his own embodiment is, therefore, perceptible. The personifying simile 'As if a bandage had been ripped from skin' bridges this opposition. By incorporating it, the speaker adopts a personal, corporeal image whilst pointing towards the cultural significance of 'a house's rise and fall'.

Bhabha notes that:

the image - as point of identification - marks the site of an ambivalence. Its representation is always spatially split - it makes *present* something that is *absent* - and temporally deferred: it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition [...] The image is at once a metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence, and by that same token a metonym, a sign of its absence and loss (1994, 51).

The words used in a poem, or the images captured in a photograph are permanent. Although interpretations and meanings can change, this modal permanence makes it easy to imagine that what is represented in poems and photography is also static. 'Ancestral Photograph' problematises this. When the speaker explicitly tells the reader that his description of his uncle is actually a description of his image in a photograph, he both affirms and denies the photograph as a fixed object: 'Long fixed in sepia tints, begins to fade/ And must come down'. The present continuous rendering of the fading image ('begins') is ruptured as the space where the photograph was becomes an absence. Bhabha's proposal that representation is 'spatially split' is enacted as the image of identification is removed, leaving an 'Empty plaque' - a visual framing of 'absence and loss'. The significance of the 'faded patch' points to the absence of the uncle, but more dominantly it points to the absence of a lifestyle ('this chapter of our chronicle'). Displacement is emphasised by line structure, as grammatical markers mid-way through lines rupture the poem's flow. In the line 'And must come down. Now on the bedroom wall' the rupture is more severe than the comma of the previous line. This is not only grammatical but temporal as the text moves from suggestion to outcome.

The ambivalent nature of 'Ancestral Photograph' stems from its incorporation of a photographic image and the speaker's meditation on its significance. Bhabha suggests that images are representations 'of a time that is always elsewhere'. Heaney's poem complicates this process by highlighting the viewer's participation in generating meaning. The image holds within it a representation of that which is past (the 'repetition' of the uncle), but it simultaneously displaces this to form a new and wholly present representation (the symbolic relationship between the uncle and a way of life). In this text, the metonymic function of the image is not simply 'a sign of its absence' - that is, the absence of the uncle - but a representation of cultural loss: the function of the image has thus been transferred, or split further, as its signification alters to encapsulate a

representation imposed upon it. The spatial splitting is, therefore, not only the absence of the uncle, but also the plurality of references stemming from his image and from the 'faded patch' on the wall. As Bhabha suggests, the image of identification is manifestly ambivalent because the illusion of its previous significance becomes overhauled by its symbolic function in the present. The poem holds within it an implicit exploration of the relationship between history, images and viewers. Within the gap between past and present a splitting occurs which consumes the past's signification. Although traces of the past remain in the present's image of it, appropriation and ambivalence dominate as images dissolve into symbols: representations of representations.

In the third section of 'Gifts of Rain' (1972, 13), a subjective perception of Irish history is once again rendered:

I cock my ear
at an absence -
in the shared calling of blood

arrives my need
for antediluvian lore.
Soft voices of the dead
are whispering by the shore

that I would question
(and for my children's sake)
about crops rotted, river mud
glazing the baked clay floor.

By pointing towards the future ('for my children's sake') the speaker emphasises Heaney's anamnestic vision of history. A connection between past oppression and the future is imagined within the speaker's physicality. And 'in the shared

calling of blood', the speaker conflates himself with a community. Similarly in 'North' (1975a, 10) a symbolic relationship between Ireland's history of oppression and blood is anamnestic, and memory is imagined as permanently 'incubating the spilled blood'. This image points towards a potential redemption, and thereby adopts an anamnestic form that closely adheres to Catholicism's. An inversion of this can be seen in poems like 'Linen Town' (1972, 28), subtitled '*High Street, Belfast, 1786*'.

By pointing forward to the future hanging of McCracken during the Irish Rebellion of 1798, 'Linen Town' directly undercuts any potential hope rendered through its anamnestic form. The text freezes a moment in time by using present tense and explicitly specifying a temporal framework: 'It's twenty to four/ By the public clock'. This specificity is problematised as no day or month is given to complete and complement the given year and time. The context, whilst specific and pointed, thus remains framed within a temporal ambiguity (only eased by the suggestion of waning daylight afternoons in the penultimate stanza). This ambiguity is, in part, resolved by a later suggestion that this time's significance is its relation to the (now historical) future of Irish nationalism.

In the third stanza the speaker looks forward, but posits the action of the future moment into the past:

In twelve years' time
They hanged young McCracken -
This lownecked belle and tricornered fop's

Still flourish undisturbed
By the swinging tongue of his body.

By shifting between tenses and temporal moments, a violent future is inscribed onto a seemingly harmonious image of 1786. This undercuts any potential

promise of the future for the speaker. The final stanzas return to the opening temporality and repeat its specificity once more:

It's twenty to four
On one of the last afternoons
Of reasonable light.

Smell the tidal Lagan:
Take a last turn
In the tang of possibility.

Even though the text closes with a metaphor of hope, it presents this after undermining it. The 'last turn/ In the tang of possibility' is already coloured with the future knowledge that the 1798 rebellion will be suppressed. By positing the image of that future in a present tense ('Still flourish undisturbed'), the text secularises its anamnestic structure. The failure of the future's redemptive promise is inscribed before its literal inception in linear time. History, then, is rendered from the outset of Heaney's career not as an objective truth, but as a subjective interpretation of the past's relationship to present and future. Functioning ultimately as subjective representation, and founded in and through language, the representation of history is coloured by the ideological position it seeks either to posit or occlude.

Subjective overtones are also inscribed onto the opening of 'Anahorish' (1972, 6) which translates the poem's title: 'My "place of clear water"'. In offering an English equivalent for 'Anahorish', the speaker makes a gesture of inclusion, expanding the possible reading community beyond the limits of Irish speakers. However, by differentiating Irish and English, he emphasises the linguistic and cultural space between Irish and English. For non-Gaelic speakers, the experience of reading 'Anahorish' begins with a lack, and although this is instantly fulfilled it is at the expense of full integration into, and identification

with, the speaker. This dislocation is further emphasised by the use of the possessive personal pronoun: 'My "place of clear water"'. The non-Gaelic speaking reader can adopt a stance in relation to the speaker's point of view, but can never be fully aligned with it, lacking - as the poem highlights - the necessary cultural and linguistic context.

David Lloyd critiques 'Anahorish', suggesting that it masks the ideological basis of identity by inscribing a 'foreclosed surety of the subject's relation to place':

[w]hat is dissembled in such writing is that the apparent innocence, the ahistoricity, of the subject's relation to place is in fact preceded by an act of appropriation or repossession. 'Anahorish' provides an image of the transcendental unity of the subject, and correspondingly of history, exactly insofar as it is represented - far from innocently - as a property of the subject (1993, 25).

Contrary to this, 'Anahorish' can be interpreted as foregrounding and implicating the constructed nature of identity, an emphasis which destabilises the very basis of Lloyd's argument.

The initial subjective and personal perspective given in relation to Anahorish is highlighted throughout the first stanza:

the first hill in the world
 where springs washed into
 the shiny grass

This suggests that Anahorish was central to the speaker's upbringing. Again, this emphasises a gap between speaker and reader. The middle stanzas describe Anahorish as if it were onomatopoeic, measuring signified by the sounds of signifier. An associative connection between language and identity is rendered by this description:

Anahorish, soft gradient
of consonant, vowel-meadow,

after-image of lamps
swung through the yards

In this description, the speaker looks back in time ('after-image'), and from this point on, cultural memory takes the place of personal associations:

With pails and barrows

those mound-dwellers
go waist-deep in mist
to break the light ice
at wells and dunghills.

As the subjective context of the previous stanzas is overhauled, a shift into historical memory destabilises the perspective of the 'after-image of lamps'. In retrospect, it would seem that the whole of stanzas three and four are historical images: describing the mound-dwellers as 'those' suggests a connection between them and something previously presented (the lamps). Despite this, the initial implication of the speaker's personal point of view remains latent. The slippage can therefore be read as a form of palimpsest. As 'Anahorish' unfolds, the subjective point of view inscribed shifts and is re-inscribed as communal anamnesis, but the latent subjective implications remain embedded in what lies before. Indeed, as this cultural anamnesis is spoken by and through the speaker, it is embedded as and in his subjectivity. It is perceived, then, as processed through an imagination. Explicitly represented spatially, the absence of its temporal context is foregrounded. Its relationship to the poem's other images is explicitly spatial: place, rather than time, connects the two. By

dissolving or displacing its temporal context, the poem collapses the gap between these points, conflating both into one poetic articulation. Such ambiguous relations between text and point of view reinforce the relationship rendered between self and culture in which the interstice between personal and communal identity is momentarily erased.

Whilst, as Lloyd suggests, the text does conflate the speaker's historical and personal responses to Anahorish, such erasure and conflation are explicitly constructed. This is foregrounded by framing the conflated images within a struggle with nature. The ambiguities in point of view are further heightened by a shifting tense which, as in 'At a Potato Digging', implies a presentness of the past. The lamps have 'swung', but the mound-dwellers are rendered in permanent action: 'go waist-deep in mist/ to break the light ice/ at wells and dunghills'. The poem fixes them permanently on the verge of a conflict with nature. As with wells and pumps in 'Personal Helicon', wells and dunghills in 'Anahorish' connect agrarian and natural worlds. And, once more, the wells represent a literal conjunction of natural resources and a social appropriation of nature. Here, natural resources are protected by a layer of ice: the disjunction between nature and man is thus imaginatively presented. A violence in the relationship between nature and mankind remains constantly anticipated: 'those mound-dwellers/ go waist-deep in mist/ to break the light ice'.

The initially personal and subjective perspective of 'Anahorish' is destabilised as a shift into historical memory occurs. The opening stanza clearly encodes a possessive relationship, representing a subjective landscape. By juxtaposing this with the last two stanzas, the text undermines its previous inscription, highlighting its limitations. If the whole poem is read as referring to Anahorish, then the latter half reflects ironically on the former, marking as it does a dispossession of the speaker's personal appropriation of place. No totalising narrative is evoked as both inscriptions omit the other. The transformation of

water imagery from a running spring to ice highlights this multiplicity: linguistic and cultural contexts are foregrounded as inscribing possession, but the temporal, shifting status of nature is envisaged as beyond human control. Language controls our capacity to identify and possess nature, but personal or cultural identification can only symbolically possess a landscape. Nature, free from representations and ownership, is beyond human limitations and inscriptions. The need to break through a surface to gain access to its resources highlights this boundary between a real and an imagined or symbolic sense of place:

[i]n the context of society, nature, like spatiality, is socially produced and reproduced despite its appearance of objectivity and separation. The space of nature is thus filled with politics and ideology, with relations of production, with the possibility of being significantly transformed (Soja 1989, 121).

The speaker's sense of possessing Anahorish is tied up with his linguistic and cultural associations with that space. This is set in opposition to the actual landscape of 'Anahorish' which allows Heaney to highlight how arbitrary the former is. Heaney's work in a sense maintains the binary connection between nature and culture, but subverts it to suggest that rather than being opposites they are connected by their shared status as socially produced concepts. This can be seen politically. Identity and belonging in relation to physical landscapes is socially constructed. Once this is emphasised in literature and its reception, the power relations which govern and perpetuate specific ideals of identification and representation are threatened. By juxtaposing historical and subjective memory, 'Anahorish' questions notions of identification.

In 'The Tollund Man' (1972, 36) a relationship between naming and identity is developed. 'The Tollund Man' is split into three poems. The first poem is

predominated by a description of the Tollund man, an Iron Age person, sacrificed during his community's rites of spring, whose body was preserved in bog water. In 1950 he was discovered, disinterred and subsequently exhibited in Denmark (Glob 1969, 18-36). His description throughout the first poem is framed by the place name Aarhus, which ends the first and last lines and serves a metonymic function: 'Some day I will go to Aarhus', 'Now his stained face/ Reposes at Aarhus'.

In the last poem, the speaker once more makes the Aarhus/bogman correlation, but complicates it:

Something of his sad freedom
As he rode the tumbriel
Should come to me, driving,
Saying the names

Tollund, Grabaulle, Nebelgard,
Watching the pointing hands
Of country people,
Not knowing their tongue.

Out there in Jutland
In the old man-killing parishes
I will feel lost,
Unhappy and at home.

Here, the poem articulates both a sense of its speaker's exclusion from the country and community he imagines visiting ('Not knowing their tongue' 'I will feel lost,/ Unhappy'), and an identification with it through his own cultural experience ('and at home'). The shift in tense, from conditional ('Should') to future ('will'), suggests a more slippery connection between these place-names

and the bogman than previously implied. Where the first poem suggests that the importance of visiting Aarhus is to see the Tollund man, the first stanza of the last poem implies that this connection is not definite ('Something of his sad freedom/ [...] / *Should* come to me, driving,/ Saying the names' [my emphasis]). However, the speaker assumes that in 'the old man-killing parishes' he 'will' find a cultural identification. Thus his identification becomes cultural, moving away from the bogman specifically. No longer drawn to Aarhus to see an Iron Age preservation, the speaker now identifies with 'the old man-killing parishes'. This inverts the poem's metonymy: Aarhus initially signifies the bogman, but now the bogman and the places which are associated with him signify a history of cultural violence. By identifying this place with a feeling of home, the speaker transfers all these associations from a foreign past to his native present, transforming the initial metonymy into a metaphor for his own cultural experience.⁷

By making an analogy between Ireland and the Tollund man's culture, the text at once negates the temporal and spatial gap between the two and uses that gap as a space in which he can interpret and critique contemporary Northern Ireland. The contradiction of being 'lost,/ Unhappy and at home' suggests an ambivalence in the speaker's attitude towards his homeland. This points back to the significance of the middle poem. Unlike the other two, its cultural context is Ireland:

I could risk blasphemy,
 Consecrate the cauldron bog
 Our holy ground and pray
 Him to make germinate

The scattered, ambushed

⁷ As Jon Stallworthy notes: 'the lucky near-pun on Aarhus our house, enables [Heaney] to superimpose Ireland on Jutland' (in Garratt 1995, 179).

Flesh of labourers,
 Stockinged corpses
 Laid out in the farmyards,

 Tell-tale skin and teeth
 Flecking the sleepers
 Of four young brothers, trailed
 For miles along the lines.

By focusing mid-way through 'The Tollund Man' on an image of sectarian violence, the poem asks to be read in relation to that violence. Significantly, the logic of 'The Tollund Man' pivots around this middle section. Moving from an identification with a sacrificed body (the Tollund man), to an unfulfilled desire to find a purpose in sectarian murders, the speaker does not definitively return to identify with the Tollund man's sacrifice. In this way he avoids suggesting that a sacrificial purpose can be read into sectarian murders. It is the Tollund man alone who becomes 'a saint's kept body', having lived his final days as 'Bridegroom to the goddess'.⁸ In opposition to this, the sectarian murders depicted are corporeal and horrific. The corpses of the 'four young brothers' being 'trailed/ For miles along the lines' is starkly contrasted with the Tollund man riding knowingly towards his death.

Helen Vendler argues that the poem 'makes perhaps too explicit the equation of the medieval corpse and those of "four young brothers" murdered in the early 1920s by the auxiliary police force, the B Specials' (1999, 34). On the contrary,

⁸ The first poem in 'The Tollund Man' directly alludes to P.V. Glob's *The Bog People* (1969). For instance, Glob describes the Tollund Man as wearing a 'pointed skin cap' (1969,20) as does Heaney, and later discusses 'the dead man's last meal' as a seed 'gruel' (1969, 32-33). Glob surmises that men like this could have been consecrated to their Earth Mother Goddess, Nerthus, as part of their community's spring rites: '[t]here is indeed much to suggest that the bog people were participants in ritual celebrations [...] which culminated in their death and deposition in the bogs' (1969,163).

rather than superimposing these two images, the juxtaposition of the Tollund man's passive and complete 'saint's kept body' with the dispersed image of the brothers' bodies ('scattered, ambushed/ Flesh of labourers')⁹ emphasises a dramatic shift from an Iron Age people's sacrificial rite of spring to twentieth-century sectarian violence.¹⁰ Although this middle poem initially expresses a desire to find something fertile and productive in the crossing of the bogman with images from (Northern) Ireland, it can never fulfil this. The second and third stanzas carry over an agrarian image of germinating the ground, but it is the flesh and teeth of murdered boys which are 'scattered', emphasising the impotent destructiveness of their deaths.

The relationship between identity, nature and language is closely linked in Heaney to a sense of belonging to, or coming from, a marginalised Catholic community. Ideas that nature and landscapes may inherently possess features which can provide humans with feelings of grace is apparent in Heaney's early work. And because Heaney re-imagines the past in the present, it is possible to read his anamnestic style as inscribing ideals of continuity onto the landscapes he renders.¹¹ This would suggest that he explores landscapes creatively in a similar way to W.J.T Mitchell's critical explorations of it 'as a place of amnesia and erasure, a strategic site for burying the past and veiling history with "natural

⁹ A similar appropriation of 'scattered' is used by Desmond Egan in 'V: The Northern Ireland Question', from 'Poems for Northern Ireland' and anthologised in Frank Ormsby's *A Rage For Order*, in which the death of two children is questioningly related to the fight for political and geographical ownership of Northern Ireland:

two wee girls
were playing tig near a car...

how many counties would you say
are worth their scattered fingers? (in Ormsby 1992, 91).

¹⁰ In fact, the Tollund man's head was decapitated and preserved without his body after his initial discovery and examination (Glob 1969, 35). Eugene O'Brien also observes this (2002, 28).

¹¹ John Wilson Foster reads Heaney in this light, proposing that 'in literature - and I suspect in history (that is, the retelling of events) - landscape is a cultural code that perpetuates instead of belying the instabilities and ruptures [...] Heaney the Catholic writer would prefer to escape' (in Andrews 1992b, 145).

beauty” (2000, 195). However, close analysis of Heaney’s landscapes show them to consciously fold into ideological structures. By highlighting a gap between such imaginative potential and rural realities, the physical world’s redemptive promise is undermined and exposed as a socially constructed ideal. Even in *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), moments of utopic imaginings are contrasted and undercut by focusing on brutal realities of rural life:

Smudging the silence: a rat
 Slimed out of the water and
 My throat sickened (‘An Advancement of Learning’, 6).

I was six when I first saw kittens drown.
 Dan Taggart pitched them, ‘scraggy wee shits’,
 Into a bucket; a frail metal sound,

Soft paws scraping like mad (‘The Early Purges’, 11).

The red sides of beef retain
 Some of the smelly majesty of living:
 A half-cow slung from a hook maintains
 That blood and flesh are not ignored (‘Turkeys Observed’, 24).

The world which holds possibilities of grace and redemption is thus from the start a world of the imagination.

‘Glanmore Sonnets’ (1979, 33) from *Field Work*, is often celebrated for its pastoral representation of the Wicklow landscape.¹² However, this way of

¹² For instance, Vendler argues that ‘in this domestic retreat’ Heaney hopes ‘to create a new hard-edged form of pastoral’, and suggests the sonnets ‘close with a pastoral dream’ (1999, 67 & 68). David Lloyd proposes that ‘[s]ecure in its protected, pastoral domain, the writing is full of unrealized resolve, governed primarily by a conditional mood which mimes the celebration of conditions for writing, yet is in actuality reduced to the almost contentless formal reiteration of the paradigms which sustain its complacencies’ (1993, 34).

reading these sonnets sits uncomfortably with the tensions evoked between the physical world which the poet views and his linguistic representation of that world. The second sonnet, for instance, emphasises an irreconcilable desire to rupture the gap between language and materiality:

Sensings, mountings from the hiding places,
Words entering almost the sense of touch
Ferretting themselves out of their dark hutch -

Heaney's thematic emphasis on textual constructions of landscape can be seen as a type of metapoetry because it questions its own role in reflecting socially constructed space as natural. Representations of place are marked by a disparity between them and the place they represent. Language is conditioned by this lack, and consequently no representation within it can elude its cultural construction. So, in Heaney's landscapes the ground itself becomes a shifting and problematical space that corresponds with an ambivalent relationship between imagined and material worlds.¹³

By reflecting on how language is instrumental in formulating perceptions of landscapes, 'The Peninsula' (1969, 9) from *Door into the Dark* questions the relationship between people and places. The poem opens with a lack of words, and imagines filling that lack by viewing a landscape: 'When you have nothing more to say, just drive/ For a day all round the peninsula'. As images of sunsets and fog over islands represent sights which can only be viewed at a distance, the poem appropriates an object or vision that can never be reached. In this

¹³ In 'Ana-; or Postmodernism, Landscape, Seamus Heaney', from *Alterities*, Thomas Docherty argues that:

the postmodern has problematized the relation between the subject and history, or between the 'real' and its 'representation'. If, in the 'society of the spectacle' or the 'hyperreal simulacrum', everything is now of the status of the image, then the 'real' has simply disappeared. The reality which is supposed to ground our representations, be it presence-to-self of the supposed transcendental subject, has itself become an image [...] Heaney's problem [is] both a political and an aesthetic problem. The 'ground' for his poetry - history itself in the Irish context - has disappeared, gone underground (1996a, 114-115).

way, the speaker constantly reminds the reader that they will never quite reach the sight: 'so you will not arrive', 'always skirting landfall' 'And you're in the dark again'.

When Heaney returns to peninsulas in 'Postscript' (1996, 70), he reiterates this point:

Useless to think you'll park and capture it
More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,
A hurry through which known and strange things pass

Although not so explicitly connected to 'The Peninsula', 'Ballynahinch Lake' (2001, 26) posits a similar instance of stopping to observe a view:

And the utter mountain mirrored in the lake
Entered us like a wedge knocked sweetly home
Into core timber.

Once again, the landscape observed affects the speaker. As the speaker and his partner watch two birds on the lake, this is extended to incorporate wildlife. 'Ballynahinch Lake' is not a sublime landscape which brings the speaker into an equilibrium with himself. Instead, retrospectively he states that 'something in us had unhoused itself/ At the sight'. Heaney arguably closes his preoccupation with landscapes foregrounded in 'The Peninsula' and 'Postscript' in 'Ballynahinch Lake' by embracing subjective experience, and recognising that, whilst the landscape itself cannot be fully grasped in the imagination, it can offer a moment of meditation for the people who absorb it. This is affirmed in the penultimate lines, 'Averting that this time, yes, it had indeed/ Been useful to stop', which contrast with a need to capture and absorb the landscape itself in 'Postscript'.

'The Peninsula', as with 'Postscript' thirty years later, refuses to physically ground poetic objects: the sight is centreless, constantly eluding grounding in a state of permanently fixed motion. Thus the middle section shifts between various sites:

Now recall

The glazed foreshore and silhouetted log,
That rock where breakers shredded into rags,
The leggy birds stilted on their own legs,
Islands riding themselves out into the fog

The final stanza explicates a tension which underlines the whole poem:

And drive back home, still with nothing to say
Except that now you will uncode all landscapes
By this: things founded clean on their own shapes,
Water and ground in their extremity.

The poem empowers the landscape that it presents through personified images which create feelings of objects' active control ('Islands riding themselves out into the fog', et cetera). But simultaneously it reminds the reader that language constrains them. We are presented with a landscape which can only be rendered for us by language, and through discursive contexts forged in language. This is suggested when the poem states that 'now you will uncode all landscapes/ By this'. Moreover, this implies that this particular landscape will become itself a language-context with which to view and measure other ones.

Refusing to fix a point of origin and reminding the reader that they cannot move beyond and into the sight, focuses on a dialectic tension between language and sight:¹⁴

[s]eeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled (Berger 1972, 7).

In order to render a sense of what the landscape looks like, the text provides a series of objective correlatives. For instance, horizons are personified to create an image of a gradually waning sunset - 'horizons drink down sea and hill'. This is complemented with a ploughed field swallowing a gable. The poet creates such images because they are required for us to imagine these objects (in our minds). However, this usurps the landscape's autonomy because it replaces the landscape itself with metaphors and analogies. Thus, in its effort to render an independent and self-sufficient vision, it processes the landscape into contexts, simultaneously coding and uncoding it.

The poem presents its thesis - the wonder of the sight as nothing but itself, 'things founded clean on their own shapes' - and its antithesis. It proves itself incapable of living up to the sight. Material objects cannot be rendered as such in language, as they can only be explained through words. As viewers, both of the text and of the surrounding world, we are constrained by this linguistic structure. 'The Peninsula' highlights the textual nature of experience in which the speaker's consciousness of the physical world will never unify and conflate

¹⁴ Edna Longley focuses on the boundary between the human and the natural world evoked through this dialectic when she reads 'The Peninsula' as an example of Heaney's work in which 'the natural world most powerfully intrudes its Otherness, or challenges and re-orientes human solipsism' (2000, 105-106).

with the actual physical world. We cannot access the space between image and representation; the gap between signifier and signified is, as Bhabha argues, a perpetual site of ambivalence 'unrepresentable in itself' (1994, 37). Consequently, a sense of unity (fully coherent and realised) cannot be rendered in language without paradoxically overcoming this gap, and the space between sight and language can never be filled with a total sense of presence. The poem entangles this concept as it grapples with the paradox of vision and remembering: we can see a landscape but we cannot retain this vision without transferring the sight into the context of language. Indeed, this context is predetermined, catching and transferring objects into linguistic structures at the moment they are seen.

By making a link between landscape perception and linguistic codification explicit, 'The Peninsula' exposes and fragments ideas that landscape is natural and untouched by society. W.J.T. Mitchell suggests that both sacred and secular perceptions of space enact a process of 'purification' in which landscape is imagined,

as a liberation of the visual consumption of nature from use-value, commerce, religious meaning, or legible symbolism of any sort into a contemplative, aesthetic form, a representation or perception of nature for its own sake [...] Landscape thus serves as an aesthetic alibi for conquest, a way of naturalizing imperial expansion and even making it look disinterested in a Kantian sense (2000, 198).

Because it emphasises the linguistic construction of landscape, 'The Peninsula' discloses and thus critiques both religious and secular structures of belonging that govern the basis of landscape perception. As the landscape of 'The Peninsula' offers no sublime contact with nature, but foregrounds the primacy of words, a religious sense of grace and purity found by retreating into nature is secularised. After all, the landscape which we have viewed during the reading

process has not been a real physical one, but one created, or produced, by words - a textual landscape. As Molino notes, the speaker's 'ability to "uncode" these landscapes reinforces his awareness that they are indeed always already textual' (1994, 36).

The titular reference of 'The Plantation' (1969, 36) alludes to the Ulster Plantation of the seventeenth century. This links the poem to an historic context.¹⁵ References to the Ulster plantation recur in Heaney's poetry. Its influence on the culture and language of (Northern) Ireland serves to emphasise hybridity in (Northern) Irish identities. By naming a poem preoccupied with mythical and physical space 'The Plantation', the text implicitly points to the concept of landscape as 'an aesthetic alibi for conquest, a way of naturalizing imperial expansion' (Mitchell 2000, 198). Whilst the title plays on a relationship between landscape and imperialism, the poem subverts these connotations. Its thematic preoccupation evades such grounding, and resets the wood's space within a textual ambivalence. Refusing to provide a stable context, the speaker's description of the wood constantly vacillates:

Any point in that wood
Was a centre, birch trunks
Ghosting your bearings,

Such shifts destabilise the relationship between speaker, reader and place.

The speaker's repeated use of second person pronouns denies the reader the comfort of being a detached observer. Instead they are positioned, illusively, within the experience of disorientation:

¹⁵ The Ulster Plantation began in 1609 wherein 'the Catholic Irish were dispossessed and (mainly Scottish) Protestant settlers were established in present day Northern Ireland [...] During the seventeenth century Protestant landownership in Ireland rose from 5 per cent to over 80 per cent at the expense of Catholics' (Dixon 2001, 3).

Wherever you stopped.
Though you walked a straight line,
It might be a circle you travelled
With toadstools and stumps

Always repeating themselves.

The use of second person address can be read as a textual strategy which reinforces an insistence on multiple subject-positions. Patrocínio P. Schweickart, in her essay 'Reading Ourselves', proposes that a split occurs within readers as they read:

Because reading removes the barrier between subject and object, the division takes place *within* the reader. Reading induces a doubling of the reader's subjectivity, so that one can be placed at the disposal of the text while the other remains with the reader (in Flynn and Schweickart 1986, 53).

Schweickart posits this as problematic: 'for in fact there is only one subject present - the reader' (1986, 53). Within a poem such as 'The Plantation', this takes on a further twist. In a second person narrative situation, the reader can be said to read both as witness to the narrator's self-address and as addressee. In a short poem, this relationship is given little time to develop and the reading position remains ambiguously decentred. An unresolved question of who is being addressed, and by whom, thus underpins the ambiguity of physical context.

The space described in 'The Plantation' is playfully placed on society's margins; 'Hedging the road', the wood's visitors find assurance in the noise of traffic. As a space, the wood is elusive, but the 'trace' of other humans provides a frame of reference for visitors to the wood, and for the reader:

Lovers, birdwatchers,
 Campers, gipsies and tramps
 Left some trace of their trades
 Or their excrement.

By placing the wood within a social context, such references enforce Theodor Adorno's claim,

[t]hat today any walk in the woods, unless elaborate plans have been made to seek out the most remote forests, is accompanied by the sound of jet engines overhead not only destroys the actuality of nature as, for instance, an object of poetic celebration. It affects the mimetic impulse. Nature poetry is anachronistic not only as a subject: Its truth content has vanished (1997, 219).

'Sonnets from Hellas' (2001, 38), a poem sequence from Heaney's most recent collection to date, also foregrounds this. These sonnets juxtapose pastoral motifs with contemporary social images. This is particularly resonant in 'Into Arcadia' when nature (symbolised by an apple) is literally squashed by culture (symbolised by a lorry):

When we crossed the border
 From Argos into Arcadia, and farther
 Into Arcadia, a lorry load
 Of apples had burst open on the road
 So that for yards our tyres raunched and scrunched them
 But we drove on, juiced up and fleshed and spattered,
 Revelling in it. And then it was the goatherd
 With his goats in the forecourt of the filling station,
 Subsisting beyond eclogue and translation.

By squashing the apples which, as well as being the source of man's expulsion from Eden itself, symbolise Edenic qualities of natural resources, the text undermines pastoral and ideal connotations poetically associated with Arcadia. The harmonious nature of the pastoral is finally and ultimately expelled by imagining the goatherd 'With his goats in the forecourt of the filling station', 'Subsisting' beyond the literary forms which imagine him. No longer about nature as a place of sanctuary, the wood of 'The Plantation' and the mountains of 'Into Arcadia' become ambivalent places, derived not from nature itself but from social occupations and appropriations of the natural world.

The reassurance of the wood's relationship to the outside world is undermined in 'The Plantation' because the wood itself is represented in a disorientating and decentring way. This ironises the visitors' sense of contextual security:

Its limits defined,
So they thought, from outside.
 They must have been thankful
 For the hum of the traffic (my emphasis).

This is redoubled in relation to the reader who, by a momentary shift from second to third person, is at once distanced from this spatial disorientation and dislocated from their established reading position.

Refusal to fix an origin and identity in the textual landscape is mirrored by the plurality of subject-positions offered in the closing stanza:

You had to come back
 To learn how to lose yourself,
 To be pilot and stray - witch,
 Hansel and Gretel in one.

'You had to come back' marks a contextual ambiguity. Because the text oscillates between a centreless wood and an external social context of traffic and picnickers, the implication of 'come back' entails possibilities of retreating into destabilised space, or returning to a social world that embraces a self of multiple subject-positions. Both possibilities suggest a need to experience context without grounding (such as a centreless wood) as a means of embracing a centreless and multiplicitous self. By referring to the self as being (or learning to be) 'pilot and stray', Heaney implies an internal dualism which entails both an active control of one's direction and a sense of wandering. The reference to a fairy tale - with its tight narrative coda and its archetypal characters of good and evil - suggests that the self is made up of a plurality of diverse subject-positions. It is thus imagined as embodying ambivalence. Rather than a simple mythical framework of good and evil, the reality of the self is one which eludes easy and united definitions. The close of 'The Plantation' implies that a loss of unity is the start of a fuller awareness of the self as a plurality. It is, then, significant that Heaney alludes to a fairy tale myth at this point in 'The Plantation'. By suggesting that we must lose ourselves in order to find multiple subject-positions within our self, he undermines homogenous perceptions of people. And, by linking this with social narratives, he suggests that the paradigms society generates and perpetuates are inadequate 'tales', reflections only of a foggy, mystifying unreality.

Richard Kearney, in *Transitions*, argues that the theme of homecoming is central to Heaney's work, but that it is a theme which is marked by its constant deferral. Involving 'a dialectic between opposing claims of home and homelessness' (1988, 102), Kearney suggests that home 'is something that cannot be taken for granted as present. It must be sought after precisely because it is *absent*' (1988, 103): '[h]omecoming, poetically understood, means therefore that our literal or geographical home is actually de-centred. The very process of homecoming reminds us that we are now displaced, in exile,

estranged (*unheimlich*)' (1988, 106). In this sense homecoming is a constantly unfulfilled state; as the speaker in 'Hedge-School' (1975b, 6) from *Stations* suggests, 'He walked behind them, homesick, going home'.¹⁶ Western cultures tend to define people in relation to national space, but physical space does not make up the totality of the relationship between a person and a place. As Heaney's poetry suggests, home is more than a physical space of habitation, it is also a metaphysical space: an invented Ireland. As an invented space, this can never be reached, and in its protean state it eludes a totalised representation. Home and self are therefore infinitely deferred, estranged at the moment of recognition, and thus marked by their very absence. In 'The Plantation' the enunciation of this is imagined as a way to access fuller self-awareness (or national self-consciousness): paradoxically, we must pass through an *unheimlich* (dis)placement in order to recognise the impossibility of reaching a total sense of *heimlich*. *Heimlich* and *unheimlich*, as Freud suggests, are thus one and the same experience: perpetual displacements of totalisation, absent because they are too full, what they represent being unrepresentable.¹⁷ Homecoming, as envisaged and displaced within 'The Plantation', is a return of the self to the self; however, this return occurs within its own displacement ('You had to come back/ To learn how to lose yourself'). Like the ambivalence of address, the clarity of who displaces whom is questioned: is it the centreless wood which estranges the self, or an intrinsic estrangement of the self to the self which is displaced onto - or reflected by - the wood?. As the relationship

¹⁶ The speaker at the close of the second poem of Derek Mahon's 'Afterlives' (1999, 58) suggests that whilst the physical landscape of his homeland remains the same, 'home' is an impossibility because he has '[e]scaped from the massacre' ('Exposure', Heaney 1975a, 67):

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.

Thus for Mahon, part of the *unheimlich* is about responsibility to the *heimlich*.

¹⁷ Freud discloses the etymology of the terms, noting that '*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a subspecies of *heimlich*' (1990, 347).

between self and place remains ambivalent, the displacement of both is perpetuated. The self cannot master its inhabited space, and the space cannot engender the self; each eludes the other in a process of perpetual (dis)placement.

David Lloyd quotes the last stanza of 'The Plantation', and argues that it 'uncritically replays the Romantic schema of a return to origins which restores continuity through fuller self-possession, and accordingly rehearses the compensations conducted by Irish Romantic nationalism' (1993, 20). By overlooking ways in which 'The Plantation' refuses to stabilise space or speaker, Lloyd's reading causes this replay. As shown, an alternative reading negates the possibility of totalised self-awareness. If the poem's close constitutes a fuller self-possession it is an act which is characterised by dispossession. Catholic and Romantic notions of the sublimity of nature are thus undercut by the landscape's commodification: '[e]ven the landscapes that we suppose to be most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product' (Schama 1996, 9). In place of a sublime landscape which would ideally reflect him, the speaker finds a socially contextualised place, and finds that in its over representation it has become itself an absence, displaced and ambivalent.

Other landscapes in *Door into the Dark* also highlight ideologically constructed relationships between space and identification. 'Bann Clay' (1969, 40) and 'Bogland' (1969, 41) fuse this with an emphasis on a physical presence of the past in land. This points towards an exploration of archaeological motifs that predominate *Wintering Out* and *North*. 'Bann Clay' describes a scene in which '[s]labs like the squared-off clots/ Of a blue cream' are being 'loaded onto the bank' from a pit. A memory is subsequently described:

Once, cleaning a drain,
I shovelled up livery slicks
Till the water gradually ran

Clear on its old floor.
Under the humus and roots
This smooth weight. I labour
Towards it still. It holds and gluts.

This last image yokes the speaker's memory with the scene observed. 'It holds and gluts' mirrors an image of water underground ('Relieved its hoarded waters') whilst emphasising how the discovery of livery slicks has penetrated his mind. Images preoccupy the speaker and hold within them a significance which remains latent in the poem itself. At the moment he shovels up livery slicks, a temporal truncation occurs, and a distant past physically impinges on the present. This re-contextualises past and present. Such truncations become central to the *North* poems. In 'Bann Clay' the final stanza is ambivalent, leaving the presentness of memory in an unclear but pertinent state. Describing an Irish Elk, resurrected from a peat bog, 'An astounding crate full of air', 'Bogland' once more projects a sense of emptiness, pregnant with symbolic force.

'Bogland' instantly defines a community which is united through their possession of a landscape: 'We have no prairies' (my emphasis). This opening line differentiates Ireland's landscape from an expansive and barren prairie space. As the poem continues this is emphasised: 'Our unfenced country/ Is bog that keeps crusting/ Between the sights of the sun'. Although Heaney uses prairies as an opposition for his community's landscape, there is an element of identification between the two. Expansiveness is inverted in relation to the Irish landscape, from something which is horizontal and visible, to something which is vertical and beneath the earth's surface. Such an inversion allows Heaney to conflate space and time. The Irish expanse posited in 'Bogland' creates a

landscape which, instead of solely projecting the present, embraces the past as physically present.

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.

These closing lines posit Ireland within a sense of history which, grafted to land, implies an element of continuity: 'Every layer they strip/ Seems camped on before'. This image integrates, but problematises, expectations of viewing a landscape's horizon. As the horizon is layered and found underground, the physical embodiment of the past is imagined as multifarious. By perceiving the ground as holding a layered horizon of history, the speaker projects an image in which each layer of the past reinscribes and alters that which preceded it. Like Bhabha's theory that discursive positions are formulated as 'a process of translation and transference of meaning' (1994, 26), elements of the past in 'Bogland' are in dialogue - each layer dialectically interacting with what has come before and after it.

'Bogland' suggests, therefore, that rather than being static and fixed, the past is constantly altered as it is related to and imagined through different presents. In 'Bogland' the past is hybrid and changeable. Possible influences external to 'Our unfenced country', implied in the image of 'Atlantic seepage', emphasise this. As it is the closing poem of *Door into the Dark*, the decentred conception of landscape which has been projected in much of the collection is framed by an image that carries this underground. The land, like its ideologically charged

surface, eludes any final definition.¹⁸ Each layer of history which is stripped from the land holds within it the trace of a more distant past. This process of retrieval and reinscription remains within a repetitive cycle. By ending 'Bogland', and indeed *Door into the Dark*, with an infinite centre, any possible beginning is erased. This mirrors the centreless wood of 'The Plantation', and reinforces the infinite deferral of origin which this collection repeatedly inscribes on its images of place. Landscapes - spatial, physical and imagined - are fundamentally involved in formations of identity. In Heaney's poetry these images, rendered ambivalent and denied the right of a designated origin, problematise the very basis of identification.

Heaney's largest poem to date is 'Station Island' (1984a, 61), the titular poem of his sixth collection. In 'Station Island' the focus on constructed landscapes, which emerges in poems such as 'The Peninsula', 'The Plantation' and 'Bogland', comes to fruition. Constant spatial and temporal shifts emphasise the imagined space evoked, reminding readers of landscape's social construction. Heaney's notes, incorporated at the end of *Station Island*, place the titular poem firmly in a geographical context: '[it] is a sequence of dream encounters with familiar ghosts, set on Station Island on Lough Derg in Co. Donegal' (1984a, 122). Despite this claim for the specificity of place, the text itself continually renders a slippage of context, both temporal and spatial, which dissolves any notions of coherence and unity.

An exemplary instance of this comes in 'III' of 'Station Island'. Specific images are evoked, but they are engendered through a highly personal consciousness. Physical descriptions spin into images which come from the speaker's associative memories. This creates a convergence of temporalities and makes the reading experience disorientating. Childhood memories and ghostly

¹⁸ Similar to the bottomless ground of 'Bogland', the ground of Derry in Seamus Deane's 'Return' (in Ormsby 1992, 43) 'flees from my feet', again eluding any totalising status.

encounters are directly correlated with the speaker's immediate experience of the pilgrimage to Station Island. This creates a dream-state in which the moment of narration and the narrated moment merge into and out of each other, fusing and confusing the text's temporal and spatial dimensions.¹⁹ The concept of a single, coherent and unitary context is thus fragmented through a spatial-temporal continuum in the speaker's consciousness. At times this aspect of the text becomes playful as the poem moves between abstraction and materiality, causing an oscillation between notions of physical and metaphysical space within the mind of the reader:

A cold draught blew under the kneeling boards.

I thought of walking round
and round a space utterly empty,
utterly a source, like the idea of sound;

like an absence stationed in the swamp-fed air
above a ring of walked-down grass and rushes
where we once found the bad carcass and scrag of hair
of our dog that had disappeared weeks before ('III').

Although a predominantly agrarian context is carried throughout 'Station Island', and is often related to childhood memories, it underpins a darker reality. When, in 'II', the speaker turns his mind directly to an agrarian landscape, he begins to churn out lists of memories:

¹⁹ The terms 'narrated moment' and 'moment of narration' follow Dorrit Cohn's use of them in *Transparent Minds*. Discussing 'the autonomous monologue that springs not from the narrating but from the *experiencing* self', she differentiates a past time discussed by a narrator, from their thoughts or comments as they narrate that time. She proposes that the juxtaposition of the two 'creates an illusory ("as if") coincidence of two-time levels, literally "evoking" the narrated moment at the moment of narration' (1978, 198).

'The alders in the hedge,' I said, 'mushrooms,
dark-clumped grass where the cows or horses dunged,
the cluck when pith-lined chestnut shells split open

in your hand, the melt of shells corrupting,
old jampots in a drain clogged up with mud -'
But now Carleton was interrupting:

This interruption by one of the literary ghosts of the text foreshortens a list of agrarian images, suggesting a potentially infinite resource of such memories in the speaker's consciousness. The juxtaposition which follows implies (or confesses) that the speaker's appropriation of such images is escapist:

'All this is like a trout kept in a spring
or maggots sown in wounds -
another life that cleans our element.

We are earthworms of the earth, and all that
has gone through us is what will be our trace.'

Carleton suggests that the speaker's memories form part of his consciousness. The way he says this frames those memories within images of constriction and evasion. The maggot image implies a parasitic yet beneficial act and 'sown' re-emphasises the suggestion of constriction established through the trout image. Carleton implies the speaker is evading some fundamental problems: by stepping into a secure world of memory: 'another life which cleans our element'. Thus the speaker is trapped: battling with cultural issues ('And always, Orange drums./ And neighbours on the roads at night with guns.') with the force of his agrarian memories. In the final metaphor, Carleton recognises an inability to escape experiences undergone: 'all that/ has gone through us is what will be our trace'.

The tension established in 'Station Island' 'II' between an agrarian landscape and a broader vision of the landscape of Northern Ireland as a space of conflict continues throughout the sequence. This is emphasised by a movement between the relative sanctity of the speaker's childhood recollections and the more brutal reality of the Troubles. Presenting the text through a fluxing consciousness echoes the speaker's own fragmented and fluxing sense of himself and the constant shifting of space and time. These factors combine to evoke an imagined landscape which echoes cultural issues the speaker at once addresses and evades.

Station Island (1984a) as a whole fully embraces imaginary landscapes, whilst simultaneously differentiating them from material reality. This is made explicit in the opening lines of 'Remembering Malibu' (1984a, 30) when a differentiation between an imagined landscape and its real counterpart is made: 'The Pacific at your door was wilder and colder/than my notion of the Pacific'. Poems like 'The Birthplace' (1984a, 34) truncate a sense of homecoming, similar to that inscribed in 'The Plantation', with a textual emphasis, as in 'The Peninsula'. The third section of 'The Birthplace' imagines space itself to be ambiguous:

Everywhere being nowhere,
who can prove
one place more than another?

We come back emptied,
to nourish and resist
the words of coming to rest:

*birthplace, roofbeam, whitewash,
flagstone, hearth,*

like unstacked iron weights

a float among galaxies.

It is the words associated with home in 'The Birthplace' which suggest the speaker's return to a peaceful origin. Yet, this retreat comes with its opposition; like the iron weights 'a float among galaxies', the possibility of an ultimate homecoming is ruptured by associating naming with place ('the words of coming to rest'). Language cannot fully embody the physical place it enunciates, thus a merger of being and language always entails an interstitial tension. This is temporally evaded because the speaker becomes immersed in the word-world he reads:

Still, was it thirty years ago

I read until first light

for the first time, to finish

The Return of the Native?

The corncrake in the aftergrass

verified himself, and I heard

roosters and dogs, the very same

as if he had written them.

In these lines there is a slippage evoked between the world the speaker read in *The Return of the Native* and the world which was occurring around him as he read. This posits a utopic overlap between word and reality, and between imagined and material space. However, by inscribing this as occurring within the reading of a text within a text, and framing it within an ambivalent space

(‘Everywhere being nowhere’), ‘The Birthplace’ distances itself from suggesting that this is a real possibility.

By literally dispersing the land itself ‘The Disappearing Island’, (1987, 50) from Heaney’s subsequent collection *The Haw Lantern*, explodes ideas of national belonging and identity legitimated with reference to land. This emphasises Heaney’s awareness that identity, rather than emanating from the land, is projected onto it. The last stanza reminds us that the relationship between land and identity is ideologically posited, and suggests that only extreme times make it possible to believe in a real connection between landscape and belonging:

The land sustaining us seemed to hold firm
Only when we embraced it *in extremis*.
All that I believe that happened there was vision.

Lloyd argues that Heaney’s preoccupation with the relationship between language, place and identity is symbolic of a cultural repossession, suggesting that this serves to emphasise a totalised identification:

Place, identity and language mesh in Heaney, as in the tradition of cultural nationalism, since language is seen primarily as naming, and because naming performs a cultural reterritorialization by replacing the contingent continuities of an historical community with an ideal register of continuity in which the name (of place or of object) operates symbolically as the commonplace communicating between actual and ideal continua. The name always serves likeness, never difference. Hence poems on the names of places must of their nature be rendered as gifts, involving no labour on the part of the poet, who would, by enacting division, disrupt the immediacy of the relation of culture to pre-culture (1993, 24).

Lloyd's reading of the implication of naming in Heaney's poetry inscribes it within a tradition of historical and subjective coherence and continuity. He suggests that Heaney does not rupture, but aesthetically formulates, such continuities. This interpretation plays into the poetry's complexity, yet fails to delve beyond its surface.²⁰ As this chapter has shown, Heaney's poetry highlights that between the actual and the ideal lies a relationship between representation and ideology. Lloyd suggests that his work only superficially registers a conflicting 'contradiction between the ethical and aesthetic elements of bourgeois ideology', because 'the chosen basis of [Heaney's] poetic [is] the concept of identity' - a concept which, for Irish identity is posed 'within the matrix of British Romanticism' and is thus 'caught up within reflected forms of imperialist ideology' (1993, 14). Instead of playing into the paradigms of British imperialist ideology by expressing an axiomatic sense of Irishness, Heaney's poetry subverts concepts of a fixed and unified identity by investigating and emphasising gaps between personal and communal identities, and imagined and real landscapes. As poems such as 'The Peninsula' and 'The Plantation' suggest, even when Heaney is not engaging with issues surrounding Irish as a language, or representations of Irish identity, his work can be read as enacting an investigation into the ambivalence of representation.

²⁰ Indeed, Lloyd qualifies his statement with a prose quotation from Heaney:

I had a great sense of release as they were being written [...] that convinced me that one could be faithful to the nature of the English language - for in some sense these poems are erotic mouth-music by and out of the anglo-saxon [sic] tongue - and at the same time, be faithful to one's own non-English origin, for me that is County Derry.

Under this he concludes that '[t]he formulation renovates the concerns, even the rhetoric, of early nationalist critics' (1993, 24).

4. Languages of Belonging

In his essay 'Spatial History', Paul Carter asserts that the history of a 'cultural place' begins, 'not in a particular year, not in a particular place, but *in the act of naming*. For by the act of place-naming, space is transformed symbolically into a place, that is, a space with a history' (in Ashcroft *et al.* 1995, 377). In relation to Ireland this becomes a complex interplay of Irish culture and imperialist intervention.¹ In a country where its principle language is superseded by the language of its coloniser, the relationship between language and power is explicated. The nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey project linguistically reinscribed Ireland's landscape. As its ramifications indicate, hegemonic uses of language actively participate in cultural and mental dispossession.² The dispossession of Gaelic can be read as a symbolic gesture which extended a physical colonisation of Ireland to incorporate a mental colonisation.³ The Anglicisation of place-names in Ireland can be seen as an attempted removal of Gaelic from its historical situation (its chronological belonging to time) and its diffusion into space. As their linguistic point of identification was altered through the Ordnance Survey translations, Irish people were effectively forced into exile

¹ As this chapter initially discusses Heaney's retrieval of Irish words, it is necessary to discuss him in relation to Ireland as a whole. This is historically legitimated, as the dispossession of the Irish language occurred before partition, where relevant the more localised context of Northern Ireland will be returned to.

² Brian Friel's play *Translations* investigates this. The significance of language and naming as an imagined point of identification is highlighted through a threat of loss which the process of Anglicisation entails:

HUGH: We must learn those new names [...] We must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must make them our new home [...] it is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language [...] we must never cease renewing those images; because once we do, we fossilize (1981/1996, 444-445).

³ David Lloyd argues that the loss of Gaelic effected a triple dislocation on the Irish because: his language is no longer fitted to the land to which his identity would be bound; the signs that he receives in place of the fitting names are arbitrary, devoid, like the commodities which flood the economy, of any natural relation to Irish ground; and in consequence, he is cut off from any lived relation to the history and traditions of the nation. Perhaps most significantly, given the political aims of nationalism, he is deprived of voice at the same moment that he ceases to be 'representative' of the Irish people: his 'power of experience' is 'abridged' (1987, 67).

within their homeland. To articulate the new place-names was at once a disjunction from their past and its Irishness, and an acknowledgement of their language's (and their own) subordination at the hands of their coloniser.

Language, then, is a site of belonging which holds within it contrary possibilities of dispossession through, and resistance to, hegemonic power. Many of the poems in *Wintering Out* emphasise Heaney's concern with such a relationship between language and identity. This is foregrounded by titles that name Northern Irish places, for instance: 'Anahorish' (1972, 6), 'Broagh' (1972, 17) and 'Toome' (1972, 16). Notions of identity are problematised through Heaney's language poems because he destabilises the relationship between reader and text, whilst tracing a relationship between language and identity.⁴ As his landscape studies tell us, Heaney's poetry registers ways in which language creates imagined relationships between people and places. His concern with place and naming can be read as an ontological investigation into a relationship between language, place and identity. Richard Kearney reads Heaney's preoccupation with language against traditionalism, positing it as an investigation into discursive constructions of identity rather than a representation of a fabricated prediscursive unity:

[f]ar from subscribing to the traditional view that language is a transparent means of representing some identity which precedes language - call it *self*, *nation*, *home* or whatever - Heaney's poetry espouses the view that it is language which perpetually constructs and

⁴ Blake Morrison suggests that Heaney's use of place-names in *Wintering Out* is 'a political etymology, its accents those of sectarianism [...] it uncovers a history of linguistic and territorial dispossession' (1982, 41). Bernard O'Donoghue, among many others, stresses the relationship between such poetry and the Irish literary form of *dinnseanchas*, a poetry of locality which makes emphatic use of place-names (1994, 59). Where O'Donoghue suggests that Heaney is perpetuating traditional literary tropes, Morrison proposes that he is re-possessing them as a means of addressing a history of oppression. Such readings limit the poetry to an attempt to preserve or re-member a sense of national continuity through literary tradition. This chapter sees Heaney's poetry as holding both a reflection and confirmation of traditional literary forms within it, but equally this preoccupation can be read as informing a wider nexus than that of the Irish experience.

deconstructs our given notions of identity [...] His refusal to be fixed, to be *placed* in any single perspective is no more than a recognition that poetry's primary fidelity is to language as an interminable metamorphosis of conflicting identities (1988, 102-3).

Heaney's language poems, which Henry Hart calls 'Irish wordscapes' (1992, 49), make no real attempt to look beyond the reflection of their constructed medium. Instead they attempt to render an understanding and repossession of identity through similar discursive practices to those which construct and control our sense of identification in the first instance. Linguistic identities with place are appropriated to re-inscribe cultural possession. However, because Heaney posits and celebrates hybridity in Northern Ireland's linguistic traditions, these inscriptions undermine homogeneous narratives of belonging.

In 'A New Song' (1972, 23) Heaney juxtaposes evocations imagined through place-names and physical descriptions of place:

I met a girl from Derrygarve
And the name, a lost potent musk,
Recalled the river's long swerve,

The speaker explores his memory of Derrygarve, initially rendering it physically: 'And stepping stones like black molars,/ Sunk in the ford, the shifty glaze/ Of the whirlpool'. Images of water permeate the speaker's description in the first two stanzas. These culminate in the third stanza and collapse a former illusion of material presence. The speaker's idea of Derrygarve is an imagined, non-substantial realm:

And Derrygarve, I thought, was just,
Vanished music, twilit water,
A smooth libation of the past

Implications of worship help highlight this mysticism, but the phrase, 'A smooth libation of the past/ Poured by this chance vestal daughter' complicates it. Because 'this chance vestal daughter' is posited as an active agent, the phrase can be read on two levels. Firstly, it can be interpreted as the speaker's description of his past experiences of Derrygarve which are recollected in his imagination - a retreat into what Elmer Andrews calls 'a nostalgic, soothing vision of an Edenic past' (1988, 57). Or, alternatively, it can be read as suggesting that the girl articulates this sense of place for the speaker, metaphorically pouring it out for him. 'Derrygarve' in 'A New Song' is, then, at once imagined, aesthetic and heterogeneous.

The penultimate stanza foregrounds a shift in emphasis:

But now our river tongues must rise
 From licking deep in native haunts
 To flood, with vowelling embrace,
 Demesnes staked out in consonants.

Once more, 'A New Song' uses water metaphors. In this stanza they are linked with linguistic metaphors to foreground a call to arms. Communal pronouns ('our', 'we') replace the personal meditation of the previous stanzas, and past tense shifts into present and future tenses, enunciating an emphatic move towards a new collaboration. The water imagery shifts from water as a soft form, and now incorporates more violent implications of flooding. Once the call for a re-possession of place through language and speech occurs, the poem begins to integrate Irish. This is rendered through imagery which frames such an integration as a natural growth: 'each planted bawn -/ Like bleaching-greens resumed by grass -/ A vocable, as rath and bullaun'.

'A New Song' imagines an Irish repossession of space by transferring meaning out of the English term 'bawn' and into the Irish terms 'rath' and 'bullaun'.⁵ This effectively inverts the nineteenth-century's linguistic imperialist project. Furthermore, it suggests that the Irish terms remained present and persistent even once Irish had been superseded by English. However, Irish words can never resume the innocence of their status prior to the infiltration of English, for they are now filled with connotations of their English counterparts. Each term thus dissipates into the other, the act of which encodes a hegemonic resonance of imperialism.

Despite, or perhaps in response to, this persisting resonance, the text begins to work explicitly within binary oppositions. This inscribes onto 'A New Song' a specific set of power relations. The final lines suggest that the term 'bawn' has corroded nature. This is countered by imagining a reordering of nature once Irish language is restored: 'each planted bawn -/ Like bleaching-greens resumed by grass -/ A vocable, as rath and bullaun'. In these lines, 'resumed' takes on its full connotations of re-possession. This is also true of 'vocable', which not only suggests an ability to speak and name things, but also points to a word with an emphasis on form over meaning.

Rath, bullaun and bawn all relate to the same kind of image, roughly the same signified, but their forms carry with them various cultural implications. It is their forms, rather than their specific meanings, that is important in terms of a linguistic territorialisation of Ireland. By displacing 'bawn' and implying its unnaturalness, the speaker enunciates a reaffirmation of Irish. By constructing binaries which invert those established by colonialism, Heaney politicises 'A New Song'. English is perceived in opposition to nature, whereas Irish is positioned as natural, thereby enunciating a re-possession of Irish culture and

⁵ Bawn: 'the name the English colonists gave to their fortified farmhouses' (Heaney 1980 35); rath: an earthen wall serving as a fort (*OED*); bullaun: 'a hollowed stone mortar' (Corcoran 1986, 86).

language through binary oppositions which designate value and power to one side of the opposition at the expense of the other.⁶ He thus mimics the ideological framework by which Ireland's initial dispossession by British imperialism occurred. Significantly, Heaney juxtaposes this binary structure with a mystical and a material version of Derrygarve, which foregrounds a constructed sense of place and nature.

'A New Song' works with binary oppositions to designate a value hierarchy. This points to Lloyd's argument that Heaney's work formally adheres to the ideology it superficially critiques. Yet, equally, 'A New Song' incorporates a thematic emphasis on the socially constructed nature of such judgements and on a multiplicity of viewpoints in any one text's sense of place. Lloyd suggests, 'a sacrificing of the real in the name of the ideal is exactly what characterizes the ideology of nationalism, seeking in its past the original principles for the form of the nation's future evolution' (1987, 71). If this is applied to 'A New Song', then through its juxtaposition of real and ideal representations of Derrygarve, the poem can be read as paradoxically appropriating a value system associated with nationalism's ideological premises, at the same moment as it denies totalising narratives that nationalism propagates.

'A New Song' suggests that cultural repossession must incorporate linguistic reterritorialisation, and that this action must be active and informed by a past which is demystified as it is reformed and appropriated by the present. Heaney begins to suggest a way of reading the hybridity of Irish cultural experience, through a metaphorical relationship between a metaphysical connection of people and place and the physical space of that connection. The

⁶ Edna Longley begins to point to this in her comparison of John Hewitt's 'Once Alien Here' (1945) and Heaney's 'A New Song' as 'complementary - Protestant and Catholic - founding myths for a poetic tradition'. Longley notes the appropriation of nature in Heaney's text ("A New Song" reinforces its nativism with Nature'). However, rather than exploring cultural tensions raised, she returns to the speakers' relationships to literature: 'these politico-poetic manifestos internalise, from their different angles, similar images of literary self and other' (Longley 1994, 50-51).

conflation of a mystified and a physical recollection of place, juxtaposed with the variety of linguistic choices and associations available to describe and imagine that place, foregrounds a complex polyphony of voices, perceptions and cultural signifiers which precede any sense of Irish identity. Where this slides into dubiety is within the connoted relationship between Irish and nature; elsewhere this is dispelled, but here it is the crux of the poem's politics.

In 'Anahorish' (1972, 6) and 'Broagh' (1972, 17), Heaney creates an opposition between a reading community able to understand and articulate Irish words and Northern Irish dialect, and one which is not. This points to ways in which language includes and excludes people when used to designate possession and place. Rather than naturalising this, these poems challenge such effects. *Wintering Out* opens with 'Fodder' (1972, 3) which pulls together these issues surrounding language and identity. The first lines extend out of the poem's title 'Fodder': 'Or, as we said, / fother'. By using a collective pronoun, the speaker's personal voice (which becomes the predominant textual mode) is extended out to encompass a communal voice. However, the use of past tense ('said') suggests that this community is also in the past. Because of this, whilst 'Fodder' can be read as effectively excluding readers who did not use 'fother' from its communal evocation, it can also be seen as undercutting the community it includes. Paradoxically, therefore, the enunciation of a community belonging in language is simultaneous with its termination.

As seen in 'A New Song', the language poems in *Wintering Out* conflate oppositions between nature and culture by suggesting that our sense of both these things is socially constructed. This emphasis is present in much of Heaney's early work in which geographical context is related to an imagined sense of space and identity, and the two are linked through his preoccupation with words at an auditory and signifying level. In this way, Heaney foregrounds

a notion that identity is rooted not only in cultural and geographical landscapes, but in the act of designating and enunciating places and things.

In the fourth poem of 'Gifts of Rain' (1972, 13) the Moyola river's movement is imagined as embodying an onomatopoeic quality which both designates its name and validates its linguistic community:

The tawny guttural water
spells itself: Moyola
is its own score and consort,

bedding the locale
in the utterance

An intricate connection similar to this is made in 'Anahorish' which emphasises how closely linked names and places become in associative memory.

As it inscribes a sense of communality, whilst highlighting and excluding 'strangers', the concern with language in 'Broagh' is analogous to the effect of translation in 'Anahorish'. There is no explicit voice in 'Broagh', and the only personal pronoun used is in an address to the landscape itself. This creates an initial sense of objectivity, to which an emphasis on physical detail contributes:

Riverback, the long rigs
ending in broad docken
and a canopied pad
down to the ford.

The speaker subsequently uses the pronunciation of broagh to evoke the place itself, explicitly blending phonetics with a description of physical space:

your heelmark
 was the black O

 in *Broagh*,
 its low tattoo
 among the windy boortrees
 and rhubarb-blades

 ended almost
 suddenly, like the last
gh

By describing how broagh's 'gh' ends 'almost/ suddenly', the poem helps its readers form a sense of the word's pronunciation. However, the closing phrase explicitly divides its readership into those who can pronounce 'the last *gh*', and those 'strangers' who find it 'difficult to manage'. Molino tries to pacify the poem's rhetoric of exclusion:

[a]lthough strangers may find the term 'difficult to manage', *broagh* is not presented as a term that invaders could not conquer, that the English could not subsume within their dictionary, that Protestants could not master. The term is difficult but not impossible to manage, and the reader, in some measure, enters the community of users (1994, 74).

By arguing that this term is masterable, Molino denies 'Broagh' its potential subversion of English cultural hegemony. Indeed, earlier in his discussion, Molino suggests that the speaker is 'walking with an eye to the ground', which is 'certainly a gesture of submission' (1994, 74).⁷ Alternatively, the poem can be

⁷ In 'Clonmany to Ahascragh' (2001, 75) from *Electric Light*, Heaney's linguistic politics have subsided and Molino's statement begins to assume some significance, although I would still suggest that Heaney's embrace of the universal human rights over language and space at the end of this poem do not suggest submission to English hegemony. 'And if ever tears are to be

read as excluding (most) English voices, and thus undermining English cultural hegemony, but including the whole community of Northern Ireland. Clair Wills highlights this, arguing that '[b]ecause of their inability to pronounce the place-names' the language community excluded is that of 'English outsiders' who 'are set against the Northern Irish, both Protestant and Catholic' (1993, 99). As Molino himself notes, *broagh* has not been incorporated into English dictionaries and therefore stands as a word whose meaning maintains its impenetrability for those outside its language community. Such a deliberate form of exclusion can be read as a subversion and reversal of the othering Irish culture and language has experienced by English hegemony.

In 'Traditions' (1972, 21) Heaney directly connects the linguistic imperialist project with an English literary tradition. The poem opens with an image of the Irish 'guttural muse'. Rather than seeking inspiration from her, the speaker imagines her having been violently overshadowed by an English 'alliterative tradition'. 'Our guttural muse' is thus reduced to a functionless trace:

Our guttural muse
 was bulled long ago
 by the alliterative tradition,
 her uvula grows

vestigial, forgotten

Connotations of rape apparent here are fulfilled in the third stanza in which Heaney's allusion to *Othello* passively places the (female) Irish tradition at the mercy of a hegemonic English tradition.⁸ This creates 'a linguistic/sexual

wiped away/ It will be in river country', the last part proposes, 'Under names unknown to most, but available/ To you and proclaimable by you'.

⁸ A similar image recurs in 'Ocean's Love to Ireland' (1975a, 40) in which Sir Walter Raleigh's rape of an Irish maid is imagined in national, imperialist terms of domination and oppression: 'Raleigh has backed the maid to a tree/As Ireland is backed to England'.

metaphor for Ireland's traumatic colonial history, a history whose crucial moment occurred during Shakespeare's life-time' (Corcoran 1986, 82).

The second section of the poem turns to English usage in Ireland, and echoes Joyce's tundish motif in *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, when an English dean of studies fails to recognise Stephen's proper use of English. The final section intertwines the preceding allusions to Shakespeare and Joyce, by placing the stereotyped MacMorris from *Henry V* in dialogue with *Ulysses's* hybrid Bloom:

MacMorris, gallivanting
round the Globe, whinged
to courtier and groundling
who had heard tell of us

as going very bare
of learning, as wild hares,
as anatomies of death:
'What ish my nation?'

And sensibly, though so much
later, the wandering Bloom
replied, 'Ireland,' said Bloom,
'I was born here. Ireland.'

This final statement by Bloom is from 'Cyclops' in *Ulysses*. The men in this section are explicitly anti-Semitic, and Joyce ironises their national sentiment as rhetoric based on mythical ideals. Opposing this is Bloom's idea that '[a] nation is the same people living in the same place' '[o]r also living in different places'. When Bloom answers the citizen's question, '[w]hat is your nation if I may ask', 'Ireland [...] I was born here. Ireland', his response is met with uncomfortable

silence - 'The citizen said nothing only cleared the spit out of his gullet,' (Joyce 1922/1992, 430). By ending 'Traditions' with Bloom's words, Heaney's poem echoes and alters this silence, filling it with a finality and assurance of his right to belong to and identify with Ireland by virtue of his birth.

Appropriating Bloom foregrounds a significant aspect of Heaney's perception of Ireland and Irishness which is often overlooked. By adopting a character who is Irish by birth and upbringing who also identifies himself with the Jewish people, Heaney endorses a hybrid view of (national) identities ('And I belong to a race too, says Bloom, that is hated and persecuted. Also now. This very moment. This very instant' [Joyce 1922/1992, 431-432]). Indeed, this hybridity is prefigured in the second section of 'Traditions' through a reference to lowlanders' diction 'shuttling obstinately/ between bawn and mossland'.⁹

'Belderg' (1975a, 4), like 'A New Song' and 'Traditions', incorporates 'bawn' and 'mossland' images. Using a bog as a place of preservation, it envisages the earth as offering up artefacts of the past:

When he stripped off blanket bog
The soft-piled centuries

Fell open like a glib:

Frozen signs of the past are projected as echoes of contemporary space:

A landscape fossilized,
Its stone-wall patternings
Repeated before our eyes

⁹ In a frequently quoted passage from *Preoccupations*, Heaney's first collection of essays, he registers the affect of the Plantation and the subsequent colonisation of Ireland on the landscape and language of the community into which he was born (1980, 35).

This echoing expands out to incorporate the speaker's and his companion's discussion: 'He talked about persistence,/ A congruence of lives'. At this moment, the poem shifts its emphasis to issues of language. This inverts the pattern of 'Toome' which moves from a linguistic to an archaeological emphasis. The text explicitly includes two voices, thus foregrounding its polyphony. Linguistic genealogy is presented through the men's conversation, not as fixed but as chosen and as 'mutable as sound'.

Many contemporary poets from Ireland question ideas of a relationship between language, origin and belonging in similar ways to Heaney's idea of mutability. Paul Durcan's 'Before the Celtic Yoke' (1993, 31) proposes that Irish language and identity are hybrid by foregrounding the imperialist intentions of each respective occupier. This places British imperialism into a history of occupation and conquest. Furthermore, it problematises notions of a specific and pure original identity. Whilst the speaker says he is virgin Ireland, the poem never designates a specific name to him. It thus rejects nationalist rhetoric of belonging by stripping back various essentialist origins:

Elizabeth, Norman, Viking, Celt,
Conquistadors all:
Imperialists, racialists, from across the seas,
Merciless whaleback riders
Thrusting their languages down my virgin throat,
And to rape not merely but to garotte
My human voice:
To screw my soul to orthodoxy and break my neck.

Likewise, in 'Belderg' Heaney questions the etymology of linguistic origins by suggesting various possible interpretations:

He crossed my old home's music
With older strains of Norse.
I'd told how its foundation

Was mutable as sound
And how I could derive
A forked root from that ground
And make *bawn* an English fort,
A planter's walled-in mound,

Or else find sanctuary
And think of it as Irish,
Persistent if outworn.

The text enforces a sense of linguistic and cultural hybridity. Thus, as the speaker retreats into an image of his heritage as univocal, multiplicity undermines him:

Or else find sanctuary
And think of it as Irish,
Persistent if outworn.
'But the Norse ring on your tree?'

The sanctuary in a totalising sense of identity implied through national terms such as Irish and British, and political terms such as republican or loyalist, is set in dialogue with a heterogeneous view of linguistic and cultural identity. This penultimate stanza closes: 'I passed through the eye of the quern', thus alluding to the biblical lines: 'It is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle' (Mark 10. 25). Whilst suggesting an entry into an heavenly realm, this echo implies the speaker is metaphorically enacting the camel's impossible act. Simultaneously, however,

the quern imagery disrupts this because it suggests that passing through the eye of the quern entails a grounding process.

The closing symbolism embraces hybridity. Passing through the quern is imagined as a way to recognise and embody heterogeneous linguistic and cultural identities, as grounding down multiple levels of genealogy and interpretation replaces national terms for belonging and origin (Norse, English, Irish) with 'A world-tree of balanced stones'. By foregrounding its metaphorical position (through the biblical allusion), the text recasts a political need to assert identity into an aesthetic realm in which complexity can be imaginatively grounded down into this balance of stones. Multiplicity is thus embraced, but only to return once more to totality. As in 'Bogland', a constant shifting and layering of origin connected to land and history is rendered in 'Belderg'. This mirrors the layering of languages which decentres ideas that any one language community can claim original possession of a place. Ireland's heterogeneous linguistic heritage, acknowledged in reference to Mossbawn in 'Traditions', is further embroiled in hybridisation when 'He crossed my old home's music/ With older strains of Norse'. Similarly, 'Toome' (1972, 16) intertwines an exploration of history's physical presence in archaeological relics with language's hybridity as a cultural signifier.

The poetic significance of Toome is emphasised in 'At Toomebridge', the first poem in *Electric Light* (2001, 3):

Where the checkpoint used to be.
Where the rebel boy was hanged in '98.
Where negative ions in the open air
Are poetry to me.

Whilst the titular reference points to an historical association between Toome Bridge and the Irish Rebellion of 1798, Toome itself is also an important

archaeological area in Ireland. The poem thus combines a sense of history which is physical, the ground literally holding within it fragments of the past, and one which is transmitted through words. This latter sense of the past penetrates the speaker's perception of physical space, and creates for him an intangible atmosphere of history - 'negative ions in the open air'.

In *Wintering Out's* 'Toome', this is emphasised by conflating an emotive resonance which cultural associations attach to words with imagery of phonetic articulation. This correlates language with physical production:

My mouth holds round
the soft blastings,
Toome, Toome,
as under the dislodged

slab of the tongue

Subsequently linguistic metaphors dissolve into a description of going underground at an archaeological site. This extends the poem's original conflation of language and physicality by relating these directly to history:

I push into a souterrain
prospecting what new
in a hundred centuries

Archaeological and linguistic images are zeugmatically bound in the phrase 'as under the dislodged/ slab of the tongue' which bridges and intersects these central motifs. The whole poem is one sentence, thus allowing images to flow into and evolve out of each other.

By imagining his mouth holding the sound of Toome, the speaker echoes Stephen Dedalus's words in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Stephen,

reflecting on the tundish incident, differentiates between his use of English as an Irishman, and that of his English dean of studies: '[h]is 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' (Joyce 1916/1960, 189). Heaney's phrase implies a sense of physical restriction. By pointing to Stephen's works, he incorporates into this image a reflection on language as a vehicle to affect power and domination. This is not impotent in either Joyce's or Heaney's texts.¹⁰ Toome is repeated three times in the text, and imparts a feeling of incantation. Because it holds within it an allusion to a site of an Irish Rebellion, the poem is thereby permeated with undertones of cultural unrest. Simultaneously, 'round' suggests protection rather than constriction and this is echoed in the image of mud: 'till I am sleeved in/ alluvial mud'. However, the images of the souterrain are also dialogic, with oppressive and protective implications juxtaposed ('sleeved in/ alluvial mud' and 'elvers tail my hair').

'A Peacock's Feather' (1987, 38) celebrates the christening of the speaker's 'English niece'. Rhyming couplets are sustained throughout the poem which is unusual for Heaney:

I come from scraggy farm and moss,
 Old patchworks that the pitch and toss
 Of history have left dishevelled.
 But here, for your sake, I have levelled
 My cart-track voice to garden tones,
 Cobbled the bog with Cotswold stones.

¹⁰ In the closing pages of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a diary entry of Stephen's from April 13 (Heaney's birthday) reads:

'That tundish has been on my mind for a long time. I looked it up and find it English and good old blunt English too. Damn the dean of studies and his funnel! What did he come here for to teach us his own language or to learn it from us. Damn him one way or the other!' (Joyce 1916/1960, 251).

The image evoked suggests that the speaker's natural voice is curtailed through Anglicisation, and constricted by using a tight metrical and rhythmic verse structure. However, because the poem explicitly recognises this act of levelling, it exposes itself as an appropriation and thus avoids being fully integrated into an English literary style. Moreover, whilst the speaker says that this poem levels his Irish voice, it actually points towards the hybridity of its rhyme scheme. Whilst his rhyming couplets point towards the heroic couplet, his use of a 4x4 metrical structure problematises this and embodies similar rhythmic and metric schemes used in forms, such as ballads, which are not derivative of an English literary tradition. Thus, the playful appropriation of an English literary style deliberately emphasises otherness (for instance when the speaker says as 'a guest in your green court' he 'might as well be in Coole Park') and furthers the sense of hybridity from which Heaney writes.

As this suggests, Heaney's work refuses to inscribe itself in one tradition, recognising the bifurcated nature of his cultural heritage:

Two buckets were easier carried than one.
I grew up in between.

My left hand placed the standard iron weight.
My right tilted a last grain in the balance ('Terminus' 'III', 1987, 4).

As poems such as 'The Other Side' (1972, 24) suggest, internal differences are imagined and celebrated as the potential of future tolerance. In 'The Other Side' binary oppositions are developed which establish boundaries between Catholics and Protestants and their respective religious customs and beliefs. Edna Longley suggests that, 'the existential flow is made continuously problematic by the hidden sectarian narrative, with its mixture of exclusion-zones and secret sharing' (1994, 59). Ultimately, however, whilst there is a

sense of discomfort in the other's strangeness, perseverance suggests an underlying tolerance:

Then sometimes when the rosary was dragging
mournfully on in the kitchen
we would hear his step round the gable

though not until after the litany
would the knock come to the door

In 1975 Heaney published a pamphlet of poems entitled *Stations*, the first pieces of which had been written in 1970 in Berkeley. Whilst the sequence is largely a reflection on childhood memories of growing up as a Catholic in Northern Ireland, Heaney's foreword foregrounds political developments which occurred during the pamphlet's composition. This posits these developments as a latent context in the poems themselves. He explains that, whilst he began to compose the sequence in California, his return to Northern Ireland effectively silenced him:

those first pieces had been attempts to touch what Wordsworth called 'spots of time', moments at the very edge of consciousness which had lain for years in the unconscious as active lodes of nodes, yet on my return a month after the introduction of internment my introspection was not confident enough to pursue its direction. The sirens in the air, perhaps quite rightly, jammed those other tentative if insistent signals (1975b, 3).

Stations is written as a sequence of short prose poems that, taken as a group, has a vacillating perspective on religious tolerance in Northern Ireland.

The opening of 'July' (1975b, 15) highlights this by foregrounding a need for the speaker to evoke its marching season scene as precisely as possible:

The drumming started in the cool of the evening, as if the dome of air were lightly hailed on. But no. The drumming murmured from beneath that drum.

The drumming didn't murmur, rather hammered.

At the same time as the speaker's consciousness is foregrounded through his developing expressiveness, the imagery which he projects onto the drums from the outset serves to frame the Orangemen's marching in a mood of judgement. Thus, whilst he changes his auditory descriptions to evoke a sense of precision, he gradually moves away from any objectivity. Although the speaker of 'July' only explicitly condemns the marching season midway through the poem, the opening establishes a judgmental tone, and imagery of blood and hell are marked throughout.

In retrospect, therefore, the initial image posits a possibility that the drum's noise comes from (the heavens) above, only to refute this by focusing on its auditory movement 'from beneath'. This shift creates an ironic tension between a divinely led people and their demonic textual association rendered midway through by the passage, 'Through red seas of July the Orange drummers led a chosen/ people through their dream'. This tension continues through colour imagery which projects a movement of black and orange within a backdrop of red and white. The black-grey of the police-anthrax simile, and the penultimate paragraph's 'red seas' of Orangemen are carried into the final description:

The air grew dark, cloud-barred, a butcher's apron. The night hushed like a white-mothed reach of water, miles downstream from the battle, a skein of blood still lazing in the

channel.

And so my ear was winnowed annually.

Drawing on Christian colour associations of good and evil to condemn Orange Lodge marches, the language of belonging is undeniably ideological in 'July'. In the following poem, 'England's difficulty' (1975b, 16), sectarian division is imagined during World War Two. Here, an historical context marks out the speaker's ideological position more explicitly: 'When the Germans bombed Belfast it was the bitter/ Orange parts were hit the worst'. However, a complexity and confused solidarity permeates this piece which punctures the speaker's ideological stability and highlights his cultural bifurcation. This is described in the opening line - 'I moved like a double agent among big concepts.' - and the closing stanza:

I lodged with 'the enemies of Ulster', the scullions
outside the walls.

[...]

An adept at banter, I crossed the lines with carefully
enunciated passwords, manned every speech with checkpoints
and reported back to nobody.

Such imagery prefigures a correlating metaphor between writing and military occupation which appears in 'From the Frontier of Writing' in *The Haw Lantern* (1987, 6) and discloses the power of speech and accent as markers of belonging.

As *Stations* develops, the sectarian divide loosens. For instance, the later half of 'Trial Runs' (1975b, 18) projects a similar sense of collective empathy for religious difference as seen in 'The Other Side':

My father jingled silver
 deep in both pockets and laughed when the big clicking
 rosary beads were produced.

‘Did they make a Papish of you over there?’

‘O damn the fear! I stole them for you, Paddy, off
 the pope’s dresser when his back was turned.’

‘You could harness a donkey with them.’

Their laughter sailed above my head, a hoarse clamour,
 two big nervous birds dipping and lifting, making trial runs
 over a territory.

The speaker describes a welcome home banner, for the return of the ‘**Eighth Army**’ to Northern Ireland after World War Two, as having been placed on a wall ‘over/ the old news of **Remember 1690 and No Surrender**’. This frames the neighbourly tolerance quoted above within a cultural backdrop of Protestant spatial hegemony. ‘Trial Runs’ does, however, suggest a possibility of erasing such typecast sectarian opposition. The gift brought by a Protestant neighbour to the speaker’s father is funny and subversive. Whilst pointing to and pointing up the father’s religion, the father shows an ability to poke fun at his own religious affiliation in the laughing questioning of his neighbour, “Did they make a Papish of you over there?”. Solidarity is inscribed in the poem’s closing laughter, and seals a bond which the previous inscriptions of division in *Stations* have hitherto threatened to permanently mark asunder.

The collection does not finish with such nervous promise. ‘Inquisition’ (1975b, 23), the penultimate poem of *Stations* and the last poem about Northern Ireland’s bifurcated community, once more creates an ambiguity around questions of religious tolerance. The speaker describes a scene in which he is being intimidated by a group of Protestants in a pub:

One barred the door, the other caught my hand in
a grip alive with some pincer alphabet.

'I don't know what you are brother, but would you believe me if I
told you I was christened in Boyne water?'

I thought he was going to ask me to curse the pope. Instead,
he thumped my back again.

'Ah, live and let live, that's my motto, brother. What
does it matter where we go on Sundays as long as we can still
enjoy ourselves. Isn't that right, brother?'

The door was unexpectedly open and I showed them the face
in the back of my head.

Here, the repetitive use of 'Brother' heightens the Catholic speaker's sense of intimidation which, along with the men's body language, undercuts any sincerity in the Protestant's speech. Any potential for tolerance is finally punctured by the poem's closing lines which, by suggesting the speaker is also Janus-faced, reduces all brotherly talk to rhetoric.

Later, in 'The Toome Road' (1979, 15), Heaney uses the word *omphalos* to inscribe his community's right of place. As the speaker describes approaching a road block, he imagines 'armoured cars' as a violation of a space which belongs to him: 'How long were they approaching down my roads/ As if they owned them?'. Opposing some of *Stations'* poems, 'The Toome Road' significantly illustrates a recurring sense of occupation and invasion in Heaney's poetry. Coming from Northern Ireland's Catholic community, and expressing nationalist sentiment, Heaney's work can consequently be read as opposing Northern Ireland's Protestant or unionist community.¹¹ However, as 'The Toome Road'

¹¹ Conor Cruise O'Brien and Edna Longley both read Heaney in this way. O'Brien proposes that Heaney's 'upbringing and experience have given him some cogent reasons to feel that one side is worse than the other, and his poems have to reflect this' (in Allen 1997, 27). Longley, often in a more cryptic way, also suggests that he writes against the unionist community; proposing, for

demonstrates, a feeling of violation is caused and perpetuated by state apparatuses. This recurs in particular relation to the major police and army presence in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. 'The invisible untoppled omphalos' - is the navel of the earth, and marks the place where earth's origin is designated. By placing this omphalos in direct opposition to the army, Heaney inscribes onto the land a combined communal possession which stands, invisibly, in the way of the armoured cars. Peter McDonald makes an interesting point when he notes that, as a dialogue between possession and occupation is established throughout the poem, the:

final and climatic appearance of an 'omphalos', a word scarcely naturalized from the Greek in English usage, is a poetic turn of some significance. In the intransigence of these last three lines, the poem stages an assertion of possession and permanence, in which the specificity and individuality of the 'omphalos' is the ultimate mark of resistance to a narrative of usurpation (1997, 54).

Heaney's word choice is of utmost significance to his articulation of possession. Rather than establishing an explicitly Irish-language connection to a space which holds implications of Irish nationalism, the text articulates possession, not in national terms, but in terms of birth and belonging which extends to all people born within this space. This should be stressed, because, as in 'Broagh' and 'Traditions', Heaney does not exclude specific communities from Northern Ireland, but inscribes upon his exploration of usurpation an inclusive narrative of resistance to the state.¹²

instance, that 'Heaney's politics is wholly recognisable to a Unionist reader as encoding his potential dispossession' (in Andrews 1992b, 80).

¹² The term 'omphalos' does hold personal significance for Heaney, and consequently 'The Toome Road' is often interpreted via his discussion of this in 'Mossbawn', reprinted as the opening essay in *Preoccupations* (1980, 17-21).

North (1975a), Heaney's fourth collection, is split into two parts, both of which engage with contemporary Northern Ireland's Troubles. The first part appropriates other cultures and mythologies in its exploration, whilst the second part draws specifically on Northern Irish experiences. From the latter half of *North* onwards, Heaney's poetry looks more directly at the Troubles and his consequent experiences of Northern Ireland. More than a decade later, in *The Haw Lantern*, Heaney begins to use parabolic forms as another way of exploring effects of the Troubles. Taken in juxtaposition, these two modes offer an analysis of Northern Ireland which adopts, and reflects upon, principle elements informing the general public's understanding of the Troubles: the media and religion. Conflating these two influences, these poems suggest that spirituality is inextricably bound to secular society. Consequently, religious images and language are emptied of their spiritual potential. The social discourses which surround reality now overshadow it.

Again, this can be understood as an ambivalent structure. Ambivalence is caused by gaps between reality and representation, and between signifier and signified. As indicated, these gaps are often occluded in order to present the status quo as natural and inevitable. As will be discussed more fully in the final part of this thesis, the concept of such a gap is eliminated in Christianity, but more precisely in Catholicism, because word and body become one. For its community of believers, spirituality thus offers a means of transcending gaps which a secular world can only superficially dissolve. And because this transcendence points to a utopic world of equality, it is in opposition to a secular world where such gaps are dissolved to perpetuate inequality and hegemonic power. Christianity's sacred structures are consumed and retransmitted, and, rather than opening up a portal to a spiritual realm, they redouble to engender a simulacra of contemporary experience. Heaney critiques society's ability to reflect beyond itself, or rather, beyond its own

version of reality, folding the ideals of change imagined through spirituality back into spectacular representations.¹³

'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' (1975a, 51), in the second part of *North*, is comprised of four interrelated poems. Its opening sets the poem in context:

I'm writing just after an encounter
With an English journalist in search of 'views
On the Irish thing.'

[...]

But I incline as much to rosary beads

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 'crack down', 'the provisional wing',
'Polarization' and 'long-standing hate'.

Jean Baudrillard argues that '[w]e live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning [...] [t]he loss of meaning is directly linked to the dissolving, dissuasive action of information, the media, and the mass media' (1994, 79). Heaney renders a world in which what is imagined to be reality is no longer real, but an image of reality projected by the mass media

¹³ This phrase comes from Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, who suggests that '[m]edia stars are spectacular representations of living human beings, distilling the essence of the spectacle's banality into images of possible roles' (1995, 38). My suggestion expands this statement: the whole essence of the media forms a society of spectacular images which refract the reality of the conditions of existence.

and reinforced by the masses.¹⁴ Thus, 'We tremble near the flames but want no truck/ With the actual firing'.

Heaney's use of quotation marks indicates a barrier between language and the reality it supposedly describes; journalistic language has become a discourse which glosses over rather than evokes reality.¹⁵ In 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' it is not the Northern Irish people or even the paramilitaries who experience sensations these words apparently describe, but the journalists and commentators 'Who proved upon their pulses' discourses they produce.¹⁶ Initially, therefore, the poem appears to foreground and critique a disparity between media discourses on the Troubles and experiences of Northern Irish citizens. However, as it unfolds, this critique extends to include words and phrases used by citizens ('those sanctioned, old, elaborate retorts'). Rather than presenting and marvelling at idiomatic descriptions of the Troubles, 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' suggests that the language and media surrounding Northern Ireland's Troubles has effectively overshadowed its reality.¹⁷ Peter McDonald raises a similar point in his introduction to *Mistaken Identities*:

¹⁴ David Trotter argues that this poem 'take[s] up idioms which a whole range of people might use to articulate their perception of the Troubles'. He proposes that Heaney 'may want to chide their presumption or marvel at their poignancy' (1984, 189-190). Because he does not reflect on implications of language, Trotter's reading falls into the trap which the poem can be read as critiquing.

¹⁵ David Lloyd suggests that '[in citing the colloquial wisdom, "Whatever you say, say nothing"] Seamus Heaney has encapsulated [the] notion of secrecy' (1999, 118) culturally constructed 'in large part from the habits of a colonized population' (1999, 48).

¹⁶ Heaney's line alludes to and extends the meaning of John Keats's words by ironically linking them to journalists. In a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats proposes that we can only judge the truth of a poetic utterance by the measure of our own experience, 'for axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses' (Letter 64, 1952, 141).

¹⁷ John Hewitt's 'Neither an Elegy nor a Manifesto' (in Ormsby 1992, 172) also acknowledges the fact that cultural associations and rhetoric embedded in language undercut the reality of deaths which the Troubles have perpetuated:

The careful words of my injunction
are unrhetorical, as neutral
and unaligned as I know:
they propose no more than thoughtful response;
they do not pound with drum-beats
of patriotism, loyalty, martyrdom.

the situation of individuals in Northern Ireland is comprised in the political and cultural discourses which set out to take them into account. An act of violence in this discourse, is more than just a violent act, since its meaning and conditioning are foregrounded in the political or historical interpretations that can deal with it; effectively, these patterns of interpretation take priority over the act itself, so that a man who murders (for example) can be defined and understood as a political offender - in this sense, he *is* his interpretation, and lives within a defining public identity (1997, 6-7).¹⁸

The initial emphasis on words and discourses surrounding the Troubles is instantly undermined in the second poem of 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing': 'Men die at hand. In blasted street and home/ The gelignite's a common sound effect'. Here gelignite, which in the previous poem is something that 'politicians and newspapermen' 'scribbled down', assumes a physicality. Even so, this section has a distancing effect. An emphasis on sound carries the previous critique on discourse into a physical realm, thus suggesting that both are complicit in perpetuating an occlusion of reality. Describing gelignite as a 'common sound effect' forces a separation between it and the real experience of men dying. This is reinforced through a similar juxtaposition in which a suggestion of sound editing stresses a redundancy of the word when it is directly contrasted with physical destruction caused during the Troubles: 'The liberal papist note sounds hollow/ When amplified and mixed in with the bangs/ That shake all hearts and windows day and night'.

¹⁸ Speaking more generally, Salman Rushdie makes a similar point in *Imaginary Homelands*: '[w]e first construct pictures of the world and then we step inside the frames. We come to equate the picture with the world, so that, in certain circumstances, we will even go to war because we find someone else's picture less pleasing than our own' (1992, 378).

Sound motifs are also carried into the final two sections of the poem. In the penultimate part this is linked to Northern Ireland's community, 'Where to be saved you only must save face/ And whatever you say say nothing'. Whilst this suggests a bifurcated community which perpetuates internal differentiation, the final section looks once more at effects of the Troubles:

Machine-gun posts defined a real stockade.
There was that white mist you get on a low ground
And it was deja-vu, some film made
Of Stalag 17, a bad dream with no sound.

The dramatic impact of these lines is twofold. Independently of the previous sections, its sense of silence serves to enhance the impact of this site upon the speaker. Absence of sound magnifies the landscape's post-bombing state, thus extending a ghostly silence surrounding the prison to encompass the speaker's reaction against it - 'I saw the new camp for the internees:/ A bomb had left a crater of fresh clay'. When read within the context of 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing', the reference to film and sound serve once more to formalise a distancing of image from reality. This is furthered by the speaker observing this scene from 'a dewy motorway'.

Throughout the poem sequence, the speaker is reflexive of his complicity in and observation of Northern Ireland's Troubles rhetoric. The speaker ironises people's belief in 'those sanctioned, old, elaborate retorts'. However, whilst he distances himself from these repeated phrases, he paradoxically implies his complicity in perpetuating them. Thus his critique extends to become an ironic self-reflection:

Yet I live here, I live here too, I sing,

Expertly civil-tongued with civil neighbours

On the high wires of first wireless reports,
 Sucking the fake taste, the stony flavours
 Of those sanctioned, old, elaborate retorts:

The closing stanzas of 'II' introduce a greater sense of frustrated impotence:

while I sit here with a pestering
 Drouth for words at once both gaff and bait

To lure the tribal shoals to epigram
 And order.

The speaker's desire to articulate and embody his tribe is inscribed through a fishing metaphor. This alludes to Jesus's metaphor to inspire potential disciples: 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men' (Matthew 4.19; cf. Mark 1. 17 and Luke 5. 10).

Heaney's metaphor is echoed in the text's final lines:

Is there life before death? That's chalked up
 In Ballymurphy. Competence with pain,
 Coherent miseries, a bite and sup,
 We hug our little destiny again.

Whilst this metaphor is present and at work on one level of the text, it overshadows another structure of meaning within these lines. '[G]aff' and 'bite', as well as 'gag', have multiple meanings, and although their linguistic context suggests their relationship to fishing, their associations with deception and pretence heighten the text's social critique.¹⁹ By suggesting that gaff and bait

¹⁹ **gaff** /n. a hook, a stick, etc., a stick with a hook for landing large fish.; *n. slang*, noise, humbug, pretence; *v. slang*, gamble, deceive, trick. **bite** /n. the seizure of bait by a fish, an imposition, a deception. **gag** /n. something thrust into or held over the mouth to prevent outcry; *n.* an invented story; a deception, an imposture, a lie (OED).

are a 'lure', and are therefore based on superficiality and pretence, the speaker's description of his longing for words 'at once both gaff and bait' entails an ironic self-revelation. By reinforcing the fishing metaphor, an image is used as a lure. This overshadows the reality it evokes, and so 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' mimics what it critiques. In this context, the speaker's lines in 'III' become loaded with a similar duplicity: 'I am incapable. The famous/ Northern reticence, the tight gag of place'. Here the imagery of 'gag' doubles in on itself to suggest that whilst the effect of the speaker's national and geographical origin has muffled and prevented his speech, reinforcing his 'Northern reticence', it is a consequence linked to an invention or deception of place rather than place itself. Heaney's metaphors thus create a duplicity which forms a microcosm of the macrocosm he critiques. Whilst the exterior world is overshadowed by images, the truth of the text - that social reality is constructed and imagined - is also overshadowed by the textual images which render it.

The poem's critique is, therefore, self-referential, recognising that it cannot evade its role as representation. Its use of words marks out a barrier between material reality and its evocation. Thus the poem colludes with other discursive media to create and imagine Northern Ireland; it too is 'a bad dream with no sound', that trembles 'near the flames' but wants 'no truck/ With the actual firing'. No poem can be an innocent bystander when addressing the politics of violence in Northern Ireland.²⁰ Peter McDonald argues this point:

[i]n the painful and exacting context of Northern Ireland's violence, there is no such thing as an innocent poem, or one which is 'not involved': good poems know this, and act accordingly. Bad poems, like bad criticism and bad politics, too easily convinced by their own prior version of events, are likely to remain in the aberrant majority (1995, 80).

²⁰ Stan Smith argues that Heaney's use of the poem's title phrase, used by the PIRA 'accrues legitimacy to the political slogan', consequently 'putting the poem in the same compromised place as those writings Yeats fretted over in "The Man and the Echo", opening up a whole new area in the relations between poetry and politics' (in Corcoran 1992, 42).

Heaney's parabolic texts offer similar critiques. In *Brecht and Method*, Fredric Jameson argues that allegory 'consists in the withdrawal of its self-sufficiency of meaning from a given representation' (1998, 122). Thus allegorical texts' meaning and social critique are only fully realised when contextualised. The power of parabolic texts lies, similarly, in the distancing effect which is produced by simultaneously stripping the subject matter of its context and allowing for a possible retrieval of that context during interpretation. As Stan Smith highlights, Heaney's 'island parables [...] all test and transcend the limits of Irish insularity, the better to return to and interpret it - to rediscover, thinking in and back into the place' (in Corcoran 1992, 45).²¹ 'Parable Island' (1987, 10) is the first poem in *The Haw Lantern* to use a parabolic form, and it is the only one of the collections' poems which - through its title - foregrounds its allegorical role.²²

Unlike Heaney's other parabolic texts, the speaker of 'Parable Island' is detached from the people he observes. Because he is positioned as an objective observer, the frequent use of third-person plurals excludes both himself and the reader from direct association with what is critiqued. The opening stanza ironically frames the nation's convictions by foreshadowing them with facts which undermine them,

Although they are an occupied nation
and their only border is an inland one
they yield to nobody in their belief
that the country is an island.

²¹ Jameson continues: '[a]llegory is [...] a reverse wound, a wound in the text; it can be staunched or controlled (particularly by a vigilantly realistic aesthetics), but never quite extinguished as a possibility' (1998, 122).

²² In opposition to my reading which politicises Heaney's parabolic texts, Michael Parker argues that Heaney uses 'political realities as metaphors for the troubles faced by the writer' (1993, 214). Whilst poems such as 'From the Frontier of Writing' seem to fit this assumption, the danger in Parker's argument is that it reduces the social critiques of Heaney's parabolic texts to musings of a self-conscious writer.

All attempts to 'mine the ore of truth' are weakened when the speaker interjects with scepticism to destabilise this nation's narratives:

At least, this was the original idea
 missionary scribes record they found
 in autochthonous tradition. But even there

you can't be sure that parable is not
 at work already retrospectively,

Heaney reinforces this instability by implying that a desire to inscribe a definitive history onto this space is connected with a will to power:

like the subversives and collaborators
 always vying with a fierce possessiveness
 for the right to set 'the island story' straight.

As with all Heaney's parabolic texts, 'Parable Island' strips away the semblance of Northern Ireland, in order to expose an ideological and political agenda at work behind its structures of belonging. By distancing these texts from a direct engagement with Northern Ireland, Heaney looks again at cultural narratives and questions them without antagonising any single origin myth. By assuming a parabolic form, he suggests that all origin narratives have ideological premises. Thus a process of self-reflexivity and understanding is potentially imagined in which no one side of Northern Ireland's community is privileged.²³

²³ Stan Smith sees this as heralding 'Ireland':

'Parable Island' tells us that there are no authenticating origins, only a plethora of story-tellings which push the origin further back into an original emptiness, scrawled over with too much meaning. It is in this area of dense secondary signification, where script disassembles an original emptiness, that Ireland 'begins' (in Corcoran 1992, 46).

'The Mud Vision' (1987, 48) is a parabolic poem. Like 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing', it critiques effects of religiosity and the mass media on a feuding nation. The text opens with a direct reference to Christian iconography: 'Statues with exposed hearts and barbed-wire crowns/ Still stood in alcoves'. In 'Settings' 'xix' (1991, 75), from *Seeing Things*, Heaney uses a similar image to foreground the psychic pull of such iconography:

Statues in purple cloaks, or painted red,
 Ones wearing crowns, ones smeared with mud or blood:
 So that the mind's eye could haunt itself

With fixed associations and learn to read
 Its own contents in meaningful order,
 [...]

You knew the portent
 In each setting, you blinked and concentrated.

By filling iconographic images with 'fixed associations', Catholic doctrines are powerfully evoked by and through the speaker's mental subjection. Iconography is, therefore, an effective tool for indoctrinating and perpetuating religious feeling.

In 'The Mud Vision', an ironic distance unusual for Heaney is established between the speaker and the text's overriding critique. The decay of religious values implied throughout is not recognised by the communal speaker. And, with the exception of a few choice lines which, to an extent, reframe the speaker's perspective, he remains a part of the society whose blindness the text critiques.²⁴ Abstracted from any specific historical or geographical context, 'The

²⁴ 'advantaged/ And airy as a man on a springboard/ *Who keeps limbering up because the man cannot dive*' [my emphasis], 'A generation who had seen a sign!' [my emphasis], 'What might have been origin/ We dissipated in news. The clarified place/ Had retrieved neither us nor itself - except/ You could say we survived.'

'Mud Vision' describes a society of the spectacle. Reality is mediated through televisual reports, which juxtapose Catholicism with images of war:

Satellite link-ups

Wafted over us the blessings of popes, heliports
 Maintained a charmed circle for idols on tour
 And casualties on their stretchers. We sleepwalked
 The line between panic and formulae, screentested
 Our first native models and the last of the mummers,
 Watching ourselves at a distance,

The description of people in 'The Mud Vision' in a state of somnambulism creates an impression of a dream-like space which finds expression in clustered and juxtaposed images of activity. 'The line between panic and formulae' suggests their vulnerability and their slavish recourse to (religious) customs. In the second stanza society's confusion is temporarily overcome: 'And then in the foggy midlands it appeared/ Our mud vision'. However, rather than representing a redemptive possibility, this vision furthers the people's dystopian dissent.

Religion is effaced by the images and iconography it once produced: 'some/ Took to wearing a smudge on their foreheads/ To be prepared for whatever'. Baudrillard's questioning of religious divinity revealed in iconography 'does it volatilize itself in the simulacra that, alone, deploy their power and pomp of fascination - the visible machinery of icons substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea of God?' (1994, 4) is answered in the affirmative by Heaney's 'The Mud Vision'. Rather than proving to be redemptive, religious images secularise the faith they symbolise:

On altars bulrushes ousted the lilies
 And a rota of invalids came and went
 On beds they could least be placed in range of the shower.

This reference to lilies can be read as alluding to one of Jesus's parables in which he stresses the importance of placing faith beyond the material world:

And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat and the body *is more* than raiment [...] Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these (Luke 12. 22-23, 27).

As symbols of this parable, lilies are now secularised; Heaney's juxtaposition of them with a production line of invalids is a powerful contemporary critique. In Christian theology, lilies are a reminder that faith should take priority over materiality. Heaney's lines thus criticise a transformation of religious space as a place of spiritual healing, to a space which poses as a place of physical healing. This secularises Christianity and turns it into a money spinning industry. The words 'rota' and 'lease' emphasise the secularist outcome of such occupations. In the third stanza biblical references are used once more to foreground and criticise this society. 'A generation who had seen a sign!' echoes the desire of the scribes and Pharisees of the New Testament:

Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign (Matthew 12.38-39).

Decay is registered through an erosion of physical objects which enunciate a correlation with Christian ceremony.

The speaker tells us how they 'smelled/ Mould in the verbena' without commenting on a metaphorical correlation of physical degeneration with

religious secularisation.²⁵ Failing to recognise this, the community continues blindly believing the vision to be a portent signifying its own importance:

our fear

Was touched with a secret pride, only ourselves
 Could be adequate then to our lives. When the rainbow
 Curved flood-brown and ran like a water-rat's back
 So that drivers on the hard shoulder switched off to watch,
 We wished it away, and yet we presumed it a test
 That would prove us beyond expectation.

The Deluge narrative of Genesis (6-9) is echoed through this reference to a rainbow. In Genesis, God floods the world as an attempt to rid it of the evil which has filled mankind. In the aftermath of this, God promises never to purge the land again for man's sake 'for the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth' (Genesis 8.21). God subsequently makes a covenant between himself and all living creatures; in Christian theology the rainbow signifies this (Genesis 9.13-17). The rainbow in 'The Mud Vision' is secularised and becomes another example of spectatorship.

Guy Debord argues that the spectacle 'is NOT a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images' (1995, 12). Debord's idea of mediation is significant because it creates a barrier between people. A false consciousness created by images not only alienates people from themselves, but from those around them. This theme is emphasised throughout the third poem of 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' in which the predominant focus is on a community tendency to assign religions and political allegiances to strangers courtesy of their names and faces.²⁶ Just as the

²⁵ The verbena is a leafy bough of certain aromatic trees and shrubs used in religious ceremonies (OED).

²⁶ This phenomenon is so pervasive in Northern Irish society that it has been named; 'Telling',

reference to screen-testing in the first stanza of 'The Mud Vision' echoes cinematic emphases in 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing', the act of mediated observation which occurs in the earlier poem is repeated here through images of screens. This constitutes a fractured sense of reality:

[We] screentested

Our first native models and the last of the mummers,

Watching ourselves at a distance,

[...]

And then the sunsets ran murky, the wiper

Could never entirely clean off the windscreen,

[...]

When the rainbow

Curved flood-brown and ran like a water-rat's back

So that drivers on the hard shoulder switched off to watch,

In *Looking Awry*, Slavoj Žižek proposes that a 'basic phenomenological experience of discord, the disproportion between inside and outside' occurs for people sitting inside a car:

outside reality appears slightly distant, the other side of a barrier or screen materialized by glass. We perceive external reality, the world outside the car, as 'another reality,' another mode of reality, not immediately continuous with the reality inside the car [...the external objects] appear to be fundamentally 'unreal,' [...] they appear as a kind of cinematic reality projected onto the screen of the windowpane (1991, 15).

is part of the warp and woof of everyday social life in Northern Ireland. The community has developed its own highly sensitive antennae whereby 'one of the other side' or a 'stranger' can be identified immediately. It is is [sic] like a sixth-sense covering everything from the rhythm of speech to the distance between one's eyes (Arthur in Apter 1997, 260).

Žižek's reading of the effect of car windscreens points precisely to Heaney's use of screens. By distancing viewer from what is being viewed, these images serve to emphasise a disjunction between reality and social perceptions of reality. This motif effects a rupture, not only within the text's vision of reality, but also within its metapoetic structure.

The use of screens assumes another level of symbolism which emphasises a communal narcissism. Although screens can offer a possibility of looking beyond one's self, the community of 'The Mud Vision' sees through them a narcissistic projection of themselves and their desires. This is also true of the rainbow which is firstly an image and secondly a sign that, rather than reflecting upon their relationship with God, reflects themselves for themselves: 'We wished it away, and yet we presumed it a test/ That would prove us beyond expectation'. Images and motifs surrounding the vision of 'The Mud Vision' point towards religiosity. Rather than understanding the vision to be religious, however, the speaker reads into it self-reflective possibilities: 'only ourselves/ Could be adequate then to our lives', 'we presumed it a test/ That would prove us beyond expectation'. Thus the vision remains grounded. Symbols of Christianity do not signify sacredness, but an overriding and overshadowing profanity. Religious symbols no longer reflect the possibility of the other; here they only ever reflect upon the possibility of revealing the self, a revelation which the text never fulfils.²⁷

²⁷ 'The Journey Back' (1991, 7), Heaney's first poem in *Seeing Things* (which is preceded by a translation of lines from Virgil's *Aeneid*, 'The Golden Bough'), suggests an overriding mundanity of the secular world. Appropriating Philip Larkin, who in turn quotes Dante, Heaney's text distances itself from any unique revelatory quality, and foregrounds a lack of spiritual possibility even in poets:

I might have been a wise king setting out
Under the Christmas lights - except that

It felt more like a forewarned journey back
Into the heartland of the ordinary.

There is a sense of loss in the final stanza of 'The Mud Vision' as the speaker describes the loss of the vision and the media's occupation of its absent space:

Just like that, we forgot that the vision was ours,
 Our one chance to know the incomparable
 And dive to a future. What might have been origin
 We dissipated in news. The clarified place
 Had retrieved neither us nor itself - except
 You could say we survived. So say that, and watch us
 Who had our chance to be mud-men, convinced and estranged,
 Figure in our own eyes for the eyes of the world.

The presence of cameras and 'experts' purges the ground of its possibility. The act of reporting, judging and observing this sight has contributed to secularising the vision's possibility. In 'The Mud Vision', as in most of Heaney's works, reducing faith to a commonplace and conflating it with a need to find and record explanations, defiles sacred things and eliminates a possibility of transcending a dystopian world-view. The powerful critique which 'The Mud Vision' makes is that this reduction is not one that people apathetically watch, it is one in which they are complicit: 'What might have been origin/ We dissipated in news' (my emphasis). Baudrillard articulates a similar critique in *Simulacra and Simulation*:

[e]verywhere information is thought to produce an accelerated circulation of meaning [...] Information is thought to create communication [...] We are all complicitous in this myth [...] Information devours its own content. It devours communication and the social (1994, 80).

Heaney's speaker extends this complicity, and the loss of possibility it entails, beyond the society of the poem: 'Figure in our own eyes for the eyes of the world'. Although 'The Mud Vision' does not allude to a particular group of people or a specific place, its references to the media and a misuse of religiosity touch on very real situations in contemporary western society.

As suggested, the parabolic quality of 'The Mud Vision' allows for a degree of alienation between reader and scene, thus forcing a cognition of the critique into each reader's individual reception of it. In 'Known World' (2001, 19), this reality is explicitly extended to a political and ethnic crisis in Kosovo which is foregrounded, and projected through the media:

And now the refugees
 Come loaded on tractor mudguards and farm carts,
 On trailers, ruck-shifters, box-barrows, prams,
 On sticks, on crutched, on each other's shoulders,
 I see its coil again like a syrup of Styx,
 An old gold world-chain the world keeps falling from
 Into the cloud-boil of a camera-lens.

The inability to separate language either from one's subjectivity or from structures of belonging out of which one writes is an elementary tension running through Heaney's work. This is foregrounded in a translation incorporated into *The Spirit Level*:

The first words got polluted
 Like river water in the morning
 Flowing with the dirt
 Of blurbs and the front pages.
 My only drink is meaning from the deep brain,
 What the birds and the grass and the stones drink.
 Let everything flow
 Up to the four elements,
 Up to water and earth and fire and air ('The First Words', 1996, 38).

Whilst on the one hand Heaney fractures any homogenous relationship between language and representation, on the other he consistently combines such elements in his texts. Heaney perpetually dwells upon unresolvable binaries, signifier and signified, self and community, name and place, belonging and space, which marks in his poetry an ongoing desire for their utopic alignment. A secularised sense of language is thus contrasted with a purveying desire for spiritual holism. This desire for society's consummation into a spiritual structure of belonging reflects a desire to eliminate the gap between word and flesh which Catholicism promises. However, time and again this is collapsed back into an uncertainty and, rather than finding a graceful revelation, Heaney's poems continually emphasise gaps between words and materiality.²⁸ Heaney's revelatory quality is, therefore, one which posits a self-conscious awareness of ideological premises underpinning language and experience. Rather than evoking unity, Heaney's reflections on landscape, history and identity embody instabilities and tensions which foreground the problematic status of representations in language.

²⁸ Medbh McGuckian is another Northern Irish poet whose work yields interesting insights into similar themes. 'The Dream-Language of Fergus' (1997, 48) and 'On Ballycastle Beach' (1997, 50), for instance, both foreground language's problematical mediation between reality and representation, whilst 'Elegy for an Irish Speaker' (1997, 80) connects and intertwines this tension with a relationship between words and landscape. 'The Feastday of Peace' (1998, 23) and '*The She-Eagles*' (1998, 84) both set up an opposition between English and Irish, and suggest that the latter is full of meanings absent in the former. McGuckian, as we shall see in relation to Heaney in the next section, extends this preoccupation to focus on a relationship between word and body - see, for example 'The War Ending' (1997, 68), 'Breaking the Blue' (1997, 69) 'She Which is Not, He Which Is' (1997, 70), and 'Drawing Ballerinas' (2001,14).

PART TWO
BODY

5. History and Union

Although much has been said about bodies in recent social and post-colonial theory they continue to be problematic for literary criticism. Corporeality resists representation because experiences such as pain only affect individuals. Maud Ellmann proposes this when she says that 'it is impossible to feel another person's pain', the sensation is one which 'demonstrate[s] the savage loneliness of bodily experience' (1993, 6). Representations of bodies are, then, inevitably ambivalent in literature and can be understood as another instance in which a gap between signifier and signified perpetuates. The importance of corporeality is embedded in Heaney's poetry from his first collections and a disparity between words and flesh prevails.¹ This opposes the significance of Jesus's body in the Eucharist as understood by Catholicism. According to Scripture, Jesus is the word made flesh; during the sacrament of the Eucharist the Priest's annunciation of his words and body and the community's participation in communion marks an ultimate embodiment of them within Christ.

Corporeal images as cultural and historical critiques are often related to landscapes in Heaney's poetry. Land is imagined as a place where histories of atrocity and sacrifice are inscribed and preserved. In 'At a Potato Digging' (1966, 18), for instance, the text shifts between a modern agrarian landscape and images from the famine of the 1840s. An image of 'live skulls, blind-eyed' is used firstly to describe the potatoes and then the starving: 'Live skulls, blind-eyed, balanced on/ wild higgledy skeletons'. The text intersects victim and 'blighted root', and inscribes land with a permanent stench of that blight: 'and where potato diggers are,/you still smell the running sore'. Skeletal bodies of

¹ *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) is marked by its concern with animal corporeality ('The Early Purges' [11], 'Dawn Shoot' [16], 'Turkeys Observed' [24]). However, 'Mid-Term Break' (15), 'At a Potato-Digging' (18), 'For the Commander of the *Eliza*' (21) from *Death of a Naturalist*, and 'Dream' (1969, 3), 'Requiem for the Croppies' (1969, 12), 'Undine' (1969, 14), 'Elegy for a Still-born Child' (1969, 19) from *Door into the Dark* point towards Heaney's later preoccupation with human suffering.

famine victims are repeated in 'For the Commander of the *Eliza*' (1966, 21), which follows 'At a Potato Digging' (1966, 18) in *Death of a Naturalist*:

Six grown men with gaping mouths and eyes
 Bursting the sockets like spring onions in drills.
 Six wrecks of bone and pallid, tautened skin.

Victims' bodies are often conflated with nature through metaphor. This is a common motif in Heaney, and is exemplary in his bog people poems.² 'Requiem for the Croppies' (1969, 12) from *Door into the Dark* continues this theme; an image of death becomes a metaphor of regeneration:

Until, on Vinegar Hill, the fatal conclave.
 Terraced thousands died, shaking scythes at cannon.
 The hillside blushed, soaked in our broken wave.
 They buried us without shroud or coffin
 And in August the barley grew up out of the grave.

Here Heaney draws on a popular history of the rebellion on Vinegar Hill, County Wexford, in 1798, playing on 'a reported fact that when the rebels died [...] [they] were buried in common graves', and the barley which they carried in their pockets to eat subsequently grew out of those graves (O'Brien 2002, 16). Heaney thus uses a (reportedly) literal historical moment and adopts it as a metaphorical image. This image reflects a common motif in Irish literature that is particularly notable from the Aisling tradition onwards: a rejuvenation of land through violence. Heaney engages with this tradition to suggest a need for continual reclamation and reinterpretation of history. The personification of nature in 'Requiem for the Croppies' posits the landscape in an attitude of judgement: the croppies' blood is incorporated into the landscape, humanising and affronting it ('The hillside blushed').

² Edna Longley notes a similar relationship when she proposes that 'At a Potato Digging' and 'For the Commander of the *Eliza*' anticipate *North* (in Curtis 1982, 67).

Wintering Out follows *Door into the Dark*; many poems in this collection contain corporeal images which point towards the bog body poems of *North*. Indeed, *Wintering Out* is prefaced by a poem which is subsequently integrated into 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' in *North* (1975a, 51):

*This morning from a dewy motorway
I saw the new camp for the internees:
a bomb had left a crater of fresh clay
in the roadside, and over in the trees*

*machine-gun posts defined a real stockade.
There was that white mist you get on a low ground
and it was déjà-vu, some film made
of Stalag 17, a bad dream with no sound.*

*Is there a life before death? That's chalked up
on a wall downtown. Competence with pain,
coherent miseries, a bite and sup,
we hug our little destiny again.*

Similar to the reference to internment in *Stations'* introduction, *Wintering Out* is underpinned by an uncomfortable despair invoked by Northern Ireland's Troubles.³ Andrews proposes that '[t]he last stanza questions the quality of life

³ Medbh McGuckian uses a similar technique to implicate the latent resonance of the Troubles in *Captain Lavender* (1994) and appropriates Picasso: "I have not painted the war...but I have no doubt that the war is in...the paintings I have done" - Picasso, 1944'. Likewise, *Drawing Ballerinas* takes its title from a statement by Matisse referenced at the end of the titular poem: 'Matisse, when asked how he managed to survive the war artistically, replied that he spent the worst years 'drawing ballerinas' (2001,15).

that is possible amid such conditions. The rest of the poems in the book have to be read in the context of this numbed despair' (1988, 48-49).⁴

'A Northern Hoard' (1972, 29) in Part One of *Wintering Out* explores the relationship between landscape and violence and exemplifies this collection's 'numbed despair'. Split into five poems 'A Northern Hoard' indirectly engages with its speaker's emotional and physical responses to Northern Ireland's Troubles. Michael Parker argues that,

there seems an undue emphasis on the poet's personal burden of guilt and inadequacy [...] and too little space given to the victims of atrocities. The comparison of their 'wounds' to Christ's 'palms' and the insensitive reference to the 'lumpy dead' deny those victims their individuality (1993, 103-104).

Parker critiques 'A Northern Hoard' for complacency about victims and their individuality. However, 'A Northern Hoard' can be read as reflecting and critiquing society's general tendency to be complacent about violence. The speaker's 'personal burden of guilt and inadequacy' can be read as a self-conscious incorporation of himself within the social structure he critiques.

As 'A Northern Hoard' unfolds it shifts away from bodily metaphors, focusing instead on archaeological motifs, however, the first three poems specifically point to a corporeality of violence. Interestingly, because he is not directly involved in any physical conflict, it is primarily the speaker's body that is foregrounded. In 'Roots' he is haunted by sounds of atrocity: 'the din/ Of gunshot, siren and clucking gas'. The final two stanzas relate this to physicality:

⁴ Molino furthers this by noting a relationship between violence and the state, which Heaney's preface points to: 'these poems exist within the cultural context of a military state and its constituent violence' (1994, 57).

I'll dream it for us before dawn
When the pale sniper steps down
And I approach the shrub.
I've soaked by moonlight in tidal blood

A mandrake, lodged human fork,
Earth sac, limb of the dark;
And I wound its damp smelly loam.
And stop my ears against the scream.

The speaker describes making a barricade. By appropriating natural materials and 'tidal blood', he imaginatively blocks out the external world from his body. The body thus becomes a place of sanctity where the speaker can attempt to protect himself from 'the scream'.

Maud Ellmann, writing about the 1981 Long Kesh hunger strikers, suggests that their refusal to eat and their consequential suffering 'necessaril[ly] entail[ed] the isolation and annihilation of the self':

To fast is to create a dungeon of the body by rejecting any influx from the outer world; and writing also insulates the body, in the sense that it is possible to write even if one's ears are stopped and lips sealed. It is telling that the letters of Long Kesh were actually used to plug the orifices of their own epistolers, because it demonstrates how writing, like starvation, fortresses the self against the world, perfecting its calamitous autonomy (1993, 93).

Heaney's text presents such an attempt to fortify the body and deny the other. However, it is not food which represents a threat, but the noise and suffering of human beings. The speaker's attempted autonomy is problematised by the very materials he imagines as forming his barrier. By blocking out victims' 'screams'

with a loam soaked in 'tidal blood', the speaker ironically appropriates the images of violence which he is attempting to escape. The mandrake 'itself a human surrogate' furthers this as it is reputed to shriek when unearthed 'the scream of long-dead murderers buried' (Andrews 1988, 62).

The speaker's need to stop his ears also has biblical resonance, drawing on The Acts of the Apostles (7. 50-60) in which Stephen attacks society's mistreatment of their prophets and saviours:

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers *did*, so *do ye*. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and the murderers [...] Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast *him* out of the city, and stoned *him* (The Acts 7. 51-52, 57-58).

Girard refers to this passage in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the Earth*:

The words that throw the violence back upon those who are really guilty are so intolerable that it is necessary to shut once and for all the mouth of the one who speaks them. So as not to hear them while he remains capable of speaking, the audience 'stops their ears'. How can we miss the point that they kill in order to cast off an intolerable knowledge and that this knowledge is, strangely enough, the knowledge of the murder itself? (1987, 171-172).

Girard proposes that Stephen is stoned by this crowd in order to stop him speaking about their complicity in the death of Christ. Effectively, they eradicate Stephen in order to occlude their complicity, but by the very nature of this masking their complicity grows. Similarly in 'Roots', it is the speaker's

intolerable complicity that is reflected back upon him, and it is this from which he cannot escape. His attempted denial of sounds of suffering fails because he cannot separate his self (physically or mentally) from external reality. His effort to exclude noises of otherness thus becomes an act of investing the blood of another in his body. He denies and becomes other at one and the same moment. Ellmann suggests that, like fasting, writing 'insulates the body'; in 'Roots' the textualisation of the speaker's thoughts serves not to insulate him, but to perpetuate his inability to escape external reality. His attempt to shut himself off from a world beyond his own consciousness is ironically undermined because it is enunciated in writing. The world as discourse is embedded in his very being; the inscription of his thoughts opens him into externality, further denying his attempted insulation.

'No Man's Land' is the second poem of 'A Northern Hoard'. In it the speaker's attempted escape is further disrupted. An image of shelter is introverted to become part of that which the speaker wishes to transgress:

I deserted, shut out
their wounds' fierce awning,
those palms like streaming webs.

Because wounds are described as having a 'fierce awning' an image of covering is projected onto them. Thus there is a twofold image of exclusion: the speaker shutting these images out and the wounds sheltering themselves. Imagery of an inverted shelter is emphasised by a reference to hands in which an allusion to Christ's sacrifice reminds the reader of the Troubles' religious hypocrisy. At the same time, the stigmata points ironically to a communal redemption which sacrifices supposedly secure. Thus a denial of victims' individuality, which Parker criticises Heaney for, is central to the social critique foregrounded in 'A Northern Hoard'. It is the communal significance of victimage itself which voids victims of their individuality.

Paradoxically, by metaphorically projecting the whole space of violence as an image of personal injury, the second stanza furthers this emphasis:

Why do I unceasingly
arrive late to condone
infected sutures
and ill-knit bone?

The speaker's relationship with this violence is imagined as an attempt to resolve or mend a rift. Corporeality is personalised through images of 'infected sutures' and 'ill-knit bone' which localise the space of damage. The use of 'their' in the first stanza effects a note of specificity. However, there is no implication of who exactly these men are, so they do not explicitly represent any particular side of the conflict in which they are caught up. These factors allow the text to shift its focus onto a description of a single body; the plurality of 'their wounds' is conflated into an image of one body, prefiguring a similar conflation in 'Act of Union' (1975a, 43). '[S]uture' is pertinent here because it suggests not only a surgical joining of a wound, but also a junction 'forming an immovable articulation' (*OED*). Thus 'No Man's Land' renders victims of violence as belonging to one and the same body, the injuries are self-contained and self-inflicted: one social body attacking and violating its own margins.

Heaney's concern with violence is fundamentally engaged with relationships between victims and spectators. In the third poem of 'A Northern Hoard' - 'Stump' - the speaker imagines himself as both part of the social body projected in 'No Man's Land', and as external to it: 'What do I say if they wheel out their dead?/ I'm cauterized, a black stump of home'.⁵ Here, the speaker distances

⁵ Paul Muldoon's 'The Hands' (in Ormsby 1992, 67) written 'after the German of Erich Arendt' seems to echo Heaney's 'A Northern Hoard', pulling together the imagery of the loam from 'Roots': 'And I wound its damp smelly loam/And stop my ears against the scream' and the stump from 'Stump':

himself from the dead by using the third-person plural, yet aligns himself with violence by describing himself as 'cauterized'. The act of cauterising implies a surgical operation which deadens infected tissue in a wound; the speaker thus projects himself as both part of the infected wound and absolved from it through the cauterising process, his place within 'home' is passive and thus impotent. The influence of this dilemma is prominent throughout *Wintering Out*.

Part Two of *Wintering Out* initially moves away from this dilemma. It begins with 'Wedding Day' (1972,45) which describes a groom's anxiety, 'I am afraid./ Sound has stopped in the day', and it looks forward to a physical comfort between husband and wife: 'Let me/ sleep on your breast to the airport'.⁶ A relationship between gender relations and corporeality is developed within *Door into the Dark*, which *Wintering Out* follows. However, the representations of women in the second part of *Wintering Out* do contrast sharply with the more abstract women of *Door into the Dark*.

Patricia Coughlan suggests that Heaney has two structures of representation for 'gender interaction':

[o]ne constructs an unequivocally dominant masculine figure, who explores, describes, brings to pleasure and compassionates a passive female one. The other proposes a woman who dooms, destroys, puzzles and encompasses the man, but also assists him to his self-discovery: the mother stereotype, but merged intriguingly with the spouse (in Allen 1997, 190).

With bloody stumps he loped across the land.
They laughed as they shot after him. And when he blared
one came over to stop his mouth with loam.

⁶ In *Death of a Naturalist* there is an array of love poems, such as 'Honeymoon Flight' (1966, 36), that prefigure *Wintering Out's* focus on marriage and union. Indeed, as an undergraduate, Heaney imaginatively engages with marriage, exploring a repression of past sexual desire in his short story 'There's Rosemary...' printed in *Gorgon* (1961, 29-32) under his then pseudonym, Incertus. This story and the poems from *Gorgon* and *Q* (Queen's University magazines) have never been republished.

Misogynistic representations of male sexuality do appear in Heaney's poetry, particularly in *Door into the Dark*. 'Rite of Spring' (1969, 13), about a frozen pump which ends 'Her entrance was wet, and she came' and 'Victorian Guitar' (1969, 21) are crude instances of this. In the latter the guitar becomes symbolic of the female (body) who owned it '*before her marriage to John Charles Smith*':

I believe he cannot have known your touch
 Like this instrument - for clearly
 John Charles did not hold with fingering -
 [...]
 Did you keep track of it as a wife?
 Do you know the man who has it now
 Is giving it the time of its life?

Whilst Coughlan's assertion of a persistent figuring of male domination over females is generally accurate, Heaney's poetry can be less clear cut than this. His first explicitly female speakers appear in *Door into the Dark*, and some of these at least complicate the gender binary which Coughlan indicates.

In 'Undine' (1969, 14), for instance, the male-female opposition develops a complex interplay. Heaney avoids direct gender confrontation by framing the male-female interaction within a human-mystical overlap. The speaker is the undine, a female water spirit, who describes a process of colonisation in which her space is disrupted and altered by the human: 'He slashed the briars, shovelled up grey silt/ To give me right of way in my own drains'. The man physically dominates the undine by capturing her: 'he dug a spade deep in my flank/ And took me to him'. However, whilst this places the undine in a passive and subjected role, this is contradicted by form and allusion. The speaker is given an active role grammatically: 'I swallowed his trench/ Gratefully, dispersing myself for love'. Moreover, the poem ends with an allusion to a

mythological outcome, 'each limb/ Lost its cold freedom. Human, warmed to him': by procreating with a human, the water spirit gains a human soul. Her active roles do centre around his pleasure. Nevertheless, the poem's latter half disrupts a simple gender structure of male-possessor, female-possessed which privileges the male:

Gratefully, dispersing myself for love
 Down in his roots, climbing his brassy grain -
 But once he knew my welcome, I alone

 Could give him subtle increase and reflection.
 He explored me so completely, each limb
 Lost its cold freedom. Human, warmed to him.

As the female imagines her loss of individuality ('He explored me so completely, each limb/ Lost its cold freedom') she effectively allows herself to be subsumed by male desire. Thus an emphasis on male pleasure through a female body remains here. However, whilst it is the man who takes possession of the undine, it is the undine who subsequently ensures his desire and dependence on her: 'I alone/ Could give him subtle increase and reflection'. At the same moment as the female is rendered subservient to the male, she recognises a power which overrides this: it is his desire for her ('I alone') which perpetuates their interaction, and whilst that desire is based on consent, it is one which empowers her through control.

'The Wife's Tale' (1969, 15) follows 'Undine' and is less complex in its interplay of gender relations. Depicted through a female's point of view, it articulates her thoughts whilst she lays out food for a group of men working on the land. The speaker is alienated from a male agrarian world:

And that was it. I'd come and he had shown me
 So I belonged no further to the work.
 I gathered cups and folded up the cloth
 And went. But they still kept their ease.

Phallic symbolism surrounds the men's activities which serves to further this division of male and female worlds; for instance, forks are stuck in the ground 'As javelins might mark lost battlefields'. Whilst this poem does recognise and foreground a patriarchal division of labour and a subsequent feeling of alienation in the female's role, it can be read as problematising this by framing the speaker within that very role. Not named, she remains structured by a formal and domestic position which the title assumes for her, and is thereby always marked by an externality which inscribes her definitively as wife. A similar framing occurs in the subsequent poem, 'Mother' (1969, 17), in which the speaker is pregnant and is,

tired of walking about with this plunger
 Inside of me. God, he plays like a young calf
 Gone wild on a rope.

The assumed reference to a male baby undercuts an attempted empathy with her condition. This physically embodies her carrying the burden of male patriarchy.

In 'Thinking of her as Ireland', from *Gender and History in Yeat's Love Poetry*, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford addresses a literary tradition that depicts Ireland's landscape as female:

From a structuralist point of view the identification of the land as female reflects the patriarchal opposition between male Culture and female Nature, which defines women as passive and silent embodiments of matter. Politically, the land is seen as an object to be possessed, or

repossessed: to gender it as female is to confirm and reproduce the social arrangements that construct women as material objects, not as speaking subjects (1993, 56).

From the Aisling tradition onwards, Ireland has been represented as female to a male Britain-England.⁷ Although this tradition originated as a colonial protest, its resonance in contemporary poetry has proved a source of disquiet for some Irish writers. Women writers in particular have redressed this in the late twentieth century.⁸ Clair Wills, like Cullingford, discusses how such representations underpin an ideological privileging of men, suggesting that in Irish literature it 'is not merely one mythic narrative among many' but 'is *the* myth, its permutations so various and ubiquitous it can be hard to recognize them for what they are' (1993, 57).

Because Heaney often appropriates an ambivalent version of this framework to explore geographical and political issues, he can, at times, be read as actively subverting the patriarchal tradition from which such oppositions stem. The first example of this is 'Lovers on Aran' (1966, 34). Here the earth and sea are imagined as lovers. A power relation within the binaries of sea-earth, male-female is imagined, but the final lines undercut it:

Did sea define the land or land the sea?
Each drew new meaning from the waves' collision.
Sea broke on land to full identity.

⁷ The Aisling, or vision, tradition which was used most intensely throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is peculiar to Ireland. This political poetry has a thematic structure in which 'the poet encounters a vision-woman who foretells a Stuart redeemer' (Ó Tuama, xxxvii).

⁸ Eavan Boland in *Object Lessons* notes the irony for Irish female poets:

As the author of poems I was an equal partner in Irish poetry. As a woman - about to set out on the life which was the passive object of many of those poems - I had no voice. [...] early on as a poet [...] I realized that the Irish nation as an existing construct in Irish poetry was not available to me (1995, 114 & 127).

The traditional privileging of male (self) over female (other) is thus refuted as the two are mutually redefining. Such ambiguity is interesting because it undermines suggestions that all of Heaney's gender poetry is complicit in perpetuating a tradition that depicts Ireland as female. Even in poems such as 'The Wife's Tale' this tradition is not left unquestioned. The husband is depicted as the land's cultivator, so, by extension, the speaker could be seen as a personification of the land. However, she ironises her husband's association with the land, and, in fact suggests it is he who finds a reflection of himself in it: "There's good yield,/ Isn't there?"- as proud as if he were the land itself'. Later poems, such as 'Polder' (1979, 51), make it impossible to state any definitive position on this subject in Heaney's work. A polder is a piece of low-lying land reclaimed from the sea. In this poem the speaker, having 'hooped you in my arms', states that he has 'reclaimed [his] polder'. Thus, at times females are associated with the land and imagined as in some way possessed by male speakers, at others this relationship is more ambiguously rendered.

In 'Act of Union' (1975a, 43) patriarchal gender representations are appropriated as an allegory of a relationship between Britain and Ireland. Political union is imagined as sexual union. The speaker is Britain, and 'still imperially/ Male'; thus Heaney adopts the 'Mother' Ireland motif.⁹ This patriarchal binary is made complex because the woman is pregnant. And, although this symbolises a conflation and embodiment of self and other within woman-Ireland, it remains framed within a reproduction of power that privileges male-Britain:

⁹ David Trotter argues that Heaney's use of representations of 'Britain as an imperialist bruiser and Ireland as a ruined maid [...] explain nothing':

For the supposedly natural distinction between masculine will and intelligence and feminine emotion is itself the product of specific cultural forces - including, in Heaney's case, the Roman Catholic faith. It simply reproduces what it is meant to explain, and so prevents any political understanding either of sexual or of national differences (1984,188).

I am the tall kingdom over your shoulder
 That you would neither cajole nor ignore.
 Conquest is a lie. I grow older
 Conceding your half-independent shore
 Within whose borders now my legacy
 Culminates inexorably.

There is, however, a major ambiguity which serves to destabilise the surety of this.

As in 'Undine', an ambiguity is provoked by the presence of male (hetero)sexual desire. In the first section of 'Act of Union', this element problematises an assumption that male-Britain is dominant. By placing 'Conquest is a lie' syntactically between two sentences with different subjects (the female and the male respectively) the agent of this conquest remains open to interpretation. This is furthered by a suggestion that the speaker concedes his partner's 'half-independent shore' and by his description of himself, 'I am the tall kingdom [...] / That you would neither cajole nor ignore'. Whilst 'ignore' suggests an intentional disregard, 'cajole' (implying persuasion through flattery or deceit) inscribes upon the woman provocative overtones. The prior negation of both these extremes creates an ambiguity that subsumes either possibilities. Potentially, the speaker's wife is empowered by vacillating between cajoling and ignoring him. Sexual overtones present in this phrase spill over into the following sentence, ensuring that the meaning of 'conquest' is fully extended to encompass implications of military subjugation and of the winning of a person's affections or sexual favours.¹⁰ The formal binary is, to an extent, reaffirmed by

¹⁰ Richard Brown highlights how puns in 'Act of Union' are significant, and points to an ambiguity in the titular reference, suggesting that it, 'elides the 1801 Act of Union with the Government of Ireland Act of 1922 or Northern Ireland Act of 1949' (in Corcoran 1992, 155-156) thus foregrounding 'a postmodern world where identities may be neither historical nor even stable but may continually be created and re-created out of ever more precise conceptions of difference' (1992, 156). Alternatively, the title could be read as a reference to all these acts of union, all of which culminate to produce Northern Ireland.

describing the foetus as belonging to the speaker ('my legacy'). However, the poem's previous ambiguities do not dissolve, and whilst the male reassumes a privileged and dominant role, the notion of a wholly subjugated female remains eroded.

The embodied conflation of male and female opposites through their baby provokes internal fracture in the second poem of 'Act of Union': 'the boom burst from within'. Merging male-Britain and female-Ireland gives birth to an alien third body, 'Whose stance is growing unilateral'. Whilst 'unilateral' would seem to imply that the baby is assuming an allegiance to one side of the opposition represented through his parents, the subsequent lines fracture this:

His heart beneath your heart is a wardrum
Mustering force. His parasitical
And ignorant little fists already
Beat at your borders and I know they're cocked
At me across the water.

Thus the child's unilateralism is projected as disregarding essences of both his kinsfolk. This indirect conflation which Heaney creates points to the poem's political and social significance. Whilst he imagines a binary opposition of Ireland and Britain to project a process of colonisation, he forms Northern Ireland as one singular body, although the female-Ireland is left with 'The rending process in the colony'. The oppositions of self-other, Protestant-Catholic, British-Irish usually aligned to Northern Ireland's conflict are thus conflated and subsumed within a singular space of the 'parasitical' body which various acts of union helped create.

Corporeal union is also an explicit part of the imagery in 'Mother of the Groom' (1972, 46) from *Wintering Out*. In this poem, the speaker imagines the emotions of a groom's mother. Her son's development into manhood is metaphorically

captured within an image of his mother bathing him as a baby, thus evoking a sense of maternal care still permeating her feelings for the groom:

Hands in her voided lap,
She hears a daughter welcomed.
It's as if he kicked when lifted
And slipped her soapy hold.

The final stanza carries over this soap imagery and again conflates temporalities, but the focus shifts from parental to marital relations:

Once the soap would ease off
The wedding ring
That's bedded forever now
In her clapping hand.

Once young, the mother was able to take off her wedding ring, and could, therefore, imaginatively evade the union that it symbolises. In age, the ring is 'bedded forever now/ In her clapping hand'. This can be interpreted as suggesting marriage entails constraint and entrapment. Alternatively, this image can be read as a shift in the ring's signification. Initially it symbolises union, as it will for the new bride and groom. But for the mother of the groom her ring has become an extension of herself, embedded in her finger. This inscribes onto the poem a temporal development from marital union as an ideal of physical union (as well as a union of two souls) to an embodiment and extension of each individual's corporeality.

This kind of corporeal bond between husband and wife, or indeed, lovers, is sustained throughout Heaney's poetry. In the titular poem of *Field Work* (1979, 52) the physicality of the speaker's loved one is mingled with nature and pastoral images. This begins in the first two poems with her vaccination mark:

I could see the vaccination mark
 stretched on your upper arm, and smell the coal smell
 of the train that comes between us ('I').

But your vaccination mark is on your thigh,
 an O that's healed into the bark.

Except a dryad's not a woman
 you are my wounded dryad ('II').

This conflation and comparison is culminated in the final poem of 'Field Work' ('IV') when the speaker imagines pressing a leaf into his lover's palm, thereby permanently marking her with its trace.

Later, in 'La Toilette' (1984a, 14) corporeality is explicitly linked to Catholicism's emphasis on the body as an extension (and possession) of God. Sexuality in 'La Toilette' is consequently marred with a latent guilt. This is implied through a group of questions that return the speaker to the Catholic doctrines he shuns. By appropriating sacred objects used during the Eucharist, the speaker conflates his sexual desire with the spiritual world of his upbringing. For instance, the ciborium (the Eucharist's drinking cup) is used as a metaphorical vehicle to imagine a feeling of the 'first coldness of the underbreast'. Conflating sexuality and Catholicism serves to emphasise how manifestly the speaker's consciousness has been affected by an emphasis on the body's sacredness, whilst radically subverting that very emphasis.¹¹ By blending sacred and sexual imagery the speaker recasts the former as a descriptive vehicle for his secular

¹¹ Heaney's translation of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's 'Féar Suaithinseach', 'Miraculous Grass' in *Pharaoh's Daughter* (Ní Dhomhnaill 1990, 33) also combines sexuality and sacredness and invests in them an Aisling/Yeatsian image which correlates the female speaker with Irish land 'my green unfortunate field'.

world. This culminates in an affirmation of the word and body of his lover over those collapsed in a spiritual union which the Eucharist signifies:

*Our bodies are the temples
of the Holy Ghost. Remember?
And the little, fitted, deep-slit drapes
on and off the holy vessels*

*regularly? And the chasuble
so deftly hoisted? But vest you
in the word you taught me
and the stuff I love: slub silk.*

In the poems which follow 'Mother of the Groom' in *Wintering Out*, an emphasis on the union of marriage moves out to incorporate paternal experiences. 'Summer Home' (1972, 47) looks forward to 'La Toilette' and 'Field Work' in its appropriation of natural and spiritual elements as it describes bodily and marital union. The final stanza of the final poem in this five part sequence differentiates a communality of family life from an exacerbated relationship between the husband and wife that has been evoked through the other four poems. The sequence begins:

*Was it the wind off the dumps
or something in heat*

*dogging us, the summer gone sour,
a fouled nest incubating somewhere?*

Here and throughout, images of intense summer heat are used to measure tense relations between the speaker and his wife. In the second poem, he

brings flowers into their summer home, the significance of which is imagined in liturgical language:

The loosened flowers between us
gather in, compose
for a May altar of sorts.
These frank and falling blooms
soon taint to a sweet chrism.

Attend. Anoint the wound.

This passage implies a tension between union and celebration and a pervasive antagonism. Union and celebration are signified through connotations of worship and redemption which are conveyed through spiritual language. Antagonism, on the other hand, is present when the flowers are imagined as a barrier 'between us' and as something quickly altered ('soon taint'). This tension is collapsed and embodied in the double meaning of 'Anoint the wound'. Most specifically, this assumes elements of spiritual consecration; however, 'Anoint' can also mean to thrash, baste or cudgel (*OED*). These latter meanings thus suggest a possibility that the flowers have perpetuated and exacerbated a marital tension. A vacillation between a movement towards reconciliation, and a stubborn perpetuation of the status quo is repeated in the third poem:

O we tented our wound all right
under the homely sheet

and lay as if the cold flat of a blade
had winded us.

More and more I postulate
thick healings,

At no time does the text explicitly resolve this tension, yet the final two poems suggest a movement towards reconciliation. In the penultimate poem, an image of grain bursting is appropriated as a possibility of regeneration. Reconciliation is implicated through an incorporation of the family unit in the final poem, and in its closing image: 'Our love calls tiny as a tuning fork'. This image registers a sense of hope in the love between husband and wife and although its call is 'tiny' it reverberates with possibility.

As these poems suggest, Part Two of *Wintering Out* is largely made up of personal lyrics, but midway through this is disturbed by a cluster of body poems that echo the corporeal emphasis of 'A Northern Hoard' from Part One and lay specific emphases on various power relations inscribed upon individual bodies. One of these is 'Maighdean Mara' (1972, 56). Elmer Andrews explains that the title is a reference to 'the legendary mermaid who had to leave the sea and marry the man who stole her magic garment, suffer love-making and motherhood, before retrieving her garment and returning to the sea' (1988, 72). Although the title refers to an Irish mythological mermaid, she is never named or explicitly identified in the poem itself. So the poem's character remains ambiguously placed between natural and supernatural worlds: 'Her magic garment al-/ most ocean-tinctured still'. This unearthly quality is problematised by the poem's framing image: 'She sleeps now, her cold breasts/ Dandled by undertow'. By opening and closing the poem with an image of her dead body, the rest of the poem is posited within this context of death or suicide. Because both the woman and her death are ambiguous, the power relations affecting her status are emphatically significant. Without explicit explanation or clarification, an emphasis on entrapment becomes the reader's only point of context:

He stole her garments as
 She combed her hair: follow
 Was all that she could do.

A tension is established between her presence on land as a wife and mother as something which has been coerced, and the sea's seduction ('In earshot of the waves'). The former, it is suggested, threatens the latter:

She suffered milk and birth -
 She had no choice - conjured
 Patterns of home and drained
 The tidesong from her voice.

Her return to the sea, without her garments ('she wrapped herself/ With smoke-reeks from his thatch'), results in her death: 'She sleeps now, her cold breasts/ Dandled by undertow'.

Andrews suggests that following the legend's 'archetypal pattern of entry into the suffering of human existence, which is endured until eventual release and return to the source', '[t]he notion of "homecoming" in "Maighdean Mara' 'offers a form of assuagement in the face of death's inevitability' (1988, 72). Alternatively, because the girl-mermaid returns to the sea without her magical source, her loss of power and the violation she has endured are extended, rather than resolved. Thus violation caused by the theft of her garments effectively annuls her power, in relation both to the man who consequently possesses her and to the sea which subsequently kills her. Her nakedness emphasises this vulnerability. This echoes the daughter of 'A Winter's Tale' (1972, 52) whose naked image is caught in the headlights of a car:

Weeping, blood bright from her cuts
 Where she'd fled the hedged and wired
 Road, they eyed her nakedness
 Astray among the cattle
 At first light.

Within 'Maighdean Mara', this emphasis on wildness and nakedness is inverted: it is a violation caused through the theft of her dress which leads eventually to her death.

'Westering' (1972, 67) is the final poem of *Wintering Out*, marking the end of Heaney's then most politically orientated work. Corporeality here is linked to Christ's crucifixion. The preface to 'Westering' - '*In California*' - explicitly registers its speaker's geographical dislocation from Northern Ireland. Despite this, the Troubles remain at the foreground of his mind. The poem is framed by an event which opens a train of associations in the speaker's memory - a map of the moon in California brings to mind a summer spent in Donegal. 'Westering' moves backwards from a recollection of the last night spent in Donegal, to the Good Friday journey to Donegal. The movement of his drive is juxtaposed by the stillness of towns at worship that he passes through: 'Past shopblinds drawn on the afternoon./ Cars stilled outside still churches'. The last stanzas integrate a disturbing image:

And congregations bent
 To the studded crucifix.
 What nails dropped out that hour?
 Roads unreeled, unreeled

Falling light as casts
 Laid down
 On shining waters.
 Under the moon's stigmata

Six thousand miles away,
 I imagine untroubled dust,
 A loosening gravity,
 Christ weighing by his hands.

Through the temporal context of Good Friday, 'Westering' explicitly points to notions of suffering and redemption which emphasise the significance of Christ's crucifixion in Christianity. However, the image is not a resolving one; its significance and its place within this worshipping community is openly questioned: 'What nails dropped out that hour?'

The iconicity of Christ's bodily suffering is central to Christianity, especially to Catholicism. As the priest becomes part of Jesus, reiterating his words and actions during the Last Supper, so too the community assumes the role of his disciples, eating and drinking Christ's body and blood to become one with him. Catholicism's belief in transubstantiation opens the body of Jesus to the worshipping community; his body, during communion becomes a vessel for conjoining the community with the body and kingdom of God. Communion with God is an active opening of the self to forces beyond it. An assumption is made, therefore, that spiritually we are both self and other. This is furthered: because Jesus died on the cross to save humanity from their sins, it is the world's sin which effectively placed him on the crucifix. Jesus is ultimately condemned to death by Pilate, but it is the crowd, backed by priests and scribes, who ensure this sacrifice (Matthew 27. 24-25). If the Eucharist literally re-enacts the passion of Jesus then it also reinstates each person's role in his crucifixion, as sinners and as members of a human community. The self's polyvocality is, then, not only a purifying conflation of self, the worshipping community and God, but also a recognition of each person's complicity in announcing Christ's physical suffering. An aspect of the Christian self is present, therefore, which is other to Christ's purity but which nevertheless ensures a possible redemption.

The figure of Christ appears at various times throughout Heaney's poetry. In *Wintering Out* problems of suffering and sin are already raised in the last lines of 'Limbo' (1972, 58): 'Even Christ's palms, unhealed,/ Smart and cannot fish there'. The speaker of 'Limbo' suggests a direct relationship between a mother's

decision to drown her illegitimate child, and her religion which socially binds and controls her action:

But I'm sure
As she stood in the shallows
Ducking him tenderly

Till the frozen knobs of her wrists
Were dead as the gravel,
He was a minnow with hooks
Tearing her open.

She waded in under
The sign of her cross.

By imagining this girl physically torn open by her action, and by setting her movement 'under/ The sign of her cross', the speaker explicitly shifts the blame of this act from her to her social context. This mirrors the purifying of Christ and the extending guilt of society as he carries his crucifix upon his back. The image of her as physically torn open also emphasises a fragmentation of her subjectivity. Although she actively drowns her child, the poem intimates her religion and society as powers which displace her agency. Andrews also suggests this, highlighting that, although there is an active-passive opposition between mother and child, 'since social taboo deriving from religious pressure is the main determinant of her action' (1988, 73) her choice is actually illusory.

The poem's close: 'Even Christ's palms, unhealed,/ Smart and cannot fish there' foregrounds a disparity between 'The sign of her cross' and the (com)passion of Christ. On one hand, this suggests that Christ, as redeemer, cannot resolve or forgive this act. However, by integrating an image of Christ after his crucifixion, and negating his healing powers in relation to the girl's sacrificial act, the poem

foregrounds an hypocrisy in the (Northern) Irish state and in organised religion. Elizabeth Butler Cullingford's reading of 'Limbo' extends this social critique when she links the poem to an outlawing of abortion in the Irish Republic in 1983, which put both sides of the border on a par '[s]ince the British Abortion Act of 1967 has never been extended to the North of Ireland' (1994, 46-47). Rather than offering the humanity of Christ (who, in the Gospels, embraces society's marginalised peoples), the overshadowing powers of the Catholic church and of the state actually push this girl beyond her own redemption. Cullingford also suggests this when she proposes that it is not only the drowned baby who will be trapped in Limbo but also its mother (1994, 53). The condition 'of unalterable and absolute degeneracy' (Andrews 1988, 74) which is foregrounded, is thus a product of a social order perpetuated by the Catholic church's inscription and control of the bodies of its members.

The image of a congregation bent towards the final Paschal symbol is intertwined with fishing metaphors in 'Westering', thus echoing 'Limbo'. An emphasis on human suffering, present within the cluster of poems which surround 'Limbo', prefigures 'Westering' and *North*. Indeed, an echo of the final image of 'Christ weighing by his hands' can be found earlier in 'Linen Town' (1972, 28) where McCracken's 'hanged' body is rendered in a continual present: 'By the swinging tongue of his body'. The lunar motif in 'Westering' is foregrounded in 'Bye-Child' (1972, 59). 'Bye-Child' follows 'Limbo' and carries over the former poem's social and religious critique. Its preface provides it with a specific social context:

*He was discovered in the henhouse
where she had confined him. He was
incapable of saying anything.*

The emphasis on the child's silence here and throughout the poem, broken only in the final stanzas by 'a remote mime', echoes Christ's silence,¹² and correlates the brutal treatment of an innocent child with the suffering of Christ. This is explicated in the middle of the text:

Little moon man,
 Kennelled and faithful
 At the foot of the yard,
 Your frail shape, luminous,
 Weightless, is stirring the dust

Here the imagery adopted points directly to the closing lines of 'Westering':

Under the moon's stigmata

 Six thousand miles away,
 I imagine untroubled dust,
 A loosening gravity,
 Christ weighing by his hands.

The lightness of casting rods, an unreeling road, lunar gravity and 'the moon's stigmata' which precede the final stanza of 'Westering' are in sharp contrast to its heavy image of 'Christ weighing by his hands'. This image opposes the hope of redemption marked by a weightless body and stirred dust in 'Bye-Child'.¹³

¹² This is expounded in an analysis of 'Weighing In' in 'Host Objects' in the final section of this thesis, pages 256-264.

¹³ Throughout my study of Heaney's work I have noticed a subtle importance he places on images of hands. In the uncollected 'Slow Jive' printed in *Gorgon* (1961, 28) the poem opens with a focus on the hands of the speaker's dance partner: 'Thin and petal-like your hands'. A similar image is created in the fourth poem from *Field Work's* titular sequence in which the speaker presses a leaf into the hand of his lover 'to prime your skin/ and your veins to be crossed/criss-cross with leaf-veins' (1979, 55). Both of these instances point towards an idealised corporeal conflation of lovers metaphorically imagined through their absorption by nature. 'Mother of the Groom' (1972, 46), as noted earlier, takes this kind of image and gives it a less idealised inflection. Beyond these, Heaney's emphasis on hands seems ultimately linked

Indeed, it opposes hope inscribed in the Eucharist and Christ himself. The fulfilment of Christ's sacrifice is his ascension to heaven and the promise that this holds for all Christians. Yet here, Christ remains in perpetual movement on the cross, suggesting that rather than being a redeemed community, this society remains tied to its sin; the biblical moment which heralds a possibility for Christian people's redemption remains permanently fixed in 'Westering' in an incomplete moment of suffering. This is clearly marked by the poem's shift into a present progressive tense, emphasising a continuation of 'Christ weighing by his hands', the weight of which measures the whole of *Wintering Out* and its troubled context.

In *North* the relationship between stasis and action is engaged with more explicitly, and this becomes a central and recurring theme in Heaney's poetry to date. 'The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream' (1975a, 50) projects the poet's work as a physical struggle in which his efforts are imagined as a physical attempt to dislodge 'state and statute'. However, the reference to dreaming, and the poet's eventual jailing undermine his potential physicality:

In the cell, I wedge myself with outstretched arms in the
corner and heave, I jump on the concrete flags to test
them. Were those your eyes just now at the hatch?

to Christ's stigmata (in fact, Henry Hart suggests that the leaf/hand motif of 'Field Work' is comparable to 'a stigmata of the cross' [1992,134]): guilt, sin, suffering and an ultimate redemption are more often than not connoted within these images. This is especially true of promise and redemption imagined in 'The Pitchfork' (1991, 23) and the consistent references in 'Station Island' (1984a, 61), particularly in relation to ghosts and victims of sectarian violence holding or shaking hands with the speaker or their counterparts. For instance, the shopkeeper, leaving his wife in their bedroom before he is murdered by two off-duty policemen, says that 'something/made me reach across and squeeze her hand across the bed' (1984a, 79). An incident Heaney relays during his Nobel Lecture furthers the significance of touching hands, directly relating it to Northern Ireland (1998, 455-457). Karl Miller also considers the connection between this story and the shopkeeper in 'Station Island' in an interview with Heaney (2000, 24).

North closes with 'Exposure' (1975a, 66), a poem which emphasises a relationship between the speaker's internal confrontation about his relationship with Northern Ireland and 'the massacre':

I am neither internee nor informer;
An inner émigré, grown long-haired
And thoughtful; a wood-kerne

Escaped from the massacre,
Taking protective colouring
From bole and bark, feeling
Every wind that blows;

Who, blowing up these sparks
For their meagre heat, have missed
The once-in-a-lifetime portent,
The comet's pulsing rose.

Ending *North* in this way frames the whole collection within a context of a guilt about complacency. This focus continues into *Field Work* where the will to act is set in tension with a conscious awareness of the violence and violation action would augment. The framing poems of this collection, 'Oysters' (1979, 11) and 'Ugolino' (1979, 61) foreground the significance of this tension throughout *Field Work*.¹⁴ 'Oysters' ends with a will for action that is marked and undercut because it renders that desire through a grammatical designation for a linguistic expression of action rather than action itself: 'I ate the day/ Deliberately, that its tang/ Might quicken me all into verb, pure verb'. It is, however, in relation to the bog people poems of *North* that this dilemma is most thoroughly explicated and opened up to a self-referential critique. Through their emphasis on victims'

¹⁴ Other examples include 'Triptych' (1979, 12), 'Casualty' (1979, 21), 'The Badgers' (1979, 25) and 'An Afterwards' (1979, 44).

bodies and voyeuristic speakers, these poems engage with questions of social passivity, and render what is active within this.

6. Bog Bodies and the Aesthetics of Violence

In *North*, the influence of P.V. Glob's *The Bog People* (1969) becomes most pertinent in a series of poems which develop out of specific archaeological finds documented in this text. Heaney's appropriation of archaeological motifs, in particular his representation of Glob's preserved corpses, has been the subject of a polemical debate since *North's* publication.¹ The contention which these poems have propagated is broadly concerned with a relationship they establish between histories of violence and Northern Ireland's Troubles.² Ciaran Carson, in his review of *North*, suggests that:

Heaney seems to have moved - unwillingly, perhaps - from being a writer with the gift of percision [sic], to become the laureate of violence - a mythmaker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, an apologist for 'the situation', in the last resort, a mystifier (1975, 183).³

In contrast to reading these poems as evasive of the Troubles 'by falsifying issues, by applying wrong notions of history instead of seeing what's before your eyes' (Carson 1975, 186), they can be seen to explicate a relationship between violence, sacrifice and the body which highlights performative aspects of power in contemporary society.

¹ Elmer Andrews proposes that *North* is 'the book of Heaney's over which there has been most controversy and the one in which he reveals most intensely the anguish of uncertainty' (1992a, 3). Longley critiques Part 1 of *North* for failing to adequately appropriate a mythic structure, arguing it 'often falls between the stools of poetry and politics instead of building a mythic bridge' (1986, 150).

² Clair Wills points out that the dominant reading of 'Hercules and Antaeus' (1975a, 46) has become a framework for subsequent enquiries into the mythic structure of *North*; the collection is split into two parts: 'which were perceived to correspond to the two principles in the poem "Hercules and Antaeus": rationality and mythic atavism' (1993, 29).

³ In an interview with Karl Miller, Heaney sites Carson's essay as the earliest 'statement of resistance' which became a 'kind of official policy on *North*, in the North' (Miller 2000, 21). Carson's review is significant because it projects a critique of *North*, and of Heaney's public image. Indeed, the review opens with a description of Edward McGuire's portrait of Heaney which, in Carson's opinion, idealises Heaney: 'the poet seems to have acquired the status of myth, of institution' (1975, 183). By drawing attention to his status, Carson points to a tendency in reviewers and critics to endorse a specific way of reading Heaney - 'by taking blurbs at their face value (as many reviewers seem to have done)' (1975, 186).

Whilst poetry is discursive, the world from which it derives is a physical one. As Foucault's work persistently shows, the body is inscribed by discourse. But this never undoes its primary corporeal status. Meaning may be absent from textuality but, regardless, pain remains as corporeal presence. Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain* says that 'the absence of pain is a presence of world; the presence of pain is the absence of world. Across this set of inversions pain becomes power' (1985, 37). If bodily pain is erased, and the bodies of victims of violence become signifiers in a process of legitimating power, then, as a society, our failure to attempt a reinstatement of that pain marks our complicity within such inscriptions. The tendency of critics such as Lloyd and Carson, to read *North* as an apology for violence simply replays liberal humanist readings which pacify and universalise Heaney's poetry. The critical reception of *North* does not acknowledge the power relations at play within the poetry itself.⁴

Rather than atoning for a tradition of violence by foregrounding its presence and persistence through history, *North* projects ways in which victims' bodies become aestheticised as they are subsumed into a social discourse that surrounds and overshadows violence. Heaney catalogues and critiques a contemporary complicity with violence by highlighting the disjunction between images of death and violence and the corporeality of violence and death. Victims' bodies remain interpreted primarily as political symbols, and thus continue to symbolise a legitimisation of reciprocal violent activity. As Katherine Verdery argues in her study of dead-body politics in Eastern Europe: '[d]ead bodies [...] can be a site of political profit [...] I am partly talking about the process of establishing political legitimacy' (1999, 33). Heaney's bog people poems foreground the bodies of violence as primarily constituting a politics

⁴ The influence of Helen Vendler in American criticism of Heaney is a case in point: Heaney's poems postulate an entire violent Northland, of which Ireland and Denmark, Celt and Viking are equally part, where ritual sacrifices, of which Ulster murders on both sides are simply recurrences, are tribal customs defeating all individual reason or endeavor (1988, 154).

which stages the struggle and display of power and legitimation. It is not Heaney who aestheticises violence, it is society; until victims of violence are read as reflecting only the pain of their death, society will continue to subsume their bodies into a politics of power.

'Come to the Bower' (1975a, 24) is the first poem to focus on an exhumed body in *North*. Whilst digging, the speaker finds a 'dark-bowered queen'. Voyeuristic overtones are prevalent:

And spring water
Starts to rise around her.

I reach past
The riverbed's washed
Dream of gold to the bullion
Of her Venus bone.

This poem is followed by 'Bog Queen' (1975a, 25). 'Bog Queen' is peculiar to the bog people texts because it is the only one in which the exhumed body is given narrative agency. Placing these poems together offers two points of focalisation from which to view the process of excavation. In 'Bog Queen', the fact that she is her own narrator, and thus subject to her own self-control, is problematised by implications that the body is an 'inscribed surface of events' (Foucault 1984, 83).⁵ The body as text is inscribed, and reinscribed by the bog: 'My body was braille/ for the creeping influences'. A gradual evolution and integration into nature is described, and the bog begins to mother her. This is signified by fluid images that connect her body to the surrounding water, and by

⁵ Even though the bog queen's control over her body is problematised, she never loses narrative agency. Thus Patricia Coughlan's critique of the bog poems as creating a 'highly problematic division' between 'the female figures' as 'the epitome of a general silence' and 'the describing, celebrating, expressing poet' (in Allen 1997, 192) serves to perpetuate what it critiques by erasing the female voice of 'Bog Queen' itself.

the image of her hair as 'a slimy birth-cord/ of bog'. The text appropriates water imagery to create this fluidity between the speaker and the bog which sustains her:

My sash was a black *glacier*
 wrinkling, dyed weaves
 and phoenician stitchwork
retted on my breasts'

soft *moraines*.
 I knew the winter cold
 like the nuzzle of *fjords*
 at my thighs (my emphasis).

The body's cohesion, both internally ('my brain darkening', 'the vital hoard reducing/ in the crock of the pelvis') and in relation to her clothing ('My diadem grew carious', 'My sash was a black glacier') is emphasised by the bog queen. The speaker is not fully passive and instead of becoming a reified text she projects her body as a metaphorical agent of this evolutionary process.⁶ As the

⁶ Derek Mahon's 'Lives' (1999, 44) adopts the theme of archaeological finds, presenting a speaker who assumes various embodiments. The speaker has been various material objects like a gold necklace and a stone as well as different human beings each time he is resurrected. The first human subjectivity the speaker assumes is similar to Heaney's bog queen. After listing and glossing the various lives of the speaker, the poem ironises simplified representations of human subjects:

I know too much
 To be anything any more;
 And if in the distant

Future someone
 Thinks he has once been me
 As I am today,

Let him revise
 His insolent ontology
 Or teach himself to pray.

'Lives' was originally published in *Lives* 1972, and so preceded *North*. However, in subsequent collections, Mahon dedicates the poem to Heaney, thus implicitly suggesting that Heaney's use of archaeology should be subject to a critique such as the one foregrounded in 'Lives'. This

bog reinscribes her body, she describes it in turn as transforming her clothing. This is broken only by translating her body from being a part of the bog to becoming a resurrected and commodified object.

The imagery of the poem's latter half ultimately stresses her exhumation as a violation. However, the speaker does not describe the turfcutter who discovered her as a violator. It is his spade that is rendered grammatically active as the agent of violence. And his recovering of the bog queen is evoked with tenderness:

I was barbered
and stripped
by a turfcutter's spade

who veiled me again
and packed coomb softly
between the stone jambs
at my head and my feet.

This passive projection is sustained throughout the latter half of the text, and is set in opposition to violent commodification emphasised by a peer's wife paying the turfcutter for the bog queen's hair.⁷

Where previously her body is conjoined with bog water, the loss of her plait erases such unity. Her voice remains coherent, but the cutting of her 'birth-cord/ of bog' (her plait) inscribes her as an object and prefigures her total fragmentation into objects in the final stanza:

plays into an established perception of Heaney's bog poems that assumes they render fixed and simple notions of identity and consciousness.

⁷ The source of this is in Glob's *The Bog People* and is about a preserved corpse found in County Down in 1781 (1969, 103).

and I rose from the dark,
 hacked bone, skull-ware,
 frayed stitches, tufts,
 small gleams on the bank.

The body, previously inscribed and textualised by the bog which preserved her, is now dispersed and absent. No longer a body it has become a list of 'small gleams on the bank'.

'Bog Queen' and 'Come to the Bower' contrast with the other bog people poems, because they do not compare past and present violence, but render present forms of disturbances - the violence of exhuming and dispersing bog bodies. The final stanzas in 'The Digging Skeleton' (1975a, 17) also foreground this.⁸ A tension between the bog people's bodies' corporeality and their significance as objects is related to a politics of violence in 'The Grauballe Man' (1975a, 28). Rather than showing how society objectifies bodies as symbols of violence, 'Bog Queen' and 'Strange Fruit' (1975a, 32) emphasise commodification of bodies as artefacts. As in 'Bog Queen' the exhumation and objectification of the girl in 'Strange Fruit' results in her fragmentation. This is emphasised more in 'Strange Fruit' because it is only her head that is preserved. So it is only a head which is viewed by the contemporary speaker: 'They unswaddled the wet fern of her hair/ And made an exhibition of its coil'. These poems serve to remind readers that what they are viewing textually is preserved and exhibited physically. In 'Punishment', the girl's 'numbered bones' disrupt the poem as a narrative of action, reminding readers of the speaker's imagined experience whilst viewing a body which is now perceived primarily as an archaeological artefact. Whilst the bog people poems reflect on objectification and commodification of bodies as politicised symbols, there is,

⁸ Such images of violation are arguably prefigured in 'Dream' (1969, 3) from *Door into the Dark*, in which the speaker dreams of hitting, and thereby unearthing, a corpse whilst digging.

therefore, an underlying reminder that the actual bog bodies have become aesthetic objects - exhibited and viewed in museums.

Of the bog people poems, 'Punishment' (1975a, 30), 'The Grauballe Man' (1975a, 28) and 'Kinship' (1975a, 33) are the foremost examples of Heaney conflating two distinct temporalities. The speakers of these poems are caught within tensions not only *between* temporalities but also *within* their contemporary moment. They express a contradiction inherent within their moment of narration which they bring back to these images from the past. The speaker in 'Punishment' shifts between viewing an excavated body as it is in its preserved state, to imagining it at the time of its sacrifice. This oscillation allows the text to open its meaning beyond the past it excavates:

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:

As with 'Bog Queen' and 'Come to the Bower', the girl is directly connected to and subsumed by nature through metaphor. In 'Punishment', however, there is another metaphorical emphasis which describes her in terms related to shipping ('frail rigging', 'rods and boughs'). This serves to foreground a central difference between the previous bodies described and this 'Little adulteress'. In 'Bog Queen', water imagery highlights a fluidity between the body and the sustenance of the bog water; here the integration of shipping metaphors offers

a critique of the girl's punishment. By aligning her to a ship, the text foregrounds an image of a body which should effectively withhold the incursions of water. However, this imagery is carried through and appropriated to describe 'the weighing stone,/ the floating rods and boughs' that are laid upon her to ensure her death.⁹ By employing complimenting images to describe the girl and the way she was killed the poem conjoins the two. This foregrounds the role of adultery in 'Punishment'. Other bog people poems emphasise victimage and even their sacrificial purpose is largely left implicit. In 'Punishment' the self-propagating nature of this girl's circumstance is formally mirrored by metaphorically collating her body and her death. Curiously, this mirroring is problematised by implications heralded in the term 'scapegoat' which explicitly suggests that the signification of this death exceeds the adultery which propagated it.

René Girard's study, *Violence and the Sacred*, focuses on sacrificial violence within primitive cultures, however much of his analysis holds for our contemporary experience of violence.¹⁰ He argues that an effort to symbolically

⁹ Heaney appears to be directly influenced by Glob here:

We must suppose that she was led naked out on to the bog with bandaged eyes and the collar round her neck, and drowned in the little peat pit, which must have held twenty inches of water or more. To keep the young body under, some birch branches and a big stone were laid upon her (Glob 1969, 114).

¹⁰ Jonathan Hufstader's *Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones: Northern Irish Poetry and Social Violence* adopts Girard's theory of religious sacrifice in his introduction (1999, 10-12), but does not use it specifically in his chapter on Heaney. However, rather than suggesting, as I have done, that the Troubles can be understood within the framework of a sacrificial crisis (e.g. the failure of sacrifice to produce a peaceful community, instead perpetuating reciprocal violence), Hufstader maintains the primary level of Girard's theory. He thereby differentiates Girard's scapegoat, as incapable of propagating violence, and the case in Northern Ireland where '[t]he Ulster victim - the Catholic slain by Protestants or the Protestant slain by Catholics - is a member of the alien, neighboring tribe, whose members are fated to chose yet another victim in their turn' (1999, 12). Whilst this is similar to Girard's sacrificial crisis and my appropriation of it, there are important differences; by maintaining the structure of religious sacrifice, Hufstader avoids addressing ideological and discursive elements which have overtaken sectarian violence and, consequently, retains an idea that violence is an inherent fact in human history: '[o]ne may change skies and trains, but not one's violent animus' (1999, 81). Similarly, Charles L. O'Neill's essay 'Violence and the Sacred in Seamus Heaney's *North*' adopts Girard's theory. Whilst O'Neill notes the significance of complicity in 'Punishment' (in Malloy & Carey 1996, 99), his essay concludes, like Girard's work, by reiterating the inevitability of violence (in Malloy & Carey 1996, 102). Whilst Girard's work undoubtedly influences this chapter, I have attempted to understand the binding and reciprocating nature of violence in the process and legitimation of

contain and eradicate violence within primitive communities is effected through a ritual in which a scapegoat (usually a marginal member of society) is sacrificed. The people 'instinctively seek an immediate and violent cure for the onslaught of unbearable violence and strive desperately to convince themselves that all their ills are the fault of a lone individual who can be easily disposed of' (1977, 79-80). Girard describes an attempt to break the 'mimetic character of violence' through the scapegoat (surrogate victim):

To escape from the circle of violence it is first necessary to remove from the scene all those forms of violence that tend to become self-propagating and to spawn new, imitative forms.

When a community succeeds in convincing itself that one alone of its number is responsible for the violent mimesis besetting it; when it is able to view this member as the single 'polluted' enemy who is contaminating the rest; and when the citizens are truly unanimous in this conviction - then the belief becomes a reality, for there will no longer exist elsewhere in the community a form of violence to be followed or opposed, which is to say, imitated and propagated. In destroying the surrogate victim, men believe that they are ridding themselves of some present ill. And indeed they *are*, for they are effectively doing away with those forms of violence that beguile the imagination and provoke emulation (1977, 81-82).

The last stanzas of 'Punishment' mark a sense of complicity that fuses the distinct temporal and spatial moments of Iron Age Denmark and contemporary Northern Ireland:

opposing powers within a fractured society, rather than accepting its centrality and inevitability within society as a whole.

My poor scapegoat,

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 civilised outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

The possibility that the 'Little adulteress' who has been drowned in an Iron Age bog is a scapegoat is highlighted by the speaker naming her as such. It is also implicitly suggested through a description of her 'betraying sisters' 'cauled in tar'. A caul is the inner membrane enclosing a foetus before birth, when this is found on a baby's head after birth it is read as a preservative against drowning. Another definition is a dam for diverting river-water (*OED*). Both these meanings carry to the text a suggestion that the act of punishment is in fact an aspect of this community's semiotic form of self-preservation and self-purification. Drowning the scapegoat constitutes a protection of the community, symbolically

diverting communal antagonism onto an individual body. The drowning, previously aligned with the act of adultery, is now reconfigured to highlight its symbolic relationship to the community as a whole.

The shift from 'I who have stood dumb' to 'who would connive' encodes both the speaker and the sisters in the community's complicity. Indeed, in relation to the Iron Age context of the poem, both the sisters and the speaker are voyeuristic. In 'Punishment', the scapegoat's sexuality - or sexual activity, is bound up with her death.¹¹ Eroticism, implied in the speaker's description of the body ('the wind/ on her naked front' blowing 'her nipples/ to amber beads'), binds the speaker into a relationship, not with the girl herself, but with the act which posited her as scapegoat. This latency in the speaker's perception of the girl furthers his vacillation between complicity with the communal act of sacrifice, and complicity with the individual act of adultery.

Although the body in 'Punishment' is initially viewed as a surrogate victim, her status as such is problematised by the final line which introduces an element of vengeance. Girard proposes that a profound difference between sacrificial violence and other forms of violence is centred around questions of vengeance. As victims of sacrificial violence tend to be peripheral to the community who appropriate them, 'a crucial social link is missing, so they can be exposed to violence without fear of reprisal. Their death does not automatically entail an act of vengeance' (1977, 13). In relation to the Iron Age context, the death of the girl is represented as something that will preserve her community, and her act of adultery - which places her on the margins of society - justifies her position as scapegoat. However, the status of the girl's death is thrown into ambiguity by the confusion of words offered to read it. The title reads her death as a punishment for adultery, the concept of her as scapegoat suggests that she is a

¹¹ Similarly, Declan Kiberd argues that 'Punishment' 'is as much about pornography as about violence, because pornography is another zone where violence and culture overlap' (1995, 593).

ritual sacrifice, and the final line posits her as a signifier of reciprocal violence. In this way the text refuses to define or inscribe her body with any finality. This ambiguity is mirrored in relation to the girl's betraying sisters.

The act of communal self-preservation during Iron Age sacrifices ties into the contemporary reference to a victimisation of Catholic women who associated with members of the British Army in the seventies. These women were tarred and feathered and tied to street railings - a symbolic process of labelling and abjecting forces which threatened an imagined social unity within the Catholic community of Northern Ireland.¹² Thus the final two stanzas can be read as a palimpsest which doubly inscribes both the punished girl and the betraying sisters. The final ambiguity of the sisters' role and the crossing of temporalities furthers the ambivalence of naming in 'Punishment'. Like the shifting status of the drowned girl, the sisters' betrayal is marked firstly by their complicity in a communal scapegoating of the adulteress in the Iron Age sacrificial rite, and latterly by their seeming betrayal of Northern Ireland's Catholic community.

This ambiguity works to enforce a shifting status of the system of sacrifice itself. Girard describes a '*sacrificial crisis*' in communities as a collapse of sacrificial rites that consequently collapses a division between 'impure violence and purifying violence'. 'When this difference has been effaced', Girard asserts that 'purification is no longer possible and impure contagious, reciprocal violence spreads throughout the community' (1977, 49). Vengeance, he suggests, 'is an interminable, infinitely repetitive process' (1977, 14): '[o]nly violence can put an end to violence, and that is why violence is self-propagating. Everyone wants to strike the last blow, and reprisal can thus follow reprisal without any true conclusion ever being reached' (1977, 26). By imagining a confusion of terms,

¹² Paul Arthur's essay "Reading" Violence: Ireland' discusses this infamous event in November 1971 (in Apter 1997, 285). Similar punishments continue to occur sporadically in Northern Ireland.

Heaney points towards a confusion of violence in contemporary Northern Ireland. There, a framework of sacrificial violence has not disappeared; it has, however, embodied the sacrificial crises of which Girard speaks. Indeed, it could be said that the system of sacrificial violence has become synonymous with a crises of sacrificial rites. This is because the concept of purification is at work within a fractured community. In effect there are, within one physical space, two dominant sets of margins and two ideological centres.

In contemporary western societies the scapegoat, instead of being an individual, tends to be a marginal force which threatens the hegemonic status of the power in question. Or, in reverse, a marginal force sees a hegemonic power as the agent and propagator of its marginal status. The scapegoat now represents a will to power, it embodies whole ideologies rather than single individuals. In its evolved state, the impossibility of eradicating that which the scapegoat symbolises becomes foregrounded: for what violence now seeks to annihilate are systems of thought and traditions of worship. Thus, a 'structural bind' underpins Northern Ireland's society in which 'the fundamental interests of one community can be secured only at the expense of the fundamental interests of the others' (Ruane and Todd in Hughes 1991, 34). What can be read from one position as a sacrificial murder which signifies an attempt to purify the community, can be read from the other as an act of impure violence which must be reciprocated.

Each sectarian murder thus embodies the contraries of a sacrificial crisis. '[V]ictimage', as Allen Feldman notes, 'is the generic institution shared by all sides of the conflict as their common material denominator and as the operator of all political exchange' (1991, 263). Reciprocal sectarian murders, whilst engendering scapegoats, fail to fulfil the scapegoat's purpose. The symbol of the scapegoat is now pregnant with political connotations. Connotations which, as Foucault suggests, place modern man's 'existence as a living being in

question' (1998, 143). The symbol cannot fulfil its purpose: the signified grossly exceeds the signifier. Violence, failing to break out of its mimetic circle, continues to reproduce itself, reinscribing its efforts and its excesses on every victim. Victims of sectarian violence and victims of sacrifice thus share a symbolic status as embodiments of an attempted purification: an inscription which perpetually exceeds the body which represents it. The act of purification embedded in a process of victimage, never proceeds beyond its performance: a victim's body does not actually serve to eliminate the force which it is read as symbolically containing. So bodies become symbols of purification and symbolic representations of the excessive demands of such signification. They embody the impossibility of the will behind the act which has annihilated them - the impossibility of an autonomous and self-validating power. For all power brings with it peripheral and marginalised forces which in turn attempt to recuperate and re-instigate their own institutions as legitimate and centralised systems of thought.

A performative aspect of victimage is foregrounded by the speaker's own splitting:

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

By reading the outrage of both speaker and sisters as conniving, 'Punishment' suggests not only contradiction but the primarily performative aspect of this civility. The final stanza conflates contradictions of outrage and revenge within the speaker and sister and within their inscriptions of the victim's body. The speaker imagines perspectives of both victim and victimiser; it is his inability to resolve these opposites, and his consequent complicity in the violence enacted, which haunts him. This is true also of the sisters who are in fact inscribed as

both victims and victimisers. The conflict is not only the speaker's internal one, but is in fact a contradiction which is played out through multiple inscriptions of the victim's body.

Intersecting points of view in the bog people poems are significant because they are displayed and inscribed upon single bodies which foregrounds the multiplicity of signification involved in violence and victimage. As Katherine Verdery argues:

[a] body's symbolic effectiveness does not depend on its standing for one particular thing [...] for among the most important properties of bodies, especially dead ones, is their ambiguity, multivocality, or polysemy. Remains are concrete, yet protean; they do not have a single meaning but are open to many different readings [...] Yet because they have a single name and a single body, they present the illusion of having *only one* significance [...] what gives a dead body symbolic effectiveness in politics is precisely its ambiguity, its capacity to evoke a variety of understandings (1999, 28-29).

Because the victim's body remains within a context of multiple inscriptions there is no resolution in 'Punishment'.¹³ Essentially it is not the 'brain's exposed/ and darkened combs' which the speaker's 'artful' voyeurism presents, but an ambivalent status of the girl's body as it is politically inscribed and encoded within his mind. An emphasis on contradiction and on communal complicity

¹³ Seamus Deane argues that Heaney's 'guilt is that of the victim, not of the victimizer', which is 'characteristic of his Northern Irish Catholic community' (1985, 175). Longley suggests that the conflict of the final stanza curtails the poem: 'can the poet run with the hare [...] and hunt with the hounds?' 'perhaps' she proposes, 'the problem is one of artistic, not political, fence-sitting' (1986, 154). Both these readings effectively void the bog people poems of their fundamental force. The speakers imagine perspectives of both victims and victimisers. It is their inability to resolve these opposites, and thus their complicity in the violence enacted, which haunts them. Furthermore these conflicting perspectives are not only internal to the speakers but are in fact contradictions that are played out through the multiple inscriptions of victims' bodies.

extends beyond the text itself to engulf the reader in a vacillation between intimate empathy with the victim ('[Little adulteress', 'My poor scapegoat'), and comprehension of the 'exact/ and tribal, intimate revenge'. The vacillation between oppositions of pity for the victim and empathy with the agent of violence is encoded within the single body of the adulteress. It is thus the body as signifier, rather than as a physical entity, that heralds a contradiction which is produced and perpetuated in an infinitely circular form, not by victims of violence, but by the forces which signify violence as politically and communally encoded. Infused with a history of power and repression, the victim's body thus becomes not only the symbol of one moment of violence but the symbolic reasoning for a continuation of violent agency.

The idea of victims' bodies encoding multiple significations is developed in the latter half of 'The Grauballe Man'. After a detailed description, the speaker questions his ability to classify the man:

Who will say 'corpse'
to his vivid cast?
Who will say 'body'
to his opaque repose?

These questions, which remain unanswered, point to the man as an archaeological artefact, as does the penultimate image 'beauty and atrocity'. However, the poem's syntax suggests that the connotations of 'beauty and atrocity' are actually related to both the image which is carried on the man's shield and to,

the actual weight
of each hooded victim,
slashed and dumped.

By conflating these connotations 'The Grauballe Man' engages with a relationship between violence and aestheticisation.

The text initially constructs the bogman as an object; his body is imagined metaphorically and collated with nature. The bogman is imagined as a fluid entity:

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

the black river of himself.

As in 'Bog Queen', water imagery is used to suggest a gradual slippage between man and bog which is subsequently extended to man and nature ('The grain of his wrists/ is like bog oak' and 'the ball of his heel/like a basalt egg'). That he 'seems to weep/ the black river of himself' posits the man as agent of this action, thus suggesting that he has originated himself (moving from fluid to substance).¹⁴ These images disintegrate in the fifth stanza as the text focuses on evidence of victimage:

The head lifts,
the chin is a visor
raised above the vent
of his slashed throat

¹⁴ Thomas Docherty, pointing to the 'peculiar future anterior tense' which Heaney employs, and arguing that images such as the basalt egg imply the man is pregnant, reads 'The Grauballe Man' as 'giving birth to himself from the female bog in which there lies a "Bog Queen"'. He suggests that 'it follows that the poetry is in a sense also giving birth to itself, originating itself or authorizing itself in this peculiar act' (1996a, 123).

Describing the chin as a visor directly contrasts with the preceding metaphors. Where previous metaphorical connotations reinforced an integration of the body with nature, this image points towards social warfare. Through this metaphorical shift, the man's body is split, positing the space of atrocity as a disruption and impingement of nature by society. The structure of contradiction which is explicated with 'hung in the scales/ with beauty and atrocity' is therefore embedded implicitly throughout the text.

The focus of 'The Grauballe Man' does not stray from the body as signifier. For the speaker, the bogman's preserved body is representative not of his historical context but of 'each hooded victim,/ slashed and dumped'. The speaker thus encodes the preserved body of this man with ideas of victimage. The text circumnavigates around a tension between two opposing senses of what the bogman signifies. The viewer imagines the bogman 'hung in the scales/ with beauty and atrocity'. What is ultimately implied through this dialectic is that the victim's body is bifurcated by multiple and contradictory inscriptions. Heaney problematises violence by questioning the identification of the symbolic space of the victim (the Grauballe man's body), and by positing that representation within a dialectic tension which is inscribed by transforming bodies from sensory systems to spectacles. Bodies of violence are encoded from the points of view of viewers. They are thereby inscribed with political overtones that effectively allow one signifier to signify opposite meanings to the larger body of those violators and those violated.

The final lines can therefore be read as self-referential. The use of 'with' in the closing stanzas works to attribute 'beauty' and 'atrocity' both to 'the Dying Gaul' and to 'the actual weight of each hooded victim':

hung in the scales
with beauty and atrocity:

with the Dying Gaul
too strictly compassed

on his shield,
with the actual weight
of each hooded victim,
slashed and dumped.

As Eugene O'Brien points out, the Dying Gaul is 'a sculpture from the third century B.C. depicting a dying Celtic warrior, matted hair, lying on his shield, wounded, and awaiting death, now found in the Capitoline museum in Rome' (2002, 37). By incorporating an allusion to a sculpture, the poem suggests that *images* of warring and violent death may embody beauty but *the reality* of such violence is manifestly devastating. By preceding the 'weight/ of each hooded victim' with the word 'actual', the speaker tries to emphasise a corporeality of violence. However, the effort to convey and appreciate this is undermined through the very medium of representation; for the reader (and indeed the speaker) this 'actual weight' is only realised in words and is thus imagined. Once establishing a differentiation between reality and image, the text folds in on itself, conflating both image and reality into an imagined and textual realm.

Acts of violence are not in themselves aesthetic; for the individual victim, violence is pain. However, as E. Valentine Daniel proposes:

Pain is highly localized. Its outermost limit is the boundary of the victim's body. Its inner limit can be as small as a point in one's foot where a nail is being pounded on. And no one pain is like any other (in Csordas 1994, 233).

Pain, being a localised experience, signifies actual pain only to the individual victim. Once pain and violence are shared beyond the limits of the body, they

become imagined and consequently aestheticised by communal values and communal significations.

It is not only the speaker or the poem that aestheticises violence, therefore. To view violence is to imagine it, the experience of 'actual' victimage being located solely within the victim's body. And this body is itself reduced to an inscription of a larger social body authorising its own processes of legitimation through a symbolic performance of power that assumes a right to violate and reconfigure such bodies. Any representation of violence consequently entails its aestheticisation. The speaker is trapped in a circularity which constantly repositions the Grauballe man as an image 'perfected in [his] memory'. His desire to differentiate images from actions is inevitably impotent because, as the text itself affirms, all is re-subsumed into his mind. The speaker therefore becomes complicit in an inevitable aestheticisation of violence. The victims are reified as their bodies are encoded with multiple and contradictory inscriptions - the attempt to address a corporeality of violence simply mimics the process of inscription which transmogrifies 'each hooded victim' into a palimpsest of the image of 'the Dying Gaul/ too strictly compassed'. Heaney foregrounds aesthetics in the bog people poems because the experience of violence for society as a whole is aesthetic. Distanced from and disinterested in individual experiences of victimage, it becomes each viewer's responsibility to realise their everyday complicity in the continuation of aestheticising and thus legitimating atrocity.

'Kinship' (1975a, 33), a series of six poems, is the final bog poem in *North*. A mediation between the speaker and the bog he describes is significant throughout the sequence; this is emphasised in the opening stanzas:

Kinned by hieroglyphic
peat on a spreadfield

to the strangled victim,
the love-nest in the bracken,

I step through origins ('I').

Grammatically, the 'hieroglyphic/ peat' is posited as the agent of a relationship between the speaker and 'the strangled victim'. This imagery has interesting connotations: describing peat as hieroglyphic actually serves to blur the bog's significance. The term suggests not only a direct or figural representation of words by objects, but also an enigmatic symbol - a sign which holds a hidden meaning (*OED*). 'Kinship' does not clarify this ambiguity of the bog's significance. Indeed, the speaker's relationship with it is ambivalent. At times he seems to be observing the bog and imaginatively invoking an Iron Age past: for instance, 'III' ends 'I stand at the edge of centuries/ facing a goddess'. And at others he is part of that time's sacrificial rites: for instance, in 'V' he 'deified the man/ who rode there,/ god of the waggon'. Even in this section, a move between past ('I was his privileged/ attendant') and present tenses ('Watch our progress/ [...] / when he speaks to me') adds to a general feeling of ambiguity. The bog is inevitably folded back into his mind:

Ground that will strip
its dark side,
nesting ground,
outback of my mind ('II').

I grew out of all this
like a weeping willow
inclined to
the appetites of gravity ('IV').

Such phrases make it impossible to separate the bog as a physical entity from it as imagined in the speaker's mind. Images of feeding in 'II' ('digestion of mollusc', 'Insatiable bride./ Sword-swallower') emphasise the bog as collecting and digesting nature and society. This is subtly repeated and directly related to the speaker in 'IV' in the phrase 'appetites of gravity'.¹⁵

Describing peat as hieroglyphic emphasises bogs as ambivalent signifiers in Heaney's poetry. Their significance is not simply that the objects found in them are emblematic of preserved histories, but also that these histories are subject to present interpretation and exploration. Bogs are, then, appropriated by Heaney as direct representations and as figural ones, embodying the ambivalence 'hieroglyphic' holds.¹⁶ The bog bodies in particular serve to

¹⁵ Poems such as 'Bann Clay' (1969, 40) and 'Bogland' (1969, 41) suggest that the Irish bogs hold within them a deep-rooted identification for their speakers ('This smooth weight. I labour/ Towards it still. It holds and gluts.' ['Bann Clay']). However, it is an identification that eludes any final definition as it denies an original position ('The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage./ The wet centre is bottomless' ['Bogland']). I have read 'Bann Clay' as a lyrical meditation which does not fully evoke the significance of the bog as a space of preservation for the speaker (see p76-77): this latency erupts within the bog people poems. The uncanny significance of the truncation of past and present violence which haunts these body poems pushes into the space of this latency.

¹⁶ Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* charts a decline of an elevated antique style of representing history and a development of a Judaeo-Christian tradition of writing and historiography - the *Figura*. Antique historiography, Auerbach suggests, negates economic conditions of the populace by representing history through the eyes of ruling classes. On the other hand, because of the centrality of Christ as an embodiment of everydayness, the Judaeo-Christian tradition retrieves the populace from their marginal position and centralises their significance. However, *Mimesis* argues that figural interpretation is already at work in Judaeo-Christian scriptures (1953, 48), and that the development of the *Figura* beyond these has, paradoxically, served to eradicate the significance of everyday experience in a linear temporality by foregrounding an historical structure of universality (1953, 15). Figural representation, he explains,

establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfils the first. The two poles of a figure are separated in time, but both, being real events or persons, are within temporality. They are both contained in the flowing stream which is historical life, and only the comprehension, the *intellectus spiritualis*, of their interdependence is a spiritual act (1953, 73).

This structure, because of its conflation of a divine and a secular teleology, marginalises experiences which do not fit into such an 'omni-temporal' intrahistorical chain of events (1953, 74). Auerbach argues that this remains so until the modern era (with writers like Rabelais and Shakespeare) in which the scope of representation becomes unlimited and polyphonic, rather than being reduced to the strictures of providential teleology. Whilst I am suggesting that Heaney uses figural images and an anamnestic historical structure, he does so in ways which constantly undercut the universality of the Judaeo-Christian tradition by, for instance,

illustrate this: they are figural inscriptions of a history of violence, but they are also the physical evidence of violence. Direct and figural inscriptions are inescapably bound into these exhumed bodies. This multiplicity makes them powerfully evocative. Understood in this way, the established critique of *North* becomes paradoxical and problematic. Lloyd, for instance, argues that Heaney's use of the bog poems as a metaphor for Ulster works, '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' (1993, 27).¹⁷ By proposing that these bodies are symbolic, Lloyd reads them as figural significations. Whilst this recognises part of their effect, it overlooks the one structure of violence which actually becomes Heaney's vehicle for critiquing Northern Ireland's Troubles - the complacency and complicity of viewers of violence. By overlooking the bog bodies as damaged and violated corpses, Lloyd himself allows violence to be aesthetically objectified. Because, even although these bodies are from a disparate age from now, they were still once human beings suffering physical pain and death. Heaney's bog poems cannot be dismissed or depoliticised because they evoke directly the bodies of violence. To dismiss their figural importance is, then, to deny voices that enunciate a need to address physical suffering today, and to dismiss them as direct representations denies their status as objects of history and as human beings who died violently.

With the exception of 'Punishment', a relationship between bog bodies and sacrificial rites is not explicated. In 'Kinship' however, images of sacrificial acts proliferate its latter half. In *The Bog People*, Glob argues that the bog bodies

foregrounding the unreliable nature of the text as a form of representation, and, as in 'Kinship', by juxtaposing a figural and a physical signification for one image.

¹⁷ Once more, however, Lloyd's assumptions are formulated around Heaney's prose. He firstly quotes Heaney on P.V. Glob and Irish political martyrdom in his essay 'Feeling into Words' (from *Preoccupations*) in which he talks about an 'archetypal pattern' of sacrifice (1980, 57) and interprets the poems via Heaney's suggestions (Lloyd 1993, 27).

were probably human sacrifices to Nerthus, Mother Earth, sacrificed during their community's spring rites. He quotes from *Germania*, 'a work contemporary with Denmark's Early Iron Age' (Glob 1969,35) by the Roman historian Tacitus, to qualify his description:

In an island of the ocean is a holy grove, and in it a consecrated chariot, covered in robes. A single priest is permitted to touch it: he interprets the presence of the goddess in her shrine and follows with deep reverence as she rides away drawn by cows: then come days of rejoicing and all places keep holiday [...] They make no war, take no arms; every weapon is put away: peace and quiet are then, and then alone, known and loved, until the same priest returns the goddess to her temple, when she has had her fill of the society of mortals. After this the chariot and the robes, and if you will believe it, the goddess herself, are washed in a sequestered lake: slaves are the ministrants and are straightaway swallowed by that same lake. Hence a mysterious terror and an ignorance full of piety as to what that may be which men only behold to die (1969, 159-162).

The last poem of 'Kinship' undoubtedly alludes to this quotation:

And you, Tacitus,
observe how I make my grove
on an old crannog
piled by the fearful dead:

a desolate peace.
Our mother ground
is sour with the blood
of her faithful,

they lie gargling
in her sacred heart
as the legions stare
from the ramparts.

Come back to this
'island of the ocean'
where nothing will suffice.
Read the inhumed faces

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

and shave the heads
of the notorious
how the goddess swallows
our love and terror.

The first stanza appropriates Tacitus's image of a sequestered lake and transforms that space from one embodying the goddess to one constructed by 'the fearful dead'. The holy grove is thus changed from a space embodying peace and promise, signified by the goddess with her chariot and robes, to one that points towards the imminent deaths of men who build this crannog. By prefiguring these deaths at the moment they construct the sacrificial offering, the text foregrounds corporeality. An inversion thus takes place in which the physical objects, which are sequestered in Tacitus's text, are replaced by the human reality of sacrifice. Instead of adorning the holy grove with riches which demonstrate a present promise of the future, Heaney presents a grove which is physically structured by the reality of past and present rites - death. This

inversion critiques processes of ritual and sacrifice. The goddess and her chariot and robes signify potential peace, representing powers which will in the future restore not only spring but communal safety.¹⁸ However, in order to realise this potential, they adopt secondary signifiers - sacrificed bodies. These bodies act as an immediate scapegoat for communal troubles and are perceived as a realisation of the mystical powers of consecrated signifiers. By replacing these mystical signifiers with the sacrificed bodies themselves, Heaney displays the performative aspect of such rites.

If the Iron Age sacrifices were not only seasonal rituals but also rituals to ensure that the peace brought about by the goddess's presence would, in the future, prevail, then an irruption of exhumed bodies into our present serves to highlight the failure of these rites. By poetically connecting Iron Age bodies to contemporary victims of violence, Heaney adopts a framework of Christian prefiguration.¹⁹ However, the initial promise of the Iron Age bodies is not fulfilled by their counterpart in the present, because the promise to be fulfilled is not a reiteration of violence but an end to it. Instead of enacting a promise of a future fulfilment, Heaney's prefiguration serves to undo that promise, reconfiguring

¹⁸ Michael Parker argues that,

[t]he fatal attraction of Nerthus lives on in such figures from the Nationalist pantheon as Kathleen ni Houlihan, the Shan Van Vocht, and Mother Ireland. Promising a rich harvest in return for the sacrifice of their lives, she still stirs the Irish young to words and murder (1993, 106).

If Parker's correlation is accepted, then Heaney's text ultimately foregrounds the dangerous reality of such stirrings. However, Heaney's textual allusion to 'her sacred heart' suggests that Nerthus prefigures the Virgin Mary as a symbol for humanity, thus extending the text's relevance beyond (Northern) Ireland. If Edna Longley's structure is adopted, which argues that Kathleen is linked to Mary through the '[t]wo passive images' of 'the vulnerable virgin and the mourning mother' (1994, 189), then images like Heaney's are reintverted as strictly nationalist. In 'From Cathleen to Anorexia' Longley presents an argument against sectarian exclusionist politics of Northern Irish nationalism. However, by correlating a Catholic figure (Mary) with a nationalist one (Kathleen), Longley's rhetorical twist further embeds nationalist sentiment in Catholic iconography.

¹⁹ William T. Cavanaugh, in *Torture and Eucharist*, discusses the anamnestic function of the Eucharist and relates it to Auerbach's observation of the prefiguring of Christ's death in Isaac's sacrifice (1998, 222-223). Cavanaugh argues that the secular imagination of time is 'overcome in the Eucharist' (1998, 227) because it relocates those taking communion into a sense of providential time (1998, 228). Whilst adopting and sustaining the conflated histories at work in the Eucharist and in figural representations, Heaney's bog poems can be read as subverting the very praxis on which this presentness of the past is grounded.

both past and present into an arbitrary void of secular time. The bog bodies are trapped in the present because they represent a past which is unfulfilled. Instead of escaping a secular world through the promise of providential time, these bodies become physical embodiments of linear time's cause and effect. In 'Station Island' 'IX', when the voice and body of a Long Kesh hunger striker is rendered, the poem's speaker suggests that this man should have been buried in a bog. This allusion to the bogs reiterates prefiguration established in *North*. That 'Station Island' alludes to and reflects Dante's *Purgatorio* further suggests the reciprocating nature of the Troubles. Prefiguring contemporary violence with these bodies thus subverts the Christian process of future redemption because it entraps both past and present in a future which continually replays the sacrificial crises of reciprocal and reciprocating violence.

Processes of sacrifice are performative because one of their primary purposes is to display bodies encoded by communal signification (their individuality being subsumed by this process). They are, therefore, offerings and demonstrations of a potentially altered and bettered future for the community. Feldman argues that this structure of signification occurs in the Troubles:

[i]n Northern Ireland the body is not only the primary political instrument through which social transformation is effected but is also the primary site for visualizing the collective passage into historical alterity [...] the practice of political violence entails the production, exchange, and ideological consumption of bodies (1991, 9).

As the bog body poems demonstrate the signification of bodies in Northern Ireland is bifurcated: each side reading bodies from opposite poles. The function of the scapegoat is now arbitrary and violence has shifted from engendering a potential peace to perpetuating reciprocal acts of violence. Thus peace is 'desolate'; this is the dystopian vision of the bog body poems brought

to its conclusion.²⁰ Violence in contemporary Northern Ireland is violence governed by a sacrificial crises; with no escape from the reciprocal nature of it, it can only be brought to an end through total annihilation.

The bog people poems can thus be read as foregrounding a problematical relationship between images of violence and violence itself, a relationship which binds and intersects the two. For it is not the atrocity of violence but the aesthetic of violence (the codification of images of violence) which perpetuates it as a political possibility. Heaney's dystopian vision of 'a desolate peace' is not presented as an inevitability. Like each bog people poem, the reader through the act of viewing becomes complicit in communal acts of violence. 'Kinship' points to this - 'the legions stare/ from the ramparts', 'we slaughter/ for the common good' - as do 'Punishment' and 'The Grauballe Man'. Without this act of complicity, the aesthetic of violence would collapse. How images of violence are received and transmitted is decisive - when violence is repeatedly read as embodying a social significance the individual act of inflicting pain upon another body is forgotten.

By addressing violence in a set of poems which foreground their aestheticism, by explicitly distancing the images and bodies rendered (Iron age preservations) to the bodies implicitly referred to (from contemporary Northern Ireland), Heaney highlights the aesthetic nature of political representation. The bodies of the victims of sectarian violence, in national terms, represent not individuals but aspects of the performative process of legitimation and domination. In short, through inscriptions of violence and politics, these bodies lose their individuality and are subsumed within images of power: images which

²⁰ Twenty years after the publication of *North*, in his Nobel Lecture 'Crediting Poetry' the desolate peace Heaney imagined in 'Kinship' is still in sharp relief:

It is difficult at times to repress the thought that history is about as instructive as an abattoir; that Tacitus was right and that peace is merely the desolation left behind after the decisive operations of merciless power (1998, 456).

are primarily aesthetic, relating to an ideological struggle which is staged as the spectacle and display of power.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault reminds us that power is a mode of production:

[w]e must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production (1991, 194).

In *The Will to Knowledge* he suggests that death escapes power: 'it is over life, throughout its unfolding, that power establishes its domination; death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it, death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most "private"' (1998, 138). The bog people poems can be read as reflecting a production of power through representations of bodies which are inscribed by the speakers of each poem as signifiers of a political power struggle. Foucault argues that we escape the domination of power through death. These poems problematise this: the individual victim through his death may escape the domain of power, but the physical body remains as a public possession, a discourse-object. The bodies of victims of violence are thus doubly bifurcated: once between opposing violent factions, and once between their selves and their bodies. In the end they are denied the 'private' freedom of death. If Heaney aestheticises the victims of violence he does so because their bodies are, within the political struggle for which they have been sacrificed, aesthetic images which display the processes, production and contradictions of the will to power.

7. Troubled Bodies

In *Looking Awry* Slavoj Žižek discusses the return of the living dead phenomenon as a 'fundamental fantasy of contemporary mass culture' (1991, 22). Heaney's bog body poems and his elegies arguably reflect instances of this; the dead rendered in these texts are 'a sign of a disturbance in the symbolic rite, in the process of symbolization [returning] as collectors of some unpaid symbolic debt' (1991, 23). Whilst Žižek alludes specifically to ghosts and zombies in horror fiction and film, he also describes the holocaust and the gulag as being exemplary cases of this in the twentieth century, thereby linking his discussion to material history. 'The shadows of their victims will continue to chase us as "living dead"', he proposes, 'until we give them a decent burial, until we integrate the trauma of their death into our historical memory' (1991, 23). Within the specificity of Ireland and, in the context of the latter part of the twentieth century, Northern Ireland in particular, the deaths caused by sectarian and political struggle constitute such shadows. Heaney's elegies revisit the dead placing them specifically within their geographical and temporal context. These texts continually struggle with a tension between a desire to integrate 'the trauma of their death' into Northern Ireland's memory, and broader issues of representation, politics and spirituality which communities face when addressing victims of sectarian violence. Heaney's elegies do not point to an all embracing paradisiacal commonality, but to the political consumption of individual deaths into a structure which fractures rather than heals Northern Ireland's society. It is not the ultimate word of God but the political discourses structuring society that subsume the significance of bodies into words.

In 'Keeping Going' (1996, 10) the impact of sectarian killing is explored through associative memory. The poem is concerned with one murder and its impact upon the consciousness of one individual, emphasising how 'the trauma of [this] death' has overshadowed his consciousness. Split into six parts, each section

of 'Keeping Going' is connected through an association of objects, thus the whitewash brush used in the first section to imitate a sporran becomes a catalyst for the second memory. When the fifth part draws on an image of gruel from a preceding section, it returns to a sense of physical reality momentarily suspended by a focus on the speaker's experiences of childhood dread:

Grey matter like gruel flecked with blood
 In spatters on the whitewash. A clean spot
 Where his head had been, other stains subsumed
 In the parched wall he leant his back against
 That morning like any other morning,
 Part-time reservist, toting his lunch-box.
 A car came slow down Castle Street, made the halt,
 Crossed the Diamond, slowed again and stopped
 Level with him, although it was not his lift.
 And then he saw an ordinary face
 For what it was and a gun in his own face.
 His right leg was hooked back, his sole and heel
 Against the wall, his right knee propped up steady,
 So he never moved, just pushed with all his might
 Against himself, then fell past the tarred strip,
 Feeding the gutter with his copious blood.

Such a meticulous description of a man's murder posits the reader into a position of personal observer. Here Heaney attempts to describe this event accurately, and poetically, without allowing a complacency of spectatorship (condemned in poems like 'The Mud Vision' and 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing'). This death is, however, still aesthetically framed within the poem, and indeed the dying man is framed by the whitewashed wall. Yet this framing effect feeds back into the text - '[he] fell past the tarred strip' echoes and fulfils the closing lines of part two:

Our shadows

Moved on the wall and a tar border glittered
 The full length of the house, a black divide
 Like a freshly-opened, pungent, reeking trench.

Thus the use of associative memory works in reverse, 'tear[ing] through the fabric of the opening sections of the poem' (Murphy 2000, 97) by filling the other memories with the presence of this one moment. Just as in the poem itself, the 'clean spot' differentiates the absence of this man from the resonance of his murder. The subsumption of the 'spatters' of his blood and brain with 'other stains' on the wall, forms a metonym for the poem's overriding implication. For the speaker, this sectarian murder is not a political statement, it is an image which recurs in his consciousness, spilling over into and tainting his memory.

This sense of permanent and irresolvable grief can be traced in many poems about Northern Ireland's Troubles. Gerald Dawe's 'Count' is a poignant example. It opens 'My only problem is your death', and recounts the speaker's memory of hearing his friend's name, age and a description of his death one morning on the radio. The poem ends with an emphasis on a recurring trauma in the speaker's mind:

Twenty years,
 six bullets, nine in the morning.
 I toy like a child with these numbers (in Ormsby 1992, 111).

Heaney has written many elegiac poems, some of which concern victims of the Troubles. *Field Work* has the most pertinent examples of elegies. Talking about 'The Strand at Lough Beg' (1979, 17), 'A Postcard from North Antrim' (1979, 19) and 'Casualty' (1979,21), Michael Parker argues that these:

demonstrate Heaney's refusal to allow the bullet and the bomb to have the final word. The appalling, unnatural circumstances in which these deaths occurred are powerfully recorded [...] yet, through the intercession of memory, Art and Nature, Heaney manages to assuage his sense of loss, and to strike sharp, clear notes in celebration (1993, 159).

As Parker asserts, the personal emphasis of these poems reminds readers of what lies behind the politics of sectarianism. However, to foreground an emphasis on celebration undermines the problematical political context from which this poetry is born.¹ Heaney's elegies of sectarian murders blend religious connotations with a politicised context which refutes a sacred structure of death and resurrection. Christianity's vision of its heavenly future in which there is an ultimate conflation of word and body and, in turn, a conflation of all bodies with the word and body of Christ, is continually inscribed and replayed in the Eucharist's recollection of Christ's resurrection and ascension to heaven. This promise is, time and again, denied in Heaney's elegiac poems, as speakers and the dead reverberate in a profane and troubled world.

The first two elegies in *Field Work*, 'The Strand at Lough Beg' and 'A Postcard from North Antrim' do not centralise the sectarian context of the deaths they record. However, the dramatic effect these poems accrue when they do focus on this context cannot be disqualified:

What blazed ahead of you? A faked road block?
The red lamp swung, the sudden brakes and stalling
Engine, voices, heads hooded and the cold-nosed gun? ('The Strand
at Lough Beg').

¹ Parker's argument does hold sway, however, in relation to 'The Strand at Lough Beg' which reduces murder to the realms of intertextual aesthetics.

You were the clown
 Social worker of the town
 Until your candid forehead stopped
 A pointblank teatime bullet ('A Postcard from North Antrim').

More emphatically, 'Casualty' (1979, 21) engages with Northern Ireland's Troubles. Its stress on victimage problematises the usual binary understanding of the Troubles (Protestant-Catholic, loyalist-republican, unionist-nationalist). The principle death elegised is a Catholic, who was killed in a pub that was bombed during a curfew the IRA imposed on the Catholic community following Bloody Sunday. This incident is framed by descriptions of a communal mourning for those killed on Bloody Sunday:²

He was blown to bits
 Out drinking in a 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.

By juxtaposing images of the Derrymen's funerals and intimate memories of the speaker's friend the poem sustains an unresolvable tension.³ The speaker

² David Trotter notes that 'Casualty' adopts the same verse form as Yeats's 'Easter 1916', and proposes that it thereby foregrounds republican sentiment; however, by initiating a celebration of their cause, 'Heaney measures the impact of "terrible beauty" on already purposeful and committed lives: an issue which both the partisan and the indifferent would be unwise to neglect' (1984, 195).

³ Similarly, 'The Linen Workers', the final poem in Michael Longley's elegy sequence 'Wreaths' (1986, 148) connects Christ's teeth with the speaker's father's false teeth and, correlating this with the mundanity of everyday objects and articles, bridges the gap between a personal experience of death and the murder of ten linen workers:

includes himself as a mourner of Bloody Sunday's victims, and sets this against his friend's action. Yet his participation in communal mourning does not undo, or override, his personal experience of grief:

Dawn-sniffing revenant,
 Plodder through midnight rain,
 Question me again.

In this way Heaney refuses to project an easy sense of condemnation on his friend's breach of the curfew. This leaves the scene enmeshed in ideological confusion, and the issue of blame an open question:

How culpable was he
 That last night when he broke
 Our tribe's complicity?

In 'The Epistemology of Nationalism' Eugene O'Brien, discussing the use of communal personal pronouns, makes an important point about nationalism and belonging which is echoed in 'Casualty':

[b]y definition, it excludes from this optative future those who are not 'us', those who are incapable of speaking the language of this nationalist credo, those who are somehow lesser Irish people.

When they massacred the ten linen workers
 There fell on the road beside them spectacles,
 Wallets, small change, and a set of dentures:
 Blood, food particles, the bread, the wine.

Before I can bury my father once again
 I must polish the spectacles, balance them
 Upon his nose, fill his pockets with money
 And into his dead mouth slip the set of teeth.

Through this juxtaposition, Longley highlights the individual tragedies beyond the linen workers' massacre - behind this public event lies personal grief.

Here, the huge dangers of aesthetic nationalism become clear. The *heimlich* organic community contains within it the *unheimlich* germ of expulsion and persecution (in Briggs *et al.* 1998, 278).

'Casualty' measures the ideal of a national community with the *unheimlich* persecution of one of its members. As Parker notes, the language which surrounds the Bloody Sunday victims and the community which mourns them encodes them with Christ's purity; the image of the 'swaddling band':

is used to describe how the infant Christ is dressed as he lies in the manger. Heaney employs the allusion to stress that the thirteen victims of Bloody Sunday were innocent of any crime, and to remind us how collective horror at their murder had the effect of strengthening the bonds within the Catholic community (1993, 163).⁴

This communality is undermined by repercussions of fratricide on the purity of 'our tribe', thus framing the funerals of Bloody Sunday's victims within reciprocating violent activity. The germ of expulsion and persecution comes from within the community; at this moment, rather than being a persecuted group, they begin to police and persecute their own for failing to conform to (and thus confirm) their image of communal solidarity. The fact that Heaney never articulates how or by whom exactly '[h]e was blown to bits' blurs the boundaries between the community as a whole and the marginal forces of

⁴ William T. Cavanaugh's discussion of the graves of early Christian martyrs has interesting connotations which extend the religious elements Parker highlights in 'Casualty':

the graves of the martyrs shattered the barrier between public and private [...] the martyrs tomb was public property, accessible to the whole community, and death was brought from the periphery of communal life to its center. The dead bodies of the martyrs took on great importance because of their participation in the strange Christian dramatics of a crucified God whose followers are most alive when they die for him (1998, 67).

violence within it.⁵ The latent condemnation of the speaker's friend's murder is thus extended beyond the individuals directly responsible.

This condemnation highlights one problem raised by Heaney in relation to the Troubles: the extent to which a person can be involved with communal mourning (for people, nation, et cetera) without becoming - by extension - complicit within society's reciprocal forces of violence. James Simmons's 'Lament for a Dead Policemen' (in Ormsby 1992, 98) suggests a major problem for Northern Ireland is that a culture of violence has become commonplace:

'The distinctive feature
of Irish life, politically' -
he could spell it out rightly -
'isn't just bigotry, it's the easy
toleration of violence by any side,
moral confusion, tearful cruelty,
acceptance of crime becoming collusion'.

It is to this problematic that 'Casualty', without resolution, points. Significantly, this discomfort remains framed within a narrative of state violence, thus reiterating the complex structure of suffering at work within Northern Ireland:

The fact the state bullets inflict death and injury in just the same way as terrorist bullets does pose ideological problems for the dominant perspective. The weight of the argument against terrorism is that it causes suffering. If it can be shown that the state and its agents cause suffering there is some explaining to do (Elliott, Murdock & Schlesinger in Rolston & Miller 1996, 357).

⁵ Corcoran (1986, 137), Vendler (1999, 64-65) and O'Brien (2002, 53) amongst others name the man and place him in context. The fact that this is not explicitly mentioned in the text allows for the ambiguity I have suggested.

Whilst 'Casualty' eulogises one man in particular, and reflects upon a complex interface within the Catholic community between nationalism and republicanism, it places this in dialogue with state violence. The unheimlich death of the speaker's friend is juxtaposed with a more haunting image of 'Coffin after coffin' floating from the door of the cathedral for 'The common funeral' of Bloody Sunday's victims. If 'Casualty' problematises IRA bombings, it more forcefully sits in opposition to a state which opens fire on a crowd of civilians marching for human rights.

'Triptych' (1979, 12) inverts the juxtaposition of state and counterstate power presented in 'Casualty' by opening with a counterstate assassination and closing with an attempted reinforcement of state authority in the wake of Bloody Sunday. However, the text's political statement works in a similar way to 'Casualty', problematising a supposed opposition between terrorism and the state. 'Triptych', as its title suggests, is a series of three thematically related poems - '*After a Killing*', '*Sibyl*' and '*At the Water's Edge*'. '*After a Killing*' and '*At the Water's Edge*' adopt Heaney's anamnestic style, shifting between personal and communal moments in the speaker's consciousness, and '*Sibyl*' prophecies a dystopian future.

'*After a Killing*', written in the aftermath of the murder of the British Ambassador to Ireland, Christopher Ewart-Biggs in July 1976 (Corcoran 1986, 132), opens with an image of two snipers awaiting their target:

There they were, as if our memory hatched them,
As if the unquiet founders walked again:
Two young men with rifles on the hill,
Profane and bracing as their instruments.

The first two stanzas observe the men and use communal pronouns which imply a collective responsibility for their action. This is emphasised by framing the men within a simile of communal memory. The haunting image in the second stanza, 'Who dreamt that we might dwell among ourselves' forces a disjunction between 'we' and 'ourselves', which ironises and fractures ideals of a heimlich community pointed at through Heaney's use of communal pronouns. The use of 'dwell' furthers this disjunction as it suggests the heimlich quality of a house or habitation, whilst pointing to dwell's negative connotations of hindersome delusion. Within this verb, Eugene O'Brien's suggestion is played out, and the presence of 'the *unheimlich* germ of persecution' is imagined to be contained within the '*heimlich* organic community' (in Briggs *et al.* 1998, 278).

Rather than distancing the men's action from the community they arguably represent, Heaney posits them as a metonymic and, in contradistinction, parasitical element of that community. Thus the very notion of the communal pronoun is problematised in '*After a Killing*' by fracturing a possibility of holism. Whilst the first stanza suggests that the community voiced is that of Northern Irish nationalists, the second stanza punctures this surety. 'Who dreamt that we would dwell among ourselves' remains ambivalent and ambiguous, but it serves two significant purposes. Firstly, it imagines a division between republican violence and a nationalist community at the same time as conflating the two.⁶

⁶ Marianne Elliott's *The Catholics of Ulster*, makes interesting remarks about the IRA that relate to this. Charting the collapse of the IRA campaign of 1956-62, she quotes their announcement terminating their campaign of resistance to British occupation. Noting that it had been condemned throughout by the nationalist press, she argues that it 'failed largely through lack of Catholic support' (2000, 406). 1969 saw exacerbated outbreaks of rioting and state violence and, Elliott suggests, 'as slogans "IRA - I ran away"' appeared 'the IRA was called back into existence as the traditional defender of the Catholic ghettos' (2000, 419). Importantly, Elliott differentiates Catholic nationalists and republicans, and suggests that Catholic support for the IRA is not necessarily widespread and changes significantly over different periods (2000, 443-445). However, what this reinforces is a relationship between the general public and state and counterstate violence. Northern Ireland's anti-internment civil rights marches (most notoriously that of 30 January 1972, Bloody Sunday) are exemplary reminders of an opposition to state violence, and are a significant instance of civil disobedience to state oppression. That these marches were declared illegal, that state violence continues, and that both these facts have been largely eroded by (British) media coverage represents an on-going social complicity with a

And, secondly, it potentially expands the 'we' to include loyalists and unionists. Conflating Northern Ireland's opposing communities in this 'we' significantly problematises the binary structure on which a general understanding of the Troubles is based. Similar techniques are used in poems such as 'A Northern Hoard' (1972, 29), 'Act of Union' (1975a, 43) and 'Punishment' (1975a, 30).⁷

Religious echoes present in the second stanza's reference to blood and water of 'After a Killing' are punctured by the phrases and images which surround it: 'headstones, leeches', 'that neuter original loneliness', and by the association of this space with the profanity of these 'young men'. The idea of an uncomfortable unity in the phrase 'Who dreamt that we might dwell among ourselves' is echoed in a desire for simplicity to which 'The pined-for, unmolested orchid' points.⁸ Colour symbolism resonates in the final stanza which describes a girl bringing home fresh food. The united tricolour of Ireland, which in turn unites nationalist and unionist traditions of Northern Ireland, are symbolically rendered:

And to-day a girl walks in home to us
Carrying a basket full of new potatoes,
Three tight green cabbages, and carrots
With the tops and mould still fresh on them.

governmental system which violates the democratic (and sometimes human) rights of its citizens.

⁷ Such poetry foregrounds an overarching structure of Christian brotherhood governing Heaney's writing. In his last two collections to date this is emphasised by a repetition of one phrase from the Catholic catechism:

Questions and answers, to which I add my own:
'Who is my neighbour? My neighbour is all mankind.' ('An Invocation' 1996, 27)

Q. and A. come back. They 'formed my mind'.

'Who is my neighbour?' 'My neighbour is all mankind.' ('2.The Catechism' in 'Ten Glosses' 2001, 54)

'xx' (1991, 77), in 'Settings' from the latter half of *Seeing Things*, emphasises a tension between killing and brotherhood and an overarching power of damnation which governs Heaney's judgement.

⁸ The orchid is peculiar to the monocotyledonous plant family for having only one labellum, and by commonly having only one anther (where pollen is stored), 'united with the style of the central body' (*OED*). It thus forms a symbol of natural unity and ultimate coherence.

In the former half of the poem ideas of cohesion and unity are terse and suggest complex ambivalence within the Catholic and Protestant communities themselves. Because of this, the latter half is ironic. If, as Elmer Andrews suggests, each poem of 'Triptych' 'turns on a different kind of response to Ulster's Troubles: each represents a crucial impulse in Heaney's total, complex relationship to his country', and 'After a Killing' emphasizes the aesthetic' (1988, 137),⁹ then what it foregrounds is the poet's inability to absolve the Troubles within an aesthetic form. The poem, juxtaposing anti-pastoral and pastoral images of society, posits a unity at the end of '*After a Killing*' which remains in stark contrast not only to the first half of the poem, but to the title which casts a violent and unforgiving shadow over the text as a whole.

The titular reference of the second poem in the sequence points to women from classical antiquity who were believed to utter oracles and prophecies of a god. In '*Sibyl*', the speaker questions the prophetess, "What will become of us?", and is answered:

'I think our very form is bound to change.
 Dogs in a siege. Saurian relapses. Pismires.

 Unless forgiveness finds its nerve and voice,
 Unless the helmeted and bleeding tree
 Can green and open buds like infants' fists
 And the fouled magma incubate

 Bright nymphs My people think money
 And talk weather. Oil-rigs lull their future
 On single acquisitive stems. Silence
 Has shoaled into the trawlers' echo-sounders.

⁹ Andrews continues, suggesting that 'Sibyl' emphasises 'the rational humanist and "At the Water's Edge" the pietistic and nationalistic' (1988, 137).

Whilst this prophecy offers an element of hope, it is essentially a dystopian vision of society. Portents of a recession into an animal state are followed by a stanza which posits the possibility of forgiveness and regeneration into images of social decay. The repetition of 'unless' at this point emphasises a rhetoric of hope that attempts to reinscribe negative images. Reversing the movement of '*After a Killing*' from anti-pastoral to pastoral images, 'Unless the helmeted and bleeding tree/ Can green' attempts to form an aesthetic resolution. However, this is undercut and its aestheticism ironically foregrounded when the penultimate stanza juxtaposes pastoral nymphs with a materialistic image of contemporary society.

The final sentences echo the water images which announce Sibyl's words, but invert the bursting forth of the opening with images of drought and silence:

Silence

Has shoaled into the trawlers' echo-sounders.

The ground we kept our ear to for so long

Is flayed or calloused, and its entrails

Tented by an impious augury.

Our island is full of comfortless noises.'

The gathering of silence returned to boats' echo-sounders suggests a bottomless sea and the ground that is missing in this image is subsequently introduced in a decayed form, 'flayed or calloused'. '[I]ts entrails/Tented by an impious augury' echoes the secularised image of the gunmen of '*After a Killing*'. By referring to the ground's 'entrails', augury's meaning moves from a general sense of divination to specifically evoke a Roman religious official who interpreted omens derived from birds' behaviour and the appearance of their entrails. Thus the image of the ground being 'Tented by an impious augury'

conflates religious prophecy with profane outcome. The final line alludes to Caliban's pastoral vision of his island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (III.2. 136). It is, however, inverted in 'Triptych' to undermine any absolution from a discomfoting secular world.

The first stanza of '*At the Water's Edge*' repeats the Christian symbols of bread (as the body of Christ) and (living) water that occurred in '*After a Killing*', but secularises them. Used metaphorically, they project an image of material decay apparent in the speaker's surroundings - Lough Beg's ancient Christian remains. Instead of foregrounding regeneration, Christian symbols project onto the material presence of Christianity its degeneration. This is furthered by the secularisation of a stoup, a vessel for holy water near the entrance of a church: 'A stoup for rainwater. Anathema'. Juxtaposing a secular appropriation of the stoup with 'anathema' foregrounds the social vision of 'Triptych'. By definition, 'anathema' originally referred to a devoted thing, but later it signified an accursed thing or being, assigned to damnation and the curse of God (*OED*). In all three poems, profanity is in sharp relief. The final half of '*At the Water's Edge*' reinforces a movement away from religion and sacredness embodied in politics and state oppression:

And listened to the thick rotations
Of an army helicopter patrolling.

A hammer and a cracked jug full of cobwebs
Lay on the windowsill. Everything in me
Wanted to bow down, to offer up,
To go barefoot, foetal and penitential,

And pray at the water's edge.
How we crept before we walked! I remembered

The helicopter shadowing our march at Newry,
The scared, irrevocable steps.

Neil Corcoran suggests that in this final image,

the whole of 'Triptych' collapses back out of any visionary or religious possibility, into the 'irrevocable' political fact: the British Army helicopter 'shadowing' the march at Newry which followed as a protest against Bloody Sunday (1986, 134).

As Catherine Byron has noted, this helicopter, following a march against state violence the Sunday after Bloody Sunday, 'blared over the heads of the crowd, "You are breaking the law. You are breaking the law"' (1992, 36). Whilst Corcoran's assertion that the final image of the helicopter frames and informs the whole sequence seems just, a continuous undercutting of religious possibility occurring throughout the text should not be overlooked. This process only culminates in the finality of political oppression. Whilst the speaker retains a desire for religious repentance and recuperation, this remains undercut by the 'irrevocable' movement of this politicised crowd. And, although they defy state oppression by marching, the helicopter that follows them overrides their potential political recuperation with its shadow.

In 'Station Island' (1984a, 61) the speaker charts a series of encounters with ghosts. Here Žižek's description of ghosts marking a 'sign of a disturbance in the symbolic rite' (1991, 23) is literally imagined. By meeting literary figures (William Carleton, Patrick Kavanagh and James Joyce), people from his education and childhood and victims of Northern Ireland's Troubles, the speaker renders a sense of destruction which conflates political, cultural and social space. The first meeting with a person killed during the Troubles is in 'VII', when the ghost of a Catholic shopkeeper, William Strathearne, is woken and shot during the night by two off-duty RUC men pretending to need supplies

for an ill child.¹⁰ In 'VI' the speaker remembers youthful moments of personal intimacy. Before the shopkeeper answers the shop door in 'VII', this intimacy is paralleled by a moment of tenderness between him and his wife, 'something/ made me reach and squeeze her hand across the bed'. The shopkeeper's death thus foregrounds a political intervention of domestic space exacerbated by the Troubles. The men's excuse that "There's a child not well["]" underpins this.

The shopkeeper's ghost remains in the state he died in:

I turned to meet his face and the shock

is still in me at what I saw. His brow
was blown open above the eye and blood
had dried on his neck and cheek.

The dead man is less concerned with the state of his face than the speaker is: "it's only me. You've seen men as raw/ after a football match["]". At the end of 'VII', the shopkeeper is described as 'the perfect, clean, unthinkable victim'. Subsequently the speaker asks him for forgiveness, "Forgive the way I have lived indifferent -/ forgive my timid circumspect involvement". This guilt and anxiety becomes central to 'Station Island'. Catherine Byron argues that the shopkeeper is likened to Christ throughout this section, and suggests that,

when Heaney himself refers to his friend as 'the perfect, clean, unthinkable victim' he echoes unmistakably the prayer *Unde et memores* that is said just after the consecration of the bread and wine in the Mass:

¹⁰ Neither parties are explicitly named in 'Station Island'. Seamus Heaney discusses the identity of the shopkeeper and his murderers in conversation with Karl Miller (2000, 26); other critics have also remarked on their identities (see for example, Gillespie in Mallory & Carey [1996, 130] and Vendler [1999, 93]).

it offers Christ to the father as '*hostiam puram, hostiam sanctam, hostiam immaculatam*' - 'a pure, a holy, a spotless victim' (1992, 138).

The incorporation of an intertextual reference to Christ's passion and the Eucharist highlights a complex interchange between guilt, sin, passivity and purity. This is an explicit theme throughout *Station Island*. Feelings of guilt about the Troubles remain in tension with the role of the artist and his personal responsibility to his work, however these are now permeated with Christian motifs. Subsequent to *Station Island*, the parable poems from *The Haw Lantern* demonstrate this. From *Station Island* onwards, Heaney's poetry explores an unresolvable interface between violent action and religious passivity.

In 'VIII', the speaker encounters his dead cousin Colum. Significantly, this dialogue makes a direct link between the speaker of 'Station Island' and Heaney that incorporates a self-referential critique of Heaney's poetry. When accusing the speaker of confusing 'evasion and artistic tact', Colum refers back to images and motifs Heaney used in 'The Strand at Lough Beg' (1979, 17), one of *Field Work's* elegies, dedicated 'In memory of Colum McCartney':

[']The Protestant who shot me through the head
 I accuse directly, but indirectly, you
 who now atone perhaps upon this bed
 for the way you whitewashed ugliness and drew
 the lovely blinds of the *Purgatorio*
 and saccharined my death with morning dew.'

'The Strand at Lough Beg' (1979,17) deals with political tensions only in so far as it hints at the underhand nature of this death. But the poem's second half, particularly its closing images, repositions the text's gaze from an image of destruction to an image which connects Colum's dead body with nature. The

speaker directly addresses his cousin and imagines finding him 'With blood and roadside muck in [his] hair' only to subvert this image:

And gather up cold handfuls of dew
 To wash you, cousin. I dab you clean with moss
 Fine as the drizzle out of a low cloud.
 I lift you under the arms and lay you flat.
 With rushes that shoot green again, I plait
 Green scapulars to wear over your shroud.

The imagery of cleansing Colum's body represents a symbolic return to the landscape of nature. By appropriating nature, the poem aesthetically resolves Colum's death, pacifying and depoliticising it. Moreover, this passage alludes to Virgil's washing of Dante in *Purgatory*:

Gently upon the turf my master spread
 Both hands; and I, not taken unawares,
 But understanding what this purported,

Held up to him my face begrimed with tears;
 And so he brought my native hue once more
 To light, washed clean of hell's disfiguring smears (trans. Sayers, 1955,
 Canto I, 124-129).

A prefatory quotation from Dorothy Sayers' translation of Dante's *Purgatorio* emphasises the aesthetic framework of this elegy, serving to incorporate it within a literary space, thereby distancing it from reality. 'The Strand at Lough Beg' does not actually resolve this sectarian murder, it retreats into the word and absolves itself of the reality of the death by reflecting and refracting it in a literary text and tradition. By referring back to this poem in 'Station Island' and by re-presenting Colum 'plastered with mud', Heaney voices his own awareness

that the appropriation of literary allusions in 'The Strand at Lough Beg' serves to evade realities of political violence and death.

'IX' of 'Station Island' opens with the voice of a dead hunger striker whose thoughts, like the narrator's, shift between moments in a dream-like state.¹¹ Where the shifting images and thoughts of the main speaker foreground a sense of his fragmented consciousness and a collocation of dream and reality, here it enhances a disintegration of the striker's brain subsequent to his starvation:

'My brain dried like spread turf, my stomach
Shrank to a cinder and tightened and cracked.
Often I was dogs on my own track
Of blood on wet grass that I could have licked.

This use of the voice and body of a hunger striker in 'Station Island' is a significant inversion of bodies integrated elsewhere in Heaney's poetry. As the bog people bodies demonstrate, Heaney has previously appropriated victims of violence. This presupposes ideas of passivity, and as argued, political inscriptions of victims' bodies are socially encoded.

The act of self-starvation effectively allows individuals to inscribe upon themselves a relationship between their bodies and politics. For the community to which a victim belonged, their passive victimage becomes part of a social

¹¹ Maud Ellmann identifies the striker as Francis Hughes (1993, 19), who - after Bobby Sands - was the second to go on Hunger Strike at Long Kesh in 1981 and who died after fifty-nine days (Feldman, 301). In 'Frontiers of Writing' Heaney makes reference to Francis Hughes's funeral and the fact that he was one of a neighbouring family in County Derry. At the time of the wake and funeral Heaney was staying at Oxford University as a guest at a college dinner, and sleeping in a room which was formerly that of a Cabinet minister of the then Conservative Government. Although he goes on to discuss the difficulty of attending such funerals, because of their subsumption in 'a propaganda war', and suggests that, had he been able to attend Hughes's funeral he probably would not have, he notes that it remained charged in his mind. '[T]hat [...] event from which I was absent shadowed and questioned my presence at an otherwise perfectly jocund college feast [...] it felt like a betrayal to be enjoying the hospitality of an Establishment college' (1995, 187-188).

inscription of bodies sacrificed for an imagined utopic space. They are marked out as martyrs, and placed within a tradition of heroic blood sacrifice. The 1981 Long Kesh hunger strike 'was an epic act of emancipation' (Feldman 1991, 236) in which strikers actively chose to position themselves within this discursive field: 'the goal of the Hunger Strike was to reclaim the external body from all institutional objectifications through a radical process of interiorization - self-consumption' (Feldman 1991, 245). By internalising their fight for the reinstatement of Special Category Status for paramilitaries imprisoned in Northern Ireland,¹² the hunger strikers at once displayed and denied the control of their bodies by the state. As Maud Ellmann points out,

it was not by starving but by making a spectacle of their starvation that the prisoners brought shame on their oppressors and captured the sympathies of their co-religionists. Representation, in all senses of the word, determined the outcome of the Hunger Strike (1993, 17).¹³

Through the act of hunger striking, the strikers' bodies became encoded as sacrificed bodies. By internalising their conflict with the British state, these men, initially interned as perpetrators of violence, drastically reinscribed the structure of violence and victimage. Feldman's discussion of the hunger strike emphasises similar points, and proposes the communal importance of hunger strikers' bodies:

¹² This was passed by William Whitelaw in 1972 and withdrawn by Merlyn Rees in 1975 (Irvine 1991, 127) and gave paramilitary prisoners political status: freedom of association, the right to a political education, freedom from prison labour and the right to wear civilian clothing (see 'The Breaker's Yard' in Feldman 1991, 147-217).

¹³ In *The Hunger Artists*, Maud Ellmann adopts Girard's argument of the sacrificial crisis in her reading of Yeats's play 'The King's Threshold'. (1993, 63-65). Indeed 'The King's Threshold' is of major significance as it posits the social tradition of hunger striking in Ireland within a literary tradition. The artist James Coleman adopted and appropriated the legend in 1985 with his installation *guaiRE: An Allegory*, directly linking this tradition to the hunger strikes of the 1980s (for a discussion of this see 'Narratives of no Return' in Gibbons 1996).

[t]he subsequent sacralization of the dead hunger striker completed the process of purification and commemorated the subverting transfer of power from the state to the insurgent community with elaborate funeral processions and mortuary displays [...] The Hunger Strike was a rite of differentiation that directly addressed the cultural construction of violence (1991, 237).

By incorporating a hunger striker, his voice, his body 'laid out with a drift of mass cards/ At his shrouded feet', and 'his draped coffin', Heaney's text points to the communal significance of the hunger strikes as performative inscriptions of state opposition.

Whilst rendering a sense of his depleting consciousness, the images which are enunciated by the striker implode any division between his self and his enemies, and between his consciousness and his corporeality:

[']Often I was dogs on my own track
 [...]
 When the police yielded my coffin, I was light
 As my head when I took aim.'

Rather than explicitly dividing victims and violators, state and counterstate, the opening of 'IX' conflates them. In this way the text evades any extreme condemnation and repeats a multiplicity of signification which the bog people poems highlight.

When the dominant voice of 'Station Island' reclaims the poem, he alludes to the bog:

Unquiet soul, they should have buried you
 In the bog where you threw your first grenade,

Where only helicopters and curlews
Make their maimed music, and sphagnum moss
Could teach you its medicinal repose

By referring to the bog as a place not only of preservation, but of healing, Heaney foregrounds it as a metaphorical space for re-imagining the agency of this warring. However, the bog's imagined sanctity is disrupted by a juxtaposition of natural and social images. At the same time as the bog is imagined as offering 'medicinal repose' it is also foregrounded as a space of production for nature (curlews) and social warring (helicopters). The 'maimed music' produced in this space points to a mutilation metaphorically preserved and propagated by the bog. The speaker's desire to preserve and heal the hunger striker's body in the bog marks a need to note and inscribe the violence of contemporary Northern Ireland. However, 'the sphagnum moss/ Could teach you its medicinal repose' subtly echoes the moss used in 'The Strand at Lough Beg' to clean Colum's body and aesthetically resolve his death. It consequently registers problems of artistic representation. The hunger striker's transition from violator to victim can be read as an active textualisation of the body which recoups his agency into the margins of martyrdom; as Feldman suggests, '[t]he act of hunger striking purified and decriminalized the striker' (1991, 236). In a similar vein, Wills argues that due to 'an (albeit discontinuous) tradition of guerrilla warfare, political violence, and hunger strikes in Ireland [...] Republicanism can draw on a long national narrative of violence for its legitimization' (1993, 108). Heaney, whilst recognising and even encouraging this through the incorporation of a bog metaphor, also reminds us that this inscription is merely a palimpsest of the body as an agent of violence. Thus, like the multiple inscriptions of the bog people bodies, the hunger striker is doubly encoded as victim and perpetrator, violator and martyr.

The significance of Christ's passion as a motif of martyrdom has, in cases such as Northern Ireland, been appropriated and misplaced within structures of

reciprocal violence. Christ's death on the cross no longer serves as a final sacrifice, but as an icon of martyrdom; his image is used to extend and perpetuate violent relations rather than absolve them. A recent and enigmatic example of this comes in the figure of Bobby Sands whose legacy as the first participant in the Long Kesh Hunger Strike remains a poignant symbol of republicanism. Bobby Sands began his hunger strike on 1 March 1981, corresponding with the celebration of Easter.¹⁴ A month before his death, on 5 May 1981, he was elected as a member of Parliament. Conor Cruise O'Brien, in an essay entitled 'Patrick Pearse, Bobby Sands and Jesus Christ', argues that '[l]ike Pearse, Sands saw himself as one of a line of martyrs for the Republic (beginning with Tone), whose sacrifice repeats the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross' (1994, 168). Significantly, Feldman points out that Jesus as sacrificial victim is actually part of both sides of the Northern Irish conflict's symbolic framework (1991, 261-263). The essential irony of Northern Ireland's Troubles, which is also an essential irony of Christian war in general is this: if 'Jesus dies, not as a sacrifice, but in order that there may be no more sacrifices' (Girard 1987, 210), then a process of reciprocal violence, and a continuation of bodily sacrifices in the name of the rights of Protestants and Catholics respectively is anti-Christian. It marks an ultimate secularisation of the Christian doctrine through its stagnation at the point of worldly sin, as a perpetual production of sacrificed bodies closes off possibilities of redemption through a continual erasure of the finality of Christ's death on the cross.

¹⁴ Because the 1981 hunger strike began around the time of Easter it was framed in a Christian period that remembers and celebrates the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For a discussion on the significance of this see Arthur (in Apter 1997, 275).

PART THREE
TRANSUBSTANTIATION

8. Translation and Spirituality

Christ's words at the last supper metaphorically connect his body and blood with bread and wine: '[t]ake, eat; this is my body [...] Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood' (Matthew 26.26-28; cf. Mark 14.22-24, Luke 22.19-20). The Eucharist reflects this when Jesus's blood and body are transferred into bread and wine and consumed by communicants. The symbolisation of the last supper differentiates Catholic and Protestant faiths. In Protestant faiths, the wine and bread of the last supper are interpreted metaphorically, as symbols of a future heavenly belonging to Christ. In Catholic faiths, wine and bread are metonymically part of Christ and, as well as symbolising a future belonging to a heavenly community of Christians, they also signify an imminent collective convergence within the body of Christ. Because Catholicism believes that this transfer is substantial (that it is the actual body and blood of Christ that are consumed during mass), Jesus's conflation of metaphor and synecdoche becomes metonymic.

The pivotal moment of the Eucharist is therefore structured around a series of transfers in which parts of Christ (body and blood) are substituted by host objects (wafer and wine), which are then consumed during mass to embody a physical and spiritual conflation of Jesus and his worshipping community. For a secular mind, these transfers can be understood in relation to formal features of language which conflate similarities and contiguities to imaginatively, but illusively, embody Jesus. The difference between these secular and spiritual interpretations of this structural movement circles around the question of belief.

Rather than separating and confusing meaning, Catholicism's sacramental ritual enacts a belief in an ultimate and total union between word and flesh. Because Christ does not become visually present, his presence can only be actual as a spirituality that depends on each individual's faith. A community is created and

united through its collective belief in this embodiment. Transubstantiation heralds a moment of commonality that is in opposition to secular theories premised on an inherent ambivalence in signification. Faith assumes the same structural position as this ambivalent gap, but instead of emphasising a perpetual dislocation between word and body, faith bridges and unites the two. Themes of transubstantiation in Heaney's poetry are congruent with an emphasis on individuality and on language and literature's inherent ineffectuality. Although they do not necessarily engender a leap of faith, emphases on the imagination's redemptive power and on spiritual images remain prevalent. These poems, therefore, embody a tension between a pervading desire for the spiritual absolution faith offers, and the secularisation of such a possibility.¹

An emphasis on faith and translation recurs throughout 'Station Island' (1984, 61), and culminates in 'XI'. Spirituality is signalled in 'X' when a commonplace object (a mug) is temporarily given a new signification. This suggests that commonplace objects hold within them spiritual possibilities. At this moment the material world is filled with transcendental potential. Poems like 'The Mud Vision' oppose this, and such potential is undercut because society itself secularises spirituality by reducing its horizon to a narcissistic reflection. In

¹ Don Cupitt's theology embodies similar contraries because it addresses and seeks to assimilate current philosophical debates which seem to contradict Christianity. In *What is a Story*, for instance, he addresses Lyotard's collapsing of grand narratives and assimilates this with a postmodern theology (1991, 93). In *The Long-Legged Fly: A Theology of Language and Desire* he uses Lacanian ideas and explores faith's relationship with desire, '[f]aith always takes the side of desire' he argues, and because of this:

[i]t affirms desire's inexhaustible creative potential, and produces in evidence its own continuous generation of new forms of life. Each is a provisional concretization to be realized and then in its turn superseded, of an infinite desire and Object of desire which is beyond all metaphor and will never be fully actualized (1987, 16).

In this way Cupitt's theology is highly significant to this thesis and my reading of Heaney. Cupitt's dialogues between theology and secular philosophy affirm spirituality whilst I suggest that spiritual potential is questionable in relation to secular experience. However, like Cupitt this thesis recognises that theology and secular philosophy can work in relation to each other and can be mutually productive rather than counteractive. This is important in relation to Heaney's unswerving desire for a spirituality which is constantly undercut.

'Station Island' the desire for God remains. It is, however, ambiguous because of a tension established between Christianity and a form of spirituality that, whilst adopting or adapting Christian symbolism, emphasises redemption and resurrection in commonplace objects and individuality.

Used as a prop for a theatrical event, the mug in 'Station Island' becomes a host object. Describing its constant presence in his childhood home, the speaker says that 'It had stood for years/ in its patient sheen and turbulent atoms,/ unchallenging, unremembered *lars*'. By using a Latinate term, and typographically foregrounding it, the speaker is already prefiguring the mug as a host object of spiritual significance. Because the term brings with it associations of gods that protect the home, this is furthered. When it is used for the evening as a prop, the speaker becomes 'estranged from it/ as a couple vowed and called it their loving cup'. Once it is returned to its usual context, its role as a sublime object remains as a latent promise of spiritual possibility.²

Dipped and glamoured from this translation,
it was restored with all its cornflower haze

still dozing, its parchment glazes fast -
as the otter surfaced once with Ronan's psalter
miraculously unharmed, that had been lost
a day and a night under the lough water.

And so the saint praised God on the lough shore.
The dazzle of the impossible suddenly
blazed across the threshold, a sun-glare
to put out the small hearths of constancy.

² The Lacanian notion of sublime objects will be explored in the next chapter.

Connotations of baptism and re-birth attached to the mug's translation ('Dipped and glamoured'), are metaphorically linked to Ronan's psalter.

Sweeney Astray (1984b) initially published by Field Day in 1983, is Heaney's translation of *Buille Suibhne*, a medieval Irish poem that tells the legend of St Ronan. Ronan, a Christian missionary in Ireland, is preparing to build a church on land that belonged to Sweeney, 'king of Dal-Arie' (1984b, 3). Sweeney becomes so angered by this that he throws Ronan's psalter into a lake. The psalter is miraculously retrieved, but Ronan curses Sweeney who becomes a bird:

A day and a night passed and then an otter rose out of the lake with the psalter and brought it to Ronan, completely unharmed. Ronan gave thanks to God for that miracle, and cursed Sweeney (1984b, 4).

Whereas *Sweeney Astray* is predominantly concerned with Sweeney's life, and so can be read as a text about religious colonisation and oppression, Heaney's adaptation of St Ronan in 'Station Island' assumes positive connotations of resurrection and redemption.³ By connecting the promise held in the mug's temporary translation to Christianity, the speaker's desire for change is, at this moment, located within a specific religious and spiritual framework.

Water and nature in the last two poems of 'Station Island' ('XI' and 'XII') adopt protective implications prefigured in '*Iars*' and its textual associations with Christianity. A descriptive association with a kaleidoscope being dropped into dirty water in the opening lines of 'XI', is linked to an analogy between the

³ This reference to Ronan also prefigures the final section of *Station Island*, 'Sweeney Redivivus'. The notes incorporated at the end of *Station Island* tell us that the poems in this section are 'voiced for Sweeney' (1984a, 123). Despite this authorial gloss on the identity of this section's speaker, themes and motifs which have concerned Heaney throughout his career remain identifiable within this specificity.

mug's translation and the resurrection of Ronan's psalter.⁴ This frames the Christian object, that symbolises possibility and redemption, by two commonplace objects. As in 'X', a relationship between commonplace experience and spiritual renewal fuses rather than fractures possible change:

As if the prisms of the kaleidoscope
I plunged once in a butt of muddied water
surfaced like a marvellous lightship

and out of its silted crystals a monk's face
that had spoken years ago from behind a grille
spoke again about the need and chance

to salvage everything, to re-envisage
the zenith and glimpsed jewels of any gift
mistakenly abased...

Because the kaleidoscope is translated through 'a butt of muddied water' and likened to 'a marvellous lightship', Heaney suggests that hope exists through re-visioning, or replenishing things. A translation of a meditation by St John of the Cross follows that again reinforces a link between these connotations and Christianity, and the rest of 'Station Island' moves away from any materially grounded response to the world.

By incorporating an actual translation of a spiritual text, Heaney emphasises the significance of these elements in 'Station Island':

⁴ 'Station Island' departs from Heaney's previous use of these symbols. In 'Waterbabies' from *Stations* (1975b, 9), no transubstantiation occurs, instead the kaleidoscope is ruined by the effects of the muddy water:

Perversely I once fouled a gift there and sank my new
kaleidoscope in the puddle. Its bright prisms that offered
incomprehensible satisfactions were messed and silted: instead
of a marvellous lightship, I salvaged a dirty hulk.

What came to nothing could always be replenished.
 'Read poems as prayers,' he said, 'and for your penance
 translate me something by Juan de la Cruz'.

Although the translation is given as a penance, the speaker implies that he has moved beyond a need for renunciation, 'he had made me feel there was nothing to confess'. Spiritual sentiment drawn from this translation can thereby be read as distanced from Catholicism and given a personal significance. However, continuing the object-water motif, the translation replaces commonplace objects with metaphorical images that entail specifically Christian associations. Moreover, the translation passage emphasises an opposition between spiritual darkness and lightness which feeds back into material associations with light and dark in the kaleidoscope and psalter passages.

No other thing can be so beautiful.
 Here the earth and heaven drink their fill
 although it is the night.

So pellucid it never can be muddied,
 and I know that all light radiates from it
 although it is the night.

The power of the translation lies largely in its repetitive rhetoric: an emphatically personal voice constantly affirms an all-embracing redemptive 'living fountain'. 'I know' is used in five of the twelve stanzas, whilst each stanza ends 'although it is the night'. An exception to this is found in the penultimate stanza:

Hear it calling out to every creature.
 And they drink these waters, although it is dark here
 because it is the night.

Syntactically, the second sentence states that it is dark because it is the night. However, the line pattern throws this into ambiguity, and opens up a possible implication that the waters of this fountain are sought as a source of replenishment because of the state of darkness. 'Though the connection remains shadowy', Molino argues, 'the link between poetry and prayer suggests that poetry can give voice to silent suffering' (1994, 156). Rather than weaving the metaphorical appropriation back into some material context, the translation passage embodies faith beyond reason.⁵

As the penultimate poems develop, a vacillation between a personal, commonplace spirituality and a formal Christian one recurs. An emphasis on individuality and hope through personal imagining is thus in dialogue with a communal religiosity whose associative and symbolic force often overrides the speaker's independence. The constant referral back to 'this living fountain' in 'XI' can be read as alluding to the Christian notion of living water (John 4. 7-10). Stephen D. Moore points out that there are many images in the New Testament linking Jesus and 'living water'. This culminates in the issuing of blood and water from Jesus's side on the cross (1994, 57-58). Subsequently in his discussion, Moore focuses on a complex conflation of literal and figurative references to bread and water in Jesus's interactions:

⁵ Neil Corcoran reads it as a subversion of faith:

the poem-prayer in XI could be thought to undermine its song of faith with its constant refrain, 'although it is the night'. In John of the Cross this is the 'dark night of the soul', in which the mystic feels himself temporarily abandoned by God; but, to a more secular consciousness, it could equally well be the sheer inability to believe (1986, 165).

A more substantial group of critics, however, read the translation in an opposite way to Corcoran, and suggest a potential return to spirituality. As Catherine Byron points out, the God in this section 'even gets His capital letter back' (1992, 187). Molino also reads the translation as an assertion of Christianity, arguing that when St John of the Cross was imprisoned he never lost his faith nor failed in his dedication, 'develop[ing] a spiritual journey in which suffering, the long night of the soul, brings forth the spiritual song of the Christian' (1994, 163). Similarly, Sammie Crawford Greer suggests that John's fountain 'symbolizes infinite possibility [...] it represents the sustenance of the spirit and the imagination' (in Malloy & Carey 1996, 113). Elmer Andrews furthers this, suggesting that the translation is appropriated in 'Station Island' as a poetic, rather than spiritual, evocation (1988, 172).

this water is neither simply material and literal, since it is symbolic, nor fully spiritual and figurative, since it is physical. It is a spiritual material and a literal figure. Literality and figurality intermingle in the flow from Jesus' side, each contaminating the other [...] Mistaking his place on the table of elements, he speaks to the Samaritan woman and his other dialogue partners as though he were a mixture composed of separable elements, as though the living water could be clearly distinguished from the spring water, the bread of life from the common bread, the figurative from the literal, the spiritual from the material, and the heavenly from the earthly. What Jesus says is contradicted by what he *is* (1994, 58-59).

Throughout 'Station Island' the physical and spiritual, material and figural, worlds are similarly conflated and confused. Here the spiritual realm of religiosity ('living fountain', 'bread of life') envelops a metaphor of the speaker's physical world ('although it is the night' 'although it is dark here') thus suggesting a need for the former to withstand the latter. The need for faith in a spiritual structure of belonging is foregrounded within a society in which St John of the Cross's 'dark night of the soul' is an ever-present social reality.

This is problematic: 'X' and 'XI' evoke a sense of resolution which symbolically renounces anxieties raised throughout 'Station Island'. Catholicism is central to the text, primarily because the poem pivots around its speaker's pilgrimage to Station Island on Lough Derg. Formal and thematic allusions to Dante's *Divine Comedy* further Catholicism's centrality. However, organised religion is questioned. In 'IV', for instance, the speaker meets a priest's ghost. He recalls how, as a student, the priest was 'doomed to do the decent thing', becoming for his neighbours 'some sort of holy mascot'. The priest retorts, "I at least was young and unaware/ that what I thought was chosen was convention", and announces a loss of faith: "And the god has, as they say, withdrawn". The text also critiques violence caused by religious differences by incorporating images such as 'Orange bigots', and 'that harp of unforgiving iron/ the Fenians strung'

('II'). Significantly, ghosts murdered in the Troubles further the text's critique of organised religion.

The emphasis on water as a Christian symbol of promise and redemption, fully explicated in the St John of the Cross translation, links into the text's final epiphany. Once James Joyce's ghost has encouraged the speaker 'to swim/ out on your own and fill the element/ with signatures on your own frequency', the poem finishes with a rain shower that symbolically washes away the poem's 'chapped wilderness'. This evokes an ambivalence that the text's circling of religion reflects:

The shower broke in a cloudburst, the tarmac
fumed and sizzled. As he moved off quickly

the downpour loosed its screens round his straight walk.

This can be read as an image which echoes the Christian symbol of living water explicated in 'XI' and symbolically resolves or renounces any cultural responsibility the speaker may feel as a writer. However, 'the downpour loosed its screens' problematises such an easy resolution. As in 'The Mud Vision', describing the rain as screens distances the speaker from the world he imaginatively projects, emphasising the difference between image and reality. The potential for epiphany in 'Station Island' is, therefore, not connected directly to the speaker's cultural landscape, but to an individual's ability to 're-envisage/ the zenith and glimpsed jewel of any gift/ mistakenly abased'.

This sits uncomfortably with Colum's criticism of Heaney's literary representation of his 'sectarian assassination': 'You confused evasion and artistic tact./ The Protestant who shot me through the head/ I accuse directly'. Indeed, the text's resolution never frees itself from earlier images of murder and disruption. Whilst appropriating religious motifs, 'Station Island' does not find a

resolution in an organised form of spirituality. The final poems in the sequence thus establish a closure that is paradoxical. By using Joyce's ghost to influence the final epiphany of 'Station Island' the text inadvertently acknowledges this, evoking a resolution that is bound to its own ineffectual form - language.

It is, then, not an all-embracing Christ which offers a utopia, but the speaker's own imaginative power to constitute such a vision of change. The sense of spirituality grappled with in 'Station Island' embodies connotations of 'repining', encapsulating contraries of disaffection and longing:

I am repining for this living fountain.
Within this bread of life I see it plain
although it is the night.

Disaffection and longing in 'Station Island' relates to a spirituality tied up with an all-embracing communality. The speaker cannot escape or resolve his place within this communality, because it itself has become fragmented by religion. He thus occupies a paradox: spiritual faith is an extension of the self into others, an imagined community, which the speaker can neither denounce nor fully engage in. When, at the end of 'IX', an unresolvable tension between the speaker's individual autonomy and his communal responsibility is emphasised by a list of 'as ifs', which place him in an impossible metonymy, this is highlighted:

As if the cairnstone could defy the cairn.
As if the eddy could reform the pool.
As if a stone swirled under a cascade,
Eroded and eroding in its bed,
Could grind itself down to a different core.

The contradictory imagery inherent in 'repining' is prefigured as the speaker describes himself as 'Lulled and repelled by his own reflection', once more oscillating between (attr)action and evasion.

Spirituality in Heaney's poetry has indeed become secularised. If the possibility of redeeming an earthly grace is purely imaginary, then the leap of faith which bridges earthly and heavenly realms is undermined, and a gap between word and flesh remains. Reduced to the level of individuality, spirituality becomes itself a fragmented phenomenon. This dispossession expressed is only a partial one: religion is secularised, but its cathartic resonance remains as an urgent desire. In *Electric Light* this need and its secular power remains. For instance, the possibility of altering the (Northern Irish) future is imagined (as in Christianity) in a new born child, 'And the child that's due. Maybe, heavens, sing/ Better times for her and her generation' ('Bann Valley Eclogue' 2001, 11). Again, Heaney's speaker finds the possibility of grace not in the world itself as a material presence, but in the translation of commonplaceness into sacredness. God is emptied of materiality; the desire for spirituality is recovered, but as an individual, imagined transformation.

This idea is also embodied throughout *Seeing Things*. In 'viii' of 'Lightenings' (1991, 62), for instance, a ship appears in the air above monks in an oratory, and catches its anchor in the altar:

A crewman shinned and grappled down the rope
And struggled to release it. But in vain.
'This man can't bear our life here and will drown,'

The abbot said, 'unless we help him.' So
They did, the freed ship sailed, and the man climbed back
Out of the marvellous as he had known it.

Whilst this text embraces possibilities of human sympathy and imaginative power, the final image introverts the predominant point of view. This entails a certain irony. Because the ship sailing through the air catches its anchor on the altar rails, the poem overlaps an imagined, spiritual realm and a material, earthly one.⁶ It thereby questions the monks' dedication to a spiritual life, and suggests a need to re-vision the material world with their hope and spirit. For, the alien presence of the man and his ship does not bring into the poem a wondrous vision of another realm, but an affirmation that, with new eyes, this world is 'marvellous'.

Many of the poems gathered in *Seeing Things* introduce a gap in relationships between representation and reality. 'Markings' (1991, 8) opens with a childhood memory of marking out a pitch with jackets to play football on, 'four jackets for four goalposts'. The missing lines of 'corners and the squares' are echoed in an imaginary division between Protestant and Catholic boys transgressed in their play: 'And then we picked the teams/ And crossed the line our called names drew between/ us'. Just as in the Eucharist the wafer is consumed with a belief that (as a host object) it will re-member Christ in the body of the consumer, the idea of translation in these poems is implicitly linked to Catholicism's notion of transcending physical reality, re-visioning it to encapsulate spiritual possibilities.

As 'xii', the last poem in 'Lightenings' (1991, 66), suggests gaps between word and flesh are bridged by faith in Christianity. The poem ends with a Christian

⁶ The ship motif is echoed once more in connection with spiritual possibilities towards the end of 'Squarings' in the last two stanzas of 'xlv' (1991, 106):

Was music once a proof of God's existence?
As long as it admits things beyond measure,
That supposition stands.

So let the ear attend like a farmhouse window
In placid light, where the extravagant
Passed once under full sail into the longed-for.

emphasis on a potential translation of physical and mental states into spiritual possibilities. It begins by defining the phenomenological usage of 'lightening' as an 'instant when the spirit flares/With pure exhilaration before death'. The second half of the poem focuses on the good thief crucified at Jesus's side and foregrounds his physical suffering:

So paint him on Christ's right hand, on a promontory
Scanning empty space, so body-racked he seems
Untranslatable into the bliss

Ached for at the moon-rim of his forehead,
By nail-craters on the dark side of his brain:
This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.

A dialogue between physical experience and imaginative potential is rendered through the poem's shift from an exhilarated spirit to the good thief's bodily suffering. However, this dialogue is folded in on itself by prefiguring the thief's pain with an emphasis on the imaginative primacy of his image - 'So paint him on Christ's right hand'. The retreat into Christian faith does not necessarily replace the suffering of the thief with Paradise, but the promise of Paradise opens the mind to 'A phenomenal instant when the spirit flares/ With pure exhilaration before death' which translates pain into possibility.⁷

In the second section of the titular poem, 'Seeing Things' (1991, 16), this motif is again explicitly linked to Christian iconography.⁸ The poem opens with the Latin word '*Claritas*' which prefaces the description of a cathedral's façade with

⁷ Henry Hart asserts that the title for this series embraces a religious context; lightening, he suggests, 'is comparable to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, His breach of all worldly limits for the sublimities of heaven' (1994, 40-41).

⁸ Elsewhere Heaney makes references to the predominance of suffering in Catholic iconography (see, for example, 'The Mud Vision' [1987, 48] and 'Settings 'xix' [1991, 75]); 'Seeing Things' foregrounds a more positive aspect of idolatry focusing on the baptismal celebration of rebirth and renewal.

a sense of clarity - glory, divine lustre, brightness, brilliancy, splendour, clearness and unambiguousness (*OED*). This is, however, refuted throughout the text, which ends with a celebration of ambiguity that is emphasised through the final image of 'the zig-zag hieroglyph for life itself'. The poem is thus framed by opposing images of clearness and ambiguity. Within this is a description of the façade which represents Christ's baptism by John. Rather than focusing on its religious significance, the texture of this representation is initially highlighted:

Lines

Hard and thin and sinuous represent
The flowing river. Down between the lines
Little antic fish are all go. Nothing else.

Here the text doubles back on itself, opening up this 'Nothing else'. By shifting between an emphasis on the texture of this image, and the historical moment that it reflects, the poem plays upon the gap between representation and reality. By foregrounding how the translation of a moment into a representation opens it up to various and varying connotations, it suggests that the possibility of transubstantiation is undercut through transcriptions. Blurring divisions between viewing subject and viewed object suggests that the signification of an object is dependent on its reception. By pointing to this dependency in relation to religious iconography Heaney touches on the indoctrinating power of images, but subverts that power. In 'Seeing Things' 'II', for instance, the speaker looks beyond the façade's religious significance (of Jesus and John above the water) to the river and what it holds below eye level:

And yet in that utter visibility
The stone's alive with what's invisible:
Waterweed, stirred sand-grains hurrying off,
The shadowy, unshadowed stream itself.

Ambiguity in ideas of representation and interpretation are celebrated in 'The Biretta'(1991, 26) because of their re-visioning potential. Initially, the biretta, a square cap worn by Roman Catholic clergymen, is symbolic of the speaker's childhood experience of the Catholic church:

The first time I saw one, I heard a shout
 As an El Greco ascetic rose before me
 Preaching hellfire
 [...]
 It was antique as armour in a hall
 And put the wind up me and my generation.

The last four stanzas subvert this fear by re-imagining the cap itself. This reinscribes its associative signification in the speaker's mind:

Now I turn it upside down and it is a boat -
 A paper boat, or one that wafts into
 The first lines of the *Purgatorio*
 [...]
 Refined beyond the dross into sheer image.

In a way similar to the play between the stone's texture and the iconic image of 'Seeing Things' 'II', 'The Biretta' finally returns the cap to the priest's head. However, as this priest is now imagined from a painting, *The Sick Call*, he remains as a visual image (prefigured through the reference to El Greco). Furthermore, being pictured on a boat, the image of the priest is reinstated in the speaker's mind within the subversive image itself. Pacified through the act of appropriation and reappropriation, the images of hellfire become 'Undaunting, half domestic, loved in crises'.

The necessity of such processes of reinterpretation that are encoded in these poems is foregrounded in 'The Settle Bed' (1991, 28), which follows 'The Biretta'. Turning a settle bed into a metaphor for the Six Counties, the poem directly alludes to Northern Ireland's divided allegiances:

the long bedtime
 Anthems of Ulster, unwilling, unbeaten,

 Protestant, Catholic, the Bible, the beads,

The closing stanzas serve to underline the significance of re-imagining that is a continual theme of *Seeing Things*, and suggest that translating commonplace objects and associations is an empowering way to re-inscribe their very substance:

Imagine a dower of settle beds tumbled from heaven
 Like some nonsensical vengeance come on the people,
 Then learn from that harmless barrage that whatever is given

 Can always be reimagined, however four-square,
 Plank-thick, hull-stupid and out of its time
 It happens to be. You are free as the lookout,

 That far-seeing joker posted high over the fog,
 Who declared by the time that he had got himself down
 The actual ship had been stolen away from beneath him.

From *Field Work* (1979) onwards the significance of translation for Heaney becomes more frequently literal. 'Ugolino' (1979, 61) is a passage translated from Dante's *Inferno* which ends *Field Work*. The publication of *Sweeney Astray*

preceded *Station Island*, and whilst the former is a translated text, the latter makes effective use of translations. Subsequent poetry collections to date all include translations.⁹ Heaney's version of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, *The Cure at Troy* was performed and published in 1990 by Field Day Theatre Company. Most famously, Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* (1999a) won the Whitbread Book of the Year in 1999. By juxtaposing translations with his own work, or including contemporary markers and references in translations themselves, Heaney foregrounds their significance in relation to contemporary situations. Part of the effect of translation in Heaney's poetry is, then, a revisiting of Northern Ireland through a different context.

'Ugolino' (1979, 61) is the first significant example of this. This is a passage translated from Dante's *Inferno* into which Heaney integrates references to Irish history and Northern Ireland's contemporary situation.¹⁰ A reference to Thebes in the final lines, which implicates a fraternal struggle over its sovereignty, deepens the intercontextual allusion to Northern Ireland's Troubles carried

⁹*The Haw Lantern* includes a translated passage from *Beowulf*, 'A Ship of Death' (1987, 20). *Seeing Things* is framed by translations from Virgil's *Aeneid*, 'The Golden Bough' (1991, 1) and from Dante's *Inferno*, 'The Crossing' (1991, 111). A translation from the Dutch of J.C. Bloem is included in 'To a Dutch Potter' (1996, 4) in *The Spirit Level*, and 'The First Words' (1996, 38) is a version of a Romanian poem by Marin Sorescu which was translated into English by Ionana Russell-Gebbett. Virgil's *Eclogue* 'IX' appears in *Electric Light* (2001, 31), as does a short translation from Irish in 'Ten Glosses' (2001, 54) and 'Arion' (2001, 72) is a translation of Pushkin's Russian. Further to these Heaney has translated and juxtaposed extracts from Brian Merriman and Ovid in *The Midnight Verdict* (1993/2000), and has worked collaboratively to publish Jan Kochanowski's *Laments* (1995) and Leos Janacek's song cycle *Diary of One Who Vanished* (1999b) in English. I have from time to time discussed Heaney's translations where a relevant overlap with his poetry has occurred. On the whole, however, his work in this area lies outside my chosen remit. For a fuller examination of the relationship between Heaney's poetry and his translations see 'A Different Shore' in Eugene O'Brien's *Seamus Heaney: Creating Irelands of the Mind* (2002).

¹⁰ Michael Longley also uses this technique, and is especially influenced by Greek mythology and Classical literature. A particularly powerful instance of such free translation comes in 'The Butchers' (1991, 51) which closes *Gorse Fires*, and depicts the gruesome process of cleaning up after the murder of the suitors and their servants in Homer's *Odyssey*. By naming the poem 'The Butchers', Longley points to a specific group of Loyalists from Belfast, the Shankill Butchers, who tortured and murdered Catholics and Protestants found in Catholic areas, during the mid-1970s (see 'The Butchers' in Feldman 1991, 59-65).

throughout. Heaney's translation ends with Ugolino's criticism of the suffering of his children consequent to his punishment:

For the sins
 Of Ugolino, who betrayed your forts,
 Should never have been visited on his sons.
 Your atrocity was Theban. They were young
 And innocent: Hugh and Brigata
 And the other two whose names are in my song.

The anamnestic historical perspective of poems such as 'At a Potato Digging' is echoed through this reference to famine and the suffering of multiple generations. A waning of Ugolino's children, recorded earlier in the text, foregrounds how pertinent bodily suffering and historical atrocity are in Heaney's poetry:

'Father, it will greatly ease our pain
 If you eat us instead, and you who dressed us
 In this sad flesh undress us here again.'
 So then I calmed myself to keep them calm.
 [...]
 Gaddo said, 'Why don't you help me, father?'
 He died like that, and surely as you see
 Me here, one by one I saw three
 Drop dead during the fifth day and the sixth day
 Until I saw no more. Searching, blinded,
 For two days I groped over them and called them
 Then hunger killed where grief had only wounded.'

A similar sense of guilt and anguish to Ugolino's, caused by a relationship between action and impotence, permeates Heaney's writing. This is furthered by the fact that Ugolino is in hell for betraying his country (Musa 1984, 375),

which mirrors Heaney's then recent departure from Northern Ireland, and the guilt that this move produced.

The relationship between guilt and complicity, action and inaction, is explored again in Heaney's version of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, *The Cure at Troy*. By developing these themes through an interpretation and translation of *Philoctetes*, Heaney abstracts Northern Ireland's contemporary conditions, and places them within the literary frame of Greek tragedy. The play dramatises Odysseus's effort through Neoptolemus to return Philoctetes (who has been abandoned on an island with a septic foot) and the bow and arrow of Hercules which he carries (and which never misses its target) to the site of the Trojan war because it has been prophesied that through this act they shall defeat Troy (1990a, 72-73). Neoptolemus is instructed by Odysseus to deceive Philoctetes in order to ensure his return to Troy, and while the main part the play records this process, the ethical structure which is foregrounded concerns Neoptolemus's confused loyalties between his word and personal ethics and his duty as a Greek and a soldier. Thus *The Cure at Troy* charts a tension between personal integrity and communal responsibility.

Part of the play's power comes from an ambiguity dramatised by the other players which is particularly pertinent in relation to the Chorus. Opening the play, the Chorus suggests an overlap between his consciousness, and those of the characters and viewers:

Philoctetes.

Hercules.

Odysseus.

Heroes. Victims. Gods and human beings.

All throwing shapes, every one of them

Convinced he's in the right, all of them glad

To repeat themselves and their every last mistake,
No matter what.

People so deep into
Their own self-pity self-pity buoys them up.
People so staunch and true, they're fixated,
Shinning with self-regard like polished stones.
And their whole life spent admiring themselves
For their own long-suffering.

Licking their wounds
And flashing them around like decorations.
I hate it, I always hated it, and I am
A part of it myself.

And a part of you,
For my part is the chorus, and the chorus
Is more or less a borderline between
The you and the me and the it of it (1990a,1-2).

This complicity posited between the framing narrator and the audience highlights an ethical and communal responsibility for Northern Ireland. The fact that this version was written by Heaney for Field Day, and thus for (Northern) Irish performances, furthers the seriousness of its enunciation of complicity.

As the play proceeds, it becomes clear that Neoptolemus develops a genuine empathy for Philoctetes's plight. The Chorus and the Merchant directly participate in a deception of Philoctetes, serving to accentuate Neoptolemus's ambivalent position vis-à-vis Philoctetes (1990a, 28-34). Whilst Neoptolemus remains in a complex position, it is in the end to his military duty that he remains loyal. Before the vision of Hercules appears to instruct Philoctetes to go to Troy, Neoptolemus frequently justifies and exonerates himself with reference to a

divinely sanctioned future, which has been prophesied by a Trojan soothsayer: 'None of us can dictate the shape of things./ It's all laid out. I'm not the one to blame' (1990a, 51). Neoptolemus's recourse to prophecy foregrounds a macrocosmic attitude in which actions of individuals are subsumed by an all-embracing national future. The recurring motifs of scales and balances serve to further an underpinning determinism in ideas of historical equilibrium (1990a, 57 & 65).

By using translations to engage in such issues, Heaney establishes a literary duplicity. He enunciates feelings of guilt that are related to the contrary emotions of ineffectuality and complicity in Northern Ireland. But, paradoxically, he acknowledges this via palimpsests that emphatically mark a retreat from this material context. For instance, the motif of translation in 'Station Island' that culminates in the St John of the Cross passage represents a movement from an attempt to evoke a material world into an imagined and textual realm. Thus, whilst integrating a self-reflexive critique of literature as an ineffectual discursive form, he doubly imbeds his work in the word by speaking through revisions of other people's words. Eleanor J. McNeese's study, *Eucharistic Poetry*, discusses the problematic relationship between language and spirituality for contemporary poets:

[I]anguage and experience have colluded to produce hypocrisy and historical atrocity, not to praise God. Together they have killed the spirit - the possibility of redemption through incarnation and resurrection. Consequently, the only way language can exonerate itself is to expose its own guilt, to turn itself inside out (1992, 26).

This problematic is reflected in Heaney's poetry. Often Heaney will juxtapose hope embodied in faith with images of violence, or deliberately bind spiritual evocations to a secular world of words. Both these recurring structures suggest that whilst Heaney's speakers may desire transubstantiation, they cannot truly

engender it. As the final chapters of this thesis will show, in Heaney's later poetry, frustration and impotence are more frequently bound to a sense of literature's redundancy as a means of redressing historical atrocity. As well as having an unprecedented abundance of intertextual allusions, *Electric Light* is a significant departure from this. It can, then, be read as an assertion of Heaney's place within an international, and interhistorical, literary community that entails a movement away from the position of guilty onlooker which colours his *fin de siècle* writing.

9. Host Objects

In *The System of Objects*, Jean Baudrillard suggests that the process of collecting abstracts an object's signification from its use-value status. No longer valued as a functioning utensil, the object becomes referential of the person who has collected it. Its meaning effectively folds into its collector to signify an aspect of them:

no longer simply material bodies offering a certain resistance, they become mental precincts over which I hold sway, they become things of which I am the meaning, they become my property and my passion [...] If I use a refrigerator to refrigerate, it is a practical meditation: it is not an object but a refrigerator. And in that sense I do not possess it. A *utensil* is never possessed, because a utensil refers one to the world; what is possessed is always an object *abstracted from its function and thus brought into relationship with the subject* (1996, 85-86).

Although similar, this differs from the sacramental role of the Eucharistic bread and wine as objects which become hosts of religious and communal significance. The bread and wine symbolise something other than their common function. During mass they are not consumed to relieve physical hunger or thirst, but to engender a worshipping community united in their embodiment of Christ. Eucharistic bread and wine signify something that, when consumed, is believed to transubstantiate. The change that Baudrillard discusses remains manifestly secular. Objects become narcissistic reflections of their collectors, but their actual physicality remains as an impenetrable space between people and material objects. This contrasts with spirituality primarily because there is no leap of faith in Baudrillard's secular system - it is not the substance of the objects that changes but the signification. Baudrillard's thesis refers directly to material culture, and is an investigation into an immediate relationship between society and material objects. Within literary texts, this relationship takes on an

added complexity because of a mediation of material culture through texts and the imagination.

From *Door into the Dark* onwards, Heaney appropriates archaeological objects and similar natural materials in his poetry. Significantly, the effect of such appropriations changes and develops. In 'Relic of Memory' (1969, 25) the speaker describes the petrification of objects in a lough, and blends this with imagery of a ghostly heritage which is preserved and eroded in this water. The speaker contrasts the simplicity of objects untouched by subjective recollection with the significance of objects encoded by memories and imaginings. The former:

Are too simple,
Without the lure
That relic stored -
A piece of stone
On the shelf at school,
Oatmeal coloured.

The use of 'relic' echoes the poem's title, 'Relic of Memory', thus reinforcing a personal relationship with this object. By describing the physical stone in simple and explicit language, the poem contrasts this with what is said to be 'too simple'. This emphasises a disjunction between its (simple) materiality and its (luring) effect upon the speaker's childhood consciousness.

From *North* onwards, poems such as 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces' (1975a, 12) illustrate how artefacts in Heaney's poems, like collector's objects, fold into their speaker's self-identification, reflecting upon these physical images within the imagination: 'My words lick around/ cobbled quays'.¹ In 'Viking Dublin: Trial

¹ Antony Easthope argues that Heaney is part of 'the dominant English [poetic] tradition' which is 'empiricist' (1997, 21). This tradition, he proposes, 'affirms (1) that the subject is coherent and

Pieces' a slippage between words, material objects and the speaker's imagination occurs. The speaker, as viewer, renders a personal signification of objects, however, by linking this to Irish historical artefacts, he attempts to project this signification beyond himself, seeking to embody a communal meaning and identity. His potential correlation of himself and his community is disrupted as it is evoked because, rendering it primarily through language, the text implicates ideological premises behind his desire for communality. From *North*, then, the use of objects enunciates a desire to find within them an historical and communal identification. However, the process of textualising objects reinforces a gulf between representation and reality. Rather than ever fulfilling a desire for commonality, these texts foreground their speakers' desire as ideologically premised. Whilst evoking a desire for transubstantiation, these objects remain physical, disclosing themselves to be hosts of their speakers' impotent desire for commonality, rather than hosts of spiritual proportions.

An ambivalence within the relationship between speaker, objects and text is foregrounded by the similes in the first poem of the 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces' sequence. The poem opens with a description of a trial-piece, ambiguous in itself 'It could be a jaw-bone/ or a rib [...] a small outline/ was incised'. Because the speaker is unsure exactly what this trial-piece is, metaphorical explanations are used to evoke it. Initially, it is likened to an image of a child writing:

Like a child's tongue
following the toils

of his calligraphy,

autonomous, (2) that discourse is in principle transparent, and (3) that the real can be experienced directly' (1997, 22). '[S]ubject and object are joined reciprocally, so that the English subject and the English real correspond to each other' (1997, 21). My reading of Heaney opposes this: rather than affirming a coherent and autonomous subject, objects in Heaney's poetry reflect desires which cannot be fulfilled, and thus foreground a lack within the speakers themselves.

By appropriating an image which projects the action of inscription to imagine an inscribed object, Heaney blurs a division between the child, his writing and the trial-piece. The object, through metaphor, is therefore fused with this act of writing. Though the text never explicitly states it, this forges a link between the act of inscription and the object itself. As the child's tongue follows and mimics a line inscribed upon the bone, the possibility of reading the child as the object's creator is foregrounded:

the line amazes itself,

eluding the hand

that fed it,

In 'III' this notion is explicated: 'this trial piece/ incised by a child'. Thus, where in 'I' the child was a metaphor, in 'III' he actively produces a trial piece. This movement occurs throughout the sequence. As the images belong primarily to the poem itself they have no material base; so images slip into and out of each other and move from descriptive metaphors to animated participants in the poem's action. Descriptions of objects mutate, and in that act they produce new contexts and interactions. In 'II', for instance, an ambiguous image of a carved bone carried over from 'I' begins to mutate. The speaker notes a need to exhibit artefacts as small as this through a magnifying glass:

so that the nostril
is a migrant prow
sniffing the Liffey,

swanning it up to the ford,
disassembling itself
in antler combs, bone pins
coins, weights, scale-pins

The idea of the bone 'disassembling' itself, which entails connotations of creating false appearances and concealing itself through pretence, mirrors the textual consequences of the poem sequence. 'III' completes the bone's mutation and the ship metaphorically imagined in 'II' is animated: 'the keel stuck fast/ in the slip of the bank'. What was in 'II' a way of imagining and objectifying the bone becomes the central subject of the first half of 'III'. In this way metaphors and objects conflate and continually subvert any materiality on which the poem is based. This punctures any interpretations that try to free the poem from an emphasis on its own textuality. David Lloyd makes a similar point when he proposes that the title 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces' 'suggests that the poem's six parts are trial pieces made of words' (in Malloy & Carey 1996, 85).

This point is foregrounded by the final stanza of 'III' and the opening one of 'IV':

and for this trial piece
incised by a child,
a longship, a buoyant
migrant line.

IV

That enters my longhand,
turns cursive, unscarfing
a zoomorphic wake,
a worm of thought

'IV' is the poem within 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces' which most explicitly explores these (material) objects' textual basis and the influence of the speaker on this basis. By foregrounding a mutation of the 'buoyant/ migrant line' into a text ('turns cursive'), 'IV' reminds the reader that the previous images were also

textual. By conflating 'zoomorphic' and 'thought' in IV's opening stanza to describe the same experience, the poem suggests that the act of writing is an imitation of the living world.² In this way, the text attempts to objectify and alter the world it imagines.

Whilst playing with an ambiguous gap between consciousness and the 'airy nothing' (Docherty 1996a, 33) of textuality which the speakers and subjects of literature inhabit, 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces' alludes to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and to Synge's *Jimmy Farrell*.³ The speaker conflates himself with Hamlet, 'I am Hamlet'. This foregrounds Hamlet's meditative vacillations, 'coming to consciousness/ by jumping in graves,/ dithering, blathering', and links them to 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces'.⁴ Hamlet's meditation upon his potential action, and the centrality of his inaction, has often been recognised as the source of *Hamlet's* tragedy.⁵ In Heaney's poetry, this issue of inaction recurs and is a central angst for many of his speakers. As 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces' demonstrates, poetry is bound to its own textual form and rather than engendering action it mutates action into text. As Heaney's work highlights however, the relationship between language and action is complex and

² Another example of this is in 'Hailstones' (1987, 14) where the speaker describes making a ball out of hailstones:

just as I make this now
out of the melt of the real thing
smarting into its absence.

³ Jimmy Farrell, a minor character in J.M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (1907), claims that the body of a murdered father, accidentally dug up, would be mistaken by the authorities for 'an old Dane, maybe, was drowned in the flood [...] Did you ever hear tell of the skulls they have in the city of Dublin[?]' (1995, 130). The allusion to Farrell in 'VI' points back to the previous allusion to Hamlet, linking both through tensions caused in each play by the supposed murder of a father.

⁴ Charles O'Neill sees Heaney's use of *Hamlet* - 'the premier revenge tragedy' - in 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces' as 'not only a personal correlative but also a national one: Northern Ireland today is another Denmark, a kingdom poisoned by violence and revenge' (in Malloy & Carey 1996, 96). Whilst this remains an important point, the central significance of this correlation in Heaney's work is not a national echo, but a personal experience *within* a national context.

⁵ 'Our mental faculties make us into spiritual beings, yet we cannot escape the mortality of the body. This is Hamlet's dilemma - the tragic condition - bound within a nutshell' (Bate 2001, 181). Bate's summation seems particularly apt for Heaney's appropriation of Hamlet. Heaney's textual preoccupation often focuses on tensions between his mental and spiritual desires for conflict and his physical passivity; body and mind are thus irreconcilable.

paradoxical, for it is through words, and explorations possible in the conflation of words and images, that speakers experience the world:

I am Hamlet the Dane,
skull-handler, parablist,
smeller of rot

in the state, infused
with its poisons,
pinioned by ghosts
and affections,

murders and pieties,
coming to consciousness
by jumping in graves,
dithering, blathering.

Realisation and consciousness occur within language, but action must displace text in order to engender itself.

In 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces', the spectrum of the reader's gaze shifts through images of the artefact, ship, text, and finally returns to the speaker. Rather than describing and referring to objects-in-themselves, all objects and images ultimately signify the speaker who imaginatively constitutes them as text:

My words lick around
cobble quays, go hunting
lightly as pampooties
over the skull-capped ground.

This last stanza echoes the last lines of T.S. Eliot's 'Preludes' (1917/1974, 23):

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.

In 'Preludes', the speaker imagines wrapping himself around a cityscape (evoked through the sequence) and the two become inseparably wrought within the text. By foregrounding a slippage between the speaker who reiterates this space and the space which he reiterates, Eliot ensures that the two are interlocked. Rather than being a direct representation, any transmission of material culture in literature is a transmutation of subject and object positions. The objects and landscapes of poetry are never 'things founded clean on their own shapes' (Heaney 1969, 9), instead they are objects imagined and translated through the person who voices them and the text which articulates them.

As in many of Heaney's poems, the speaker of 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces' uses various personal pronouns. At times his voice is apparently objective, for instance in 'I' and 'II' where he seems to observe action. Thereafter, he moves between plural (in 'III' and 'V') and first person singular pronouns (in 'IV', 'V' and 'VI'). This disrupts boundaries between the speaker, his community and the reader, and suggests the speaker's desire to represent a community. When, in 'V', the speaker calls upon the reader-community ('Come fly with me,/ come sniff the wind') and summons a communal ancestry, it is not to remember the past in its own right, but to render an anamnestic past as a permanent symbol in the present:

Old fathers, be with us.
Old cunning assessors
of feuds and of sites
for ambush or town.

Describing the viewing of artefacts as a moment of self-revelation transfers them into symbols of the self rather than materials of an historical moment.⁶ By encoding this moment of self-revelation with a calling to a specific ancestry, heralded by using first person plurals, Heaney projects an attempted communal revelation which is at once inclusive and exclusive. The use of personal plurals is, as noted in reference to Eugene O'Brien's work, a fundamentally significant aspect of nationalism.⁷

Žižek's Lacanian psychoanalytic theory emphasises the role of objects as a material basis for our sense of reality. It is crucial, he proposes, that 'the real that serves as support of our symbolic reality must appear to be *found* and not *produced*' (1991, 32):

while it is true that any object can occupy the empty place of the Thing it can do so only by means of the illusion that it was always already there, i.e., that it was not placed there by us but *found there as an 'answer of the real'*. Although any object can function as the object-cause of desire - insofar as the power of fascination it exerts is not its immediate property but results from the place it occupies in the structure - we must, by structural necessity, fall prey to the illusion that the power of fascination belongs to the object as such (1991, 33).

Evoking a communal significance in many of his artefact poems, Heaney points toward a desire to enunciate a sense of belonging to a specific community. These artefacts construct for Heaney a material sense of origin. Abstracted from their exchange value, museum exhibits are collected and displayed in groups and are implicitly viewed as a community's heritage. The tautology

⁶ In 'Violence and the Sacred in Seamus Heaney's *North*' Charles O'Neill proposes that this alludes to Stephen Dedalus's invocation at the close of *A Portrait of the Artist*: 'Old father, old artificer' (in Malloy & Carey 1996, 95).

⁷ See my discussion of 'Casualty' in 'Troubled Bodies', pages 192-196.

which Heaney's use of objects implies is thus communal. However, Heaney's artefacts are constructed out of his own imagination, because '[a]rtefacts do not represent the past, they are not a property of the past. Artefacts signify' (Shanks & Tilley 1987, 60). And the signification of artefacts is constructed or, in Žižek's terms, produced as part of the symbolic order which creates senses of belonging and physically embodies our desires. If Heaney finds in these objects an origin or truth, it is - with some degree of irony - a truth which legitimates the present, which is also a legitimation of himself in the present.⁸ In his fascination with the past, he finds a (collective) belonging for himself in the present.⁹ Moreover, whilst a variety of personal pronouns are used, the recurrence of one overriding voice suggests that there is one dominant speaker controlling the text which undermines the communal totalisation that 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces' seeks.¹⁰ The poem renders a series of material objects which, reflecting the speaker rather than themselves, are translated into a subjective mutation of material culture, and thus into a mutation of the identity of the culture invoked.

The poem's eventual return to individuation, which renders the possibility of a communal point of view redundant, is mirrored in a relationship between text and reader. Instead of rendering a communal narrative, the relationship remains

⁸ In *Social Theory and Archaeology*, Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley place special emphasis on the relationship between past and present:

[n]o text is a transparent medium expressing an essential meaning of the past. Writing occurs in the present, it is a material means of production. As a social practice it is a threading together of the social, historical, linguistic and personal. There is no escape from this nexus. Archaeology is, then, immediately theoretical, social, political and autobiographical (1987, 25-26).

⁹ Brian Friel's play *Volunteers*, first performed in 1975, and dedicated to Heaney, echoes several themes of *North*, and of 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces' in particular. For instance, a trial piece is found which has a boat carved on it (1979, 35). Keeney, one of the volunteers, asks the question 'was Hamlet really mad?' (1979,66) throughout the play. Parodying an archaeologist, midway through *Volunteers*, Keeney says: 'the more we learn about our ancestors [...] the more we discover about ourselves' (1979, 32).

¹⁰ At the same moment as Heaney creates this image of totalisation, he undermines it. Through a textual emphasis on Vikings, the poem registers - if only by implication - a polyvocal influence on Irish culture. Richard Kirkland observes the significance of multiplicity in Northern Ireland: '[h]ere, as elsewhere, there is no such thing as a truly nativist tradition; even labelling it as such indicates a dialectical relationship with other cultural forces that continually remake the univocal and uni-accentual traditions with which they are in perceived opposition' (1996, 11).

trapped within a circular and circulating movement between objects imagined, the speaker, the text rendered and the reader. In the end, the mirror of a material object only extends to an immediate viewer. The process of communal possession attempted by the speaker thus remains at the level of desire. The structure of reciprocity ruptures the potential of one person actually projecting a communal act of possession. As the replication of each object will always be a false one, a communality rendered through an individual,¹¹ the speaker's narcissistic projection overflows its possibility and fails to engender the self to which it alludes.¹²

An unacknowledged desire for meaning to be present within objects themselves occurs in Heaney's early poems. As this analysis has shown, meaning is actually projected onto objects by speakers who distance objects from their functioning signification and imagine within them elevated meanings of communal identification. The objects in Heaney's poems up to and including those in *North* are emptied of their signification and become hosts for meanings which speakers provide. Such productions of meaning are not explicitly rendered in these poems themselves. In opposition to this, a subtler recognition of a relationship between meaning and speakers develops in *Station Island*.

In 'Shelf Life' (1984a, 21) from *Station Island*, an infusion of objects with the speaker's subjectivity is foregrounded in the first line of 'Granite Chip': 'Houndstooth stone. Aberdeen of the mind'.¹³ The stone is personified by and

¹¹ Richard Kirkland sees the relationship between individuality and a communal consciousness as 'the central dilemma to which Heaney's poetry has continually addressed itself': 'Heaney's fundamentally bourgeois poetic has chosen to represent that integration as a constant crisis of interest between the urge to full individuation and the desire for assimilation' (1996, 150). What I hope to show is that the desire for assimilation is always undermined and folded back in the speaker's individuality. Thus whilst this desire persists it is never fulfilled: language denies Heaney's poetry the right to escape this.

¹² This follows Baudrillard, who argues that 'no object ever opposes the extension of the process of narcissistic projection to an unlimited number of other objects' (1996, 90-91).

¹³ Michael Parker points out that the stone is a piece of Martello Tower, built in 1804 by the British as a defence against French invasion (1993, 187).

for the speaker; imagined as instructive to his 'complaisant pith', he projects onto an inanimate object the power of a mentor:

*Come to me, it says
all you who labour and are burdened, I
will not refresh you. And it adds, Seize
the day. And, You can take me or leave me.*

An explicit tension is articulated here. The speaker projects the stone as emanating a calling. However, as articulated by the personified stone, this calling is not one which will satiate the hearer ('*I will not refresh you*'). In the second poem of the sequence this tension is reproduced. In '*Old Smoothing Iron*' it is not the woman observed but her movement which is given a voice:

To work, her dumb lunge says,
is to move a certain mass

through a certain distance,
is to pull your weight and feel
exact and equal to it.
Feel dragged upon. And buoyant.

The woman is reified. It is the movement of her body which is emphasised and filled with subjectivity ('to pull your weight and feel/ exact and equal to it'). The text conflates an opposition between oppression and freedom by describing this movement as embodying a physical paradox - 'Feel dragged upon. And buoyant'.¹⁴

¹⁴ Robert Welch argues that *Station Island* 'is a volume about the search for freedom, but freedom is now so abused a word as almost to be meaningless' (in Andrews 1992a, 173).

It is not until the third poem that the speaker offers us a direct insight into his consciousness. Associative memory shifts the text from a discourse on pewter to a meditation on the significance of these objects in the speaker's mind:

Glimmerings are what the soul's composed of.
Fogged-up challenges, far conscience-glitters
and hang-dog, half-truth earnestness of true love.
And a whole late-flooding thaw of ancestors.

By shifting directly into a self-reflexive monologue, the speaker explicitly suggests that the poem's objects and images are reflections of his drives and desires. In doing so, it casts a shadow across the whole poem-sequence that suggests it is implicitly political. Consequently, the threat of insubstantiality evoked in '*Iron Spike*', which follows, becomes a metaphorical vehicle to express a social anxiety.

In '*Iron Spike*' the speaker describes finding a 'rusted spike' which had previously held down a railway sleeper. An erratic temporal structure problematises the poem's stability. This mirrors the spike which, having been displaced, loses its functional signification and is itself unstable. Consequently, the displaced object is open to appropriation. The potential for appropriation is enacted in the text itself as the speaker describes finding the spike as a revelation of the self. This self-revelation is imagined as the sleeper is removed from grass:

I felt I had come on myself

in the grassy silent path
where I drew the iron like a thorn
or a word I had thought my own
out of a stranger's mouth.

Rather than erasing the object's instability in *'Iron Spike*, this speaker's revelation is actually part of an indeterminacy evoked through the object's dispossession:

What guarantees things in keeping
 if a railway can be lifted
 like a long briar out of ditch growth?
 I felt I had come on myself

The potential revelatory moment ('I felt I had come on myself') projects onto the object's instability a point of harmony. However, this is undermined by an ambiguity imposed through the metaphorical connection between this moment and the stranger's words in the speaker's voice. Through the self-revelation and the plucking of 'a word I had thought my own/ out of a stranger's mouth', the text emphasises an embodiment of the speaker in objects throughout the sequence. Moreover, an ambiguity between his own words and those of a stranger suggests that self-revelation entails a recognition of the self's submersion within the other's discourse.

A religious register apparent in *'Old Smoothing Iron'* is reintroduced in the penultimate poem, *'Stone from Delphi'*. It is typographically emphatic, being the only single stanza poem of the sequence, half of which is italicised. This formal emphasis is also grammatically demarcated by a shift in tense. Unlike the rest of the sequence (which uses a present tense), this poem is rendered in a future tense. This points towards implications inherent in the titular reference to Delphi - the Greek site of the oracle of Apollo:

To be carried back to the shrine some dawn
 when the sea spreads its far sun-crops to the south
 and I make a morning offering again:

The promise of returning the stone as an offering re-inscribes it as an object which signifies the speaker's (potential) invocation:

*that I may escape the miasma of spilled blood,
govern the tongue, fear hybris, fear the god
until he speaks in my untrammelled mouth.*

Whilst '*the miasma of spilled blood*' foregrounds the speaker's present experience as oppressive and polluting, the potential resistance offered transcends humanity through an enunciation of grace. The image of concorporeality in which 'the god' speaks through the speaker's voice is explicated as a possibility which moves the speaker from constraint to freedom (un-trammelled). However, this shift from oppression to freedom is problematised.

The concorporeality imagined in '*Stone from Delphi*' echoes the preceding poem's self-revelation. As noted, that revelation is undermined and the speaker falls into a fearful uncertainty ending the poem with unanswered questions. The uncertainty posited in '*Stone from Delphi*' through the indefiniteness of '*may*' is subsequently attached to a list of possible actions - escaping the miasma of blood, governing the tongue, fearing hybris and fearing the god. Consequently, the significance of the poem's close is thrown into ambiguity. Does the concorporeality of god in speaker undo constraints that force the speaker to govern his tongue and fear hybris? Or, do these actions come with the conflation of god and speaker, as part of his escape? Whilst most images preceding this poem shift objects-in-themselves into aspects of the speaker's consciousness, the desire to '*escape the miasma of spilled blood*' remains as a representation of corporeality. And, because that miasma is never explicated, it is open and ambiguous.

'A *Snowshoe*' returns to the present and to a containment of objects in the speaker's mind: 'The loop of a snowshoe hangs on a wall/ in my head, in a room that is drift-still'. The room is described in images related to writing: 'it is like a brushed longhand character,/ a hieroglyph for all the realms of whisper'. Thus, whilst being primarily a textual representation, the room is represented metaphorically as writing, this mirrors the speaker's subsequent action, 'Then I sat there writing, imagining in silence/ sounds like love sounds after long abstinence'. In turn, this harmonious relationship between writer, writing and space is problematised when the speaker implicitly mirrors the snowy landscape outside: 'Now I sit blank as gradual morning brightens/ its distancing, inviolate expanse'. The text suggests that the speaker's writing is made possible by a snowshoe in his mind; it is through its (imagined) disappearance that the speaker becomes 'blank'. This loss once more marks a textual problematization of an opposition between freedom and oppression. The closing lines of 'A *Snowshoe*' present the landscape as a space free from violation, however - like the 'untrammelled mouth' of 'Stone from Delphi' - this is a negative-positive: in-violate. This freedom is imagined through the speaker's point of view as 'distancing', leaving the speaker 'blank' and thus reduced to a degree-zero.

As a complete text, this sequence projects and problematises a relationship between freedom and oppression. If the speaker inevitably projects aspects of himself and his emotions onto objects, then tensions established in 'Shelf Life' around relationships between objects and the speaker can be read as enunciating a relationship between the speaker and his social context. However, a movement between freedom and oppression remains as an on-going instability in the text and thus at the heart of the speaker's relationship to his social context. The haunting implication which closes 'Shelf Life' is that the speaker's creativity comes not from love or freedom, but from its 'long abstinence'.

The stone of 'Sandstone Keepsake' (1984a, 20) is explicitly filled with meaning generated by the speaker. Its symbolic function becomes so intricately linked to the speaker's vision of his social structure that it assumes a sublime quality. Poems such as 'Sandstone Keepsake' demonstrate the speaker producing meaning through objects, and emphasise how this meaning is tied up with desires that belong to him. They therefore foreground a lack of meaning in the objects themselves. Rather than engendering a moment of transcendence they show how the speaker, generating meaning for the object, foregrounds a circulating desire for an impossible object. This can be understood with reference to some of the terms used in Lacanian psychoanalysis.¹⁵

Following Lacan, Žižek describes the sublime quality of an object as 'an effect on its position in the fantasy space', whilst the object is materially unchanged, its meaning is elevated and it:

undergoes a kind of transubstantiation and starts to function, in the symbolic economy of the subject, as an embodiment of the impossible Thing i.e., as a materialised Nothingness. This is why the sublime object presents the paradox of an object that is able to subsist only in shadow, in an intermediary, half-born state, as something latent, implicit, evoked: as soon as we try to cast away the shadow to reveal the substance, the object itself dissolves; all that remains is the dross of the common object (1991, 83-84).

Where the representation of objects has previously emphasised a narcissistic and essentially impotent desire to render and evoke a communal subject, 'Sandstone Keepsake' and 'Shelf Life' represent ordinary objects that are

¹⁵ Although these analyses are influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis they do not adhere to any rubric as such. Much of Lacan's work focuses on sexuality and the unconscious (Evans 1996, 36). This analysis has appropriated his theories on objects mediating roles vis-à-vis people and desire to discuss various social and spiritual desires in Heaney's speakers.

elevated above their material status to evoke communal, subjective and political desires. They are therefore elevated to a level which aspires sublimity as speakers attempt to alter and transcend the material and representative conditions of their enunciations. However, there is always a shortfall. The structural conditions of existence effectively deny each speaker the ability to create, even imaginatively, this transubstantiation.

Objects, then, become material representatives of particular desires (in 'Viking Dublin' this is the desire for a communal voice, in 'Sandstone Keepsake' it is for political subversion), and because these desires are in effect unachievable, the signification of the objects is elevated to the status of the sublime. It is therefore precisely, yet paradoxically, for this reason that Heaney's sublime objects are always marked by their failure to move beyond secularity and the speakers are destined to circumnavigate the impossible goal of their desire. By projecting their desires through objects, these speakers ultimately display the lack of sublime possibility in themselves. Žižek says that the sublime object always remains latent. This is not the case in Heaney's poetry. Through a growing concern with a dialectic between speaker and object, tensions between passive and active forces (imagined through objects) become movements within the speakers themselves. They are, then, tensions between each speaker and the objects onto which they transfer their desires. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the unnameable Thing is outside language and is, consequently, impossible to grasp (Evans, 205). In Heaney, the impossible Thing that objects symbolise is outside language, and is impossible to grasp because it is a desire to transubstantiate words into actions. Rather than changing the substance of their textual enunciations, they change the signification of objects evoked.

In 'Sandstone Keepsake' the speaker's physical passivity and imaginative activity, as well as his textual inscription of these, projects onto the stone politicised desire. Initially a tension between a material image of the stone and

the speaker's meditation of it is established. The opening stanza presents an object in the speaker's present:

It is a kind of chalky russet
solidified gourd, sedimentary
and so reliably dense and bricky
I often clasp it and throw it from hand to hand.

In the second stanza there is a shift in tense and temporality in which the speaker reflects upon the evening he 'lifted it'. This shift differentiates the object's appearance in the narrated moment from the moment of narration. When the speaker first handled it 'It was ruddier, with an underwater/ hint of contusion'. Now, however, its 'chalky russet' appearance pales by comparison. Describing the stone as it was found prefigures the blood imagery of Dante's Phlegethon; as Michael Parker notes, 'the stone is marked with the colour of blood and guilt' (1993,187). As it is imagined in the poem's present it is dried out and subdued. A diffusion of the stone's symbolic potential is suggested through this differentiation. The change from the vibrancy of the wet stone to the passive chalkiness of the 'solidified gourd' is demarcated by an implied movement as the first stanza ends: 'I often clasp it and throw it hand to hand'. Whilst this image signals a time shift which occurs in the second stanza from the moment of narration to the narrated moment, the movement itself is evocative of violent and subversive desire.¹⁶

The reader views the stone's characteristics anachronistically. So a reversal occurs in which it is the stone's present appearance and the speaker's present attitude which are latent in the potentiality of the wet stone. Possible subversive

¹⁶ Mary Kinzie suggests this when she argues 'that the narrator may yet have in him the aim and thrust of revolt' (1988,35). Parker sums up the significance of the geographical location of the Inishowen beach, which 'is on the "Free State" side of the Foyle estuary; across the water, across the border, lies Magilligan Point, the site of an internment camp set up by the British in 1971' (1993, 187).

action is imagined in the wet stone. Literary allusions to Dante's Phlegethon, and also to Guy de Montfort, extend this. In Dante's *Inferno*, Phlegethon is 'the river of blood that boils the souls/ of those who through their violence injured others' in the seventh circle of Hell (trans. Musa, 1984, Canto XII, ll. 47-48). It is in Phlegethon that Dante sees Guy de Montfort. de Montfort murdered Prince Henry, Edward I of England's cousin, during a church Mass in 1272 to avenge the death of his father at the hands of Edward. Henry's heart was placed in a casket on London Bridge where it was said to continue dripping blood; '[t]he dripping blood signifies that the murder has not yet been avenged' (Musa in Dante, 1984, 184). Despite the undertones of revenge and violence these allusions bring to the poem, the potential subversion is always already preceded by knowledge of the stone's future state.

At the moment the speaker imagines himself in the role of avenging murderer, he therefore negates that possibility:

A stone from Phlegethon,
 bloodied on the bed of hell's hot river?
 Evening frost and the salt water

made my hand smoke, as if I'd plucked the heart
 that damned Guy de Montfort to the boiling flood -
but not really, though I remembered
 his victim's heart in its casket, long venerated (my emphasis).

In these stanzas a vacillation between a desire for action and the reality of the speaker's obeisance is established.¹⁷ The ambivalence between passivity and

¹⁷ Donald Davie argues that in *Station Island* Heaney registers the pressure for him to make a political stance regarding the Troubles, noting that we see 'Heaney recognizing the legitimacy or at least the plausibility of this demand upon him, and confessing - now ashamedly, now defiantly - how impossible it was for him to meet it' (1989, 247).

potential action is furthered because it is in the present moment that the speaker, through simile, points to Guy de Montfort.

Once again, an anachronistic presentation problematises the possibilities that the Dantean allusion held for action. By undercutting the simile with 'but not really', the speaker distances the narrated moment from de Montfort's revenge. This is furthered by a movement in the speaker's imaginings from the act of vengeance to the symbol of an unavenged murder. However, at the same moment as 'but not really' throws the previous allusion into question, it also points towards the text's different temporalities: 'but not really, though I remembered/ his victim's heart in its casket, long venerated.' Here, the speaker posits himself in opposition to de Montfort by foregrounding his memory at the narrated moment as being with the victim's revered heart.

Echoing the opening stanza's vacillation between potential action and passivity, these stanzas prefigure the present in the past. By fusing the speaker and object as they were on the beach (the narrated moment) with them as they are in the present of the poem (the moment of narration), the text allows vacillations and connotations of the latter to be realised in the former. Thus, whilst foregrounding the non-threatening nature of the speaker as imagined through the binoculars, seeing 'a silhouette not worth bothering about', the text constantly changes position to suggest that the comfort of this image is manifestly threatened by its opposition in the present. However, this is inverted to undermine the speaker's present desire as essentially impotent, being announced as it is in the present in relation to a past event .

These contrary movements between different times and differing emotional states are reflected and fully realised in the ambivalent use of veneration. This term appears firstly in relation to the speaker's walk along the beach when, not thinking about de Montfort, he 'remembered/ his victim's heart in its casket, long

venerated'. Subsequently it appears again, and is the last word of the poem. The speaker uses it to describe himself as seen through the men watching him:

a silhouette not worth bothering about,
out for the evening in scarf and waders
and not about to set times wrong or right,
stooping along, one of the venerators.

At the moment of narration the speaker fantasises about the possibilities of becoming a Guy de Montfort. However, this critiques his own inactivity and his complicity with the men behind the binoculars. The connotations of the final statement 'one of the venerators' problematises implications of reverence pointed to in relation to Henry's heart ('long venerated'). At the last moment, the term opens up to include its less common meaning to pay honour to something by an act of obeisance (*OED*).¹⁸ Thus the final line channels the poem's subversive energy into a self-reflexive critique.

In his analysis of the panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that, as a structural form, watch-towers implicate the observed body as a mediator of the observer's power:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (1991, 202-203).

¹⁸ Talking about the 'Station Island' sequence, Catherine Byron suggests that the question of passivity repeats itself throughout the poem: '[h]ow far is it right and just to be passive in a time and a place like Ireland in the eighties? To what extent is that passivity a part of the long history of being a subject race[?]' (1992, 69). Moreover, this dilemma goes beyond 'Station Island', and is in fact a central preoccupation of the whole of *Station Island*.

In the act of disregarding him, the men in the watch-tower imply the speaker's complicity with them. Moving the stone from hand to hand threatens this complicity, but this is ultimately retrospective. The wet stone remains clasped in the speaker's hand during the narrated moment and, with that stasis, the speaker venerates the watch-tower's role. 'Sandstone Keepsake' is, then, ultimately political as a self-referential critique. Potential violence is only inscribed onto the scene through a disjunction between the moment of narration and the narrated moment. The final veneration is realised because in the text itself the speaker's complicity at the narrated moment is set in tension with his potential subversion of this in the moment of narration. By positing Guy de Montfort as the character from Dante's *Inferno* rather than the historical figure (through the allusion to Phlegethon), the speaker ironises his own potential subversion as, in the end, distanced from a physical and grounded world, present only in his 'free state of image and allusion'.

'Weighing In' (1996, 17), collected in *The Spirit Level*, adopts a motif of a weighbridge as a vehicle to explore its speaker's anxieties about balances between active and passive forces within society, himself and Christ. The poem opens with a focus on one weight: 'A solid iron/ Unit of negation':

Yet balance it

Against another one placed on a weighbridge -

On a well-adjusted, freshly greased weighbridge -

And everything trembled, flowed with give and take.

The relationship between weights upon a weighbridge is seen here to be symbiotic: each depends upon the other to cause and perpetuate an equilibrium. This is transferred into an image of society:

And this is all the good tidings amount to:
 This principle of bearing, bearing up
 And bearing out, just having to

Balance the intolerable in others
 Against our own, having to abide
 Whatever we settled for and settled into

Against our better judgement.

What follows problematises the easiness of this analogy, and points towards a complexity expounded in the poem's second half:

Passive

Suffering makes the world go round.
 Peace on earth, men of good will, all that

Holds good only as long as the balance holds,
 The scales ride steady and the angels' strain
 Prolongs itself at an unearthly pitch.

Having initially foregrounded balance as a matter of physics, the speaker distances himself from this when, adopting a Christian rhetoric (peace on earth, good will to all men), he begins to address social relations. By conflating *Cabaret's* 'Money Makes the World Go Round' with an image that evokes Christ, the phrase 'Passive/ Suffering makes the world go round', prefigures the poem's following sections. Moreover, it points to a reality that undermines a simplified comparison with a weighbridge's give and take - if money makes the world go round, it does so at the expense of millions who silently suffer daily. By suggesting, in 'the angels' strain', that omnipotent control is losing its grasp of

this world, the text repeats its profanation of Christian hope. Integrating an allusion to biblical events that precede Christ's crucifixion into the speaker's thoughts, the subsequent section echoes such problematic juxtapositions of Christian imagery and a complex reality:

To refuse the other cheek. To cast the stone.

Not to do so some time, not to break with

The obedient one you hurt yourself into

Is to fail the hurt, the self, the ingrown rule.

Prophesy who struck thee! When soldiers mocked

Blindfolded Jesus and he didn't strike back

They were neither shamed nor edified, although

Something was made manifest - the power

Of power not exercised, of hope inferred

By the powerless forever. Still, for Jesus' sake,

Do me a favour, would you, just this once?

Prophesy, give scandal, cast the stone.

This focuses on an anxiety Heaney has explicitly articulated since *North*: a pull between a desire for passivity and a desire for poetry actively to affect Northern Ireland's Troubles.¹⁹ The Christian allusion echoes St Luke's Gospel:

And the men that held Jesus mocked him and smote *him*. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote thee? (22. 63-64).

¹⁹ See for example, 'Punishment' (1975a, 31), 'Exposure' (1975a, 66), 'Oysters' (1979, 11), 'An Afterwards' (1979, 44), 'Away from it All' (1984a, 16), 'Station Island' (1984a, 61-94).

An appraisal of the relationship between silence and power is effected through the connotations of this allusion, and the implications of Jesus's passivity. By rendering a moment in which Jesus remains passive at the hands of his torturers (symbols of a political power which will enunciate his death), Heaney points to the potentially subversive nature of a silent body.

In *Formations of Violence*, Feldman explores the 'institutionalization of interrogation-torture procedures' (1991, 110) in Northern Ireland during the 1970s. He argues that:

[t]he performance of torture does not apply power; rather it manufactures it from the 'raw' ingredient of the captive's body. The surface of the body is the stage where the state is made to appear as an effective material force [...] The state (m)others bodies in order to engender itself. The production of bodies - political subjects - is the self-production of the state (1991, 115).

Later he notes that the interrogatee (the narrator) holds within his corporeality, a potential subversion of the state's attempted production of a Foucauldian, docile body:

[the] narrator's capacity to survive is dependent on surrendering his body to the objectifying violence that is inflicted upon it. The body, appropriated as an object of ritual, is divested of any sense of self and invested with the collective meanings it encapsulates for his interrogators. This elementary divestiture of the body, as much as it presages death, also becomes the condition of resistance [...] [t]he self remains at the margins of the body (1991, 119-120).

When Heaney's text describes Jesus blind-folded and tortured it imagines him refusing to be complicit in state action. This contrasts with the speaker of 'Sandstone Keepsake' whose action ensures his own subjection to state control.

By refusing to 'strike back', Jesus refuses violent reciprocity, reinscribing the soldier's blows as rhetorical statements which foreground the state as a mechanism of oppression. In this refusal, Jesus posits himself as sacrifice and martyr: his refusal to become encoded with and within the state distances him from its action. Rather than allowing the state to '(m)other' him, he others himself. Because it encodes a space out-with that dictated by the actions of the state (the soldiers), this is a subversive act.

The question from St Luke's Gospel, 'Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?' is reinscribed in 'Weighing In' as a statement, the reciprocation of which is silence. This implies a connection between Jesus's physical passivity and his refusal of speech which prefigures the questioning of Jesus at the hands of elders, priests and scribes. During this interrogation, Jesus refuses to name himself directly as the Son of God, the act of naming occurs through the mouths of those who condemn him: 'Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth' (Luke 22. 70-71).²⁰ The significance of Christ's silence in 'Weighing In' also alludes to Jesus's adultery parable. When the speaker, in a self-address, repeats the term 'prophecy', the implications posited through an allusion to Jesus and his crucifixion are transferred into the secular world: 'Do me a favour, would you, just this once?/ Prophecy, give scandal, cast the stone'. The repetition of 'Prophecy' is mirrored by a repetition of the cast stone.

Preceding the poem's allusion to Jesus, a desire '[t]o cast the stone' is rendered, but negated:

To refuse the other cheek. To cast the stone.

²⁰ Jesus was understood to be blaspheming when he claimed that 'Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God' (Luke 22. 69).

Not to do so some time, not to break with
The obedient one you hurt yourself into

When this stone image is repeated, the biblical echo, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her' (John 8. 7) is foregrounded because it is surrounded by other explicit biblical allusions. By stating a desire to fight back in such an allusion and refusing to fulfil that desire, the speaker can be read as positing himself into the role adopted for Jesus in this stanza. This is enforced by his self-address 'Prophecy, give scandal, cast the stone', wherein 'Prophecy' can be read as noun or verb. By refusing action, the speaker aligns himself with the silence of Christ, a silence which ultimately separates Jesus from the state's actions and society's representatives; thus the nothingness of silence overcomes the material world.

The allusion to casting the stone has particular resonance here. According to the Gospel of St John, Jesus criticises scribes and Pharisees for bringing an adulteress woman to him and asking whether they should stone her as instructed by Moses and the Ten Commandments:

but what sayest though? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with *his* finger wrote on the ground, *as though he heard them not*. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard *it*, being convicted by *their own* conscience, went out one by one (John 8. 5-9).

Significantly, we are not told what Jesus wrote on the ground - his refusal to offer any acknowledgement of the question of the adulterer's sin evokes and emphasises a powerful opposition between Jesus's authority and that of the Pharisees. However, Gabriel Josipovici raises a significant point about the

close of this chapter. Because the scribes and Pharisees cast stones at him, Jesus takes the place of the adulterous woman (John 8. 59). This, according to Josipovici, demonstrates the point that 'argument alone will not advance the cause of either Jesus or John' (1988, 213).

These three moments alluded to from the Bible reflect a general tendency in Heaney's poetry to explore relationships between silence, speech, ritual deaths and complicity. A tension between speech and action, wrestled with by Heaney throughout his poetry, culminates in the figure and purity of Christ. Jesus's silence produces a disjunction between his body and the events which lead to his crucifixion, thus separating his actions from society's complicity with state power. The more Jesus's body and speech become separated from the body and actions of state and society, the more his symbolic resonance purifies. This transfers guilt, sin and complicity onto the body of society, and therefore furthers the purity of God's sacrifice in relation to it.²¹ Each act of complicity serves to purify Jesus, and, when his body is re-framed as the symbol of Christian redemption, his silence is transformed into 'hope inferred'.²² Jesus's 'power not exercised' is echoed through the history of Christianity in the possibilities it promises 'the powerless' to reach paradise.

When the speaker registers a desire to cast the stone in 'Weighing In', he implicitly points to the Troubles within the structure of Christ's sacrifice. This alters the significance of the stone from (its parabolic use in Christian theology and) its metaphorical use in the first part of the poem. The stone is now filled with a potential desire for physical, violent action. Images of sin and complicity

²¹ It should be remembered, however, that God's purity only exists in this context because of society's sin. Christ's death on the Cross represents a fulfilment of the redemption of a people from the sin of their mortal world, yet the literal fact of the crucifixion is only fulfilled by society's sin (the denial of Jesus as the Son of God). The sin which they are saved from is the sin which allowed them to be saved.

²² Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* argues that the central proclamation of the New Testament is that 'in the body of Jesus Christ God took upon himself the sin of the whole world and bore it' (quoted in Scott 1966, 157).

latent in the casting of the stone encode a potential rupture of the speaker's position. This is explicated:

To refuse the other cheek. To cast the stone.

Not to do so some time, not to break with

The obedient one you hurt yourself into

Is to fail the hurt, the self, the ingrown rule.

Such an ambivalence in the speaker's use of biblical allusion is reinforced when the final section dismantles any potential profit in silence. By denying self-blame ('self-exculpation'), but positing liturgical blame (*'mea culpa'*), the speaker proposes an ambivalence in his, and his society's, relationship with (counter)state power and violence. Indeed, the final line suggests that the speaker no longer reveres Jesus's passive resistance to state power. Returning to the framing metaphor, he imagines that sin is caused by seeking a balance:

Two sides to every question, yes, yes, yes...

[...]

I held back when I should have drawn blood

And that way (*mea culpa*) lost an edge.

A deep mistaken chivalry, old friend.

At this stage only foul play cleans the slate.

The speaker's identification with Christ can be seen, following Žižek's Lacanian terminology, as Heaney's ultimate "phallic" gesture of symbolization' by which he inverts 'his utter impotence into omnipotence, to conceive himself as *radically responsible*' (1991, 29). By identifying himself with the speech (and silence) of Christ, the speaker assumes an impossible position in which his action (or inaction) can redeem the situation of the society he observes. This

gesture of symbolisation is, however, paradoxical. The speaker does not actually assume the role of Christ but momentarily projects himself into that role. In fact, his fantasy projection of omnipotence serves both to foreground his actual impotence and to undercut Christ's role in contemporary society. If 'the angels' strain/ Prolongs itself at an unearthly pitch', then Christ's omnipotence, marked by the power of his passivity is strained by a continuation of real suffering on earth. In *Faith and Violence*, Thomas Merton proposes that Christians can transcend their earthly suffering by embodying the power of Christ when he asserts that 'Christian non-violence and meekness imply a particular understanding of the power of human poverty and powerlessness when they are united with the invisible strength of Christ' (1968, 17). Although Jesus's 'power not exercised' is echoed through the history of Christianity in the possibilities it promises 'the powerless' to reach paradise, this does not alter the reality of human suffering on earth. Thus the purity of Christ's silence, rendered through the speaker's identification with it, is folded into a betrayal, or failure of the self; silence alone 'will not advance the cause' (Josipovici 1988, 213) and both Christ's and the speaker's desire for omnipotence appears to be undermined by their inability to change the society they watch over and address.

10. The End of Art is Peace?

'*The end of art is peace*', originally Coventry Patmore's phrase adopted by Yeats and subsequently by Heaney, comes in the last stanza of 'The Harvest Bow' (1979, 58) from *Field Work*. The year after *Field Work*'s publication, Heaney's first collection of prose, *Preoccupations*, was published. Its title alludes to a prose passage of Yeats's which prefaces *Preoccupations*, and from which Heaney borrowed '*The end of art is peace*'. This passage is from 'Samhain:1905' in *Explorations* and opens with a discussion about Yeats's play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.

In this play, Yeats draws on a tradition of allegorical representations of Ireland as a woman ('[s]ome call me the Poor Old Woman, and there are some that call me Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan' [1902/1997, 26]). Set in 1798, the year of the Irish Rebellion, the play allegorically invokes bloody uprisings. '[T]he strange woman that goes through the country whatever time there's a war or trouble coming' (1902/1997, 20) arrives at the Gillane household and encourages Michael (the son, due to be married on the following day) to help her. Through her descriptions of men that have died for her, she presents blood sacrifice for her love as a rewarding martyrdom: '[i]t is a hard service they take that help me [...] They that have red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake, and for all that, they will think they are well paid' (1902/1997, 26-27). When Michael follows the Old Woman at the play's end, rebirth and renewal are symbolised as the woman is transformed into 'a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen' (1902/1997, 28).

Previous to the part of 'Samhain: 1905' that Heaney quotes, Yeats says that '[w]e all write, if we follow the habit of the country, not for our own delight but for the improvement of our neighbours', and points to Bernard Shaw, George Moore and Oscar Wilde as well as 'such obviously propagandist work as *The*

Spirit of the Nation or a Gaelic league play' (1962, 198). Yeats subsequently differentiates his own writing from such practices, and it is from this point on that Heaney quotes him. Yeats says that *Cathleen ni Houlihan* was not intended to 'affect opinion': 'I had certain emotions about this country, and I gave those emotions expression for my own pleasure'. The passage ends:

If we understand our own minds, and the things that are striving to utter themselves through our minds, we move others, not because we have understood or thought about those others, but because all life has the same root. Coventry Patmore has said, 'The end of art is peace,' and the following of art is little different from the following of religion in the intense preoccupation it demands (1962, 199).

While engendering its intensity, Yeats attempts to pacify his writing in this statement by suggesting he has no public responsibility, and seeks no public cause. By prefacing his prose with this rhetoric, Heaney makes a similar move. Yeats's proposition, and Heaney's appropriation of it in his prose, are, however, problematised by their poetry.

The final stanza of 'The Harvest Bow' begins with Patmore's phrase:

The end of art is peace
 Could be the motto of this frail device
 That I have pinned up on our deal dresser -
 Like a drawn snare
 Slipped lately by the spirit of the corn
 Yet burnished by its passage, and still warm.

In the opening stanza, the text explicitly links the person addressed to the titular object, suggesting that during the process of making the harvest bow they 'implicated the mellowed silence in [them]' into the bow itself. This is mirrored not only in the following stanza through the phrase 'Gleaning the unsaid off the

palpable', but also in the closing image of a remainder or trace of the 'spirit of the corn' in the bow - 'burnished by its passage'. The idea that people fill objects with their own significations is marked in Heaney's transubstantiating poetry. The intervention of '*The end of art is peace*' within this network points to another form of transubstantiation - the possible transformative role of aesthetics.

The phrase '*The end of art is peace*' can be interpreted as holding within it contending meanings. Firstly, it can be read as suggesting that art moves towards and is motivated by an ideal equilibrium embodied in the notion of peace. Contrarily, it can be read as suggesting that conflict breeds art, thus a consequence of peace would be that art stopped being produced. Whilst the phrase assumes a significant position in Heaney's poem (because it is the opening of the text's ending and is foregrounded typographically) it remains relatively ambivalent vis-à-vis the overall content of 'The Harvest Bow'. Thus, one interpretation of the phrase's presence is that, as it remains ambivalent, neither of the meanings can be given priority. The phrase itself affects the text in a way similar to the predominant images carried through it - it leaves behind an inassimilable remainder and marks the text with its trace. Its presence projects onto the textual representation of a piece of art (the harvest bow), which is itself a piece of art (a poem), an ambiguity that prevents a totalised reading. There is no end point onto which the poem can project the peace it evokes. Through this ambiguity, any reading of the text remains partial, forcing into the foreground and problematising a central issue in relation to Heaney's poetry - the social, ideological role of aesthetics.¹

In 'The Man and the Echo' (1939/1974, 203) Yeats postures about the possibility that *Cathleen ni Houlihan* effected action. So, whilst his prose

¹ This is particularly pertinent in *Field Work*, a collection which juxtaposes representations of art and nature with elegies and sectarian violence.

suggests no such intention, his guilty self questioning in later life contradicts him. Paul Muldoon critiques the presumption that art may have, or has had, a direct and fundamental impact on (Irish) history in the 'Wystan' section of '7, Middagh Street' (1987, 36) when he satirises Yeats's posturing:²

'Did that play of mine
send out certain men (*certain men* ?)
the English shot... ?'
the answer is 'Certainly not'.

If Yeats had saved his pencil-lead
would certain men have stayed in bed?

For history's a twisted root
with art its small, translucent fruit

and never the other way round.

As Muldoon suggests, the potentially transformative nature of aesthetics never moves beyond its discursive form, and is thus symbolic rather than explicitly

² In 'To a Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were Proved the People Wanted Pictures' (1914/1974, 54), Yeats rephrases his previous Patmore quote: 'Delight in Art whose end is peace'. Paul Durcan subsequently adopts the phrase in 'The Riding School' (1993, 223). Directly appropriating Yeats's poetic coinage of it, Durcan repetitively uses the phrase in each stanza of 'The Riding School', but ultimately subverts its promise in the final stanza:

My song is nearing the end of its tether;
Lament in art whose end is war;
Opera glasses, helicopters, TV crews;
Our slayings are what's news.
We are taking our curtain call,
Our last encore.
True to our natures
We do not look into the camera lenses
But at one another.
In a gap of oblivion, gone.

active. Such discursive constraint is realised and engaged with by many of Heaney's speakers, who evoke a desire for activity, but speak from a position of passivity. As Henry Hart asserts, 'He seems damned not only by Auden's contention [...] that 'poetry makes nothing happen,' but also damned because he wants poetry to be politically compelling (1992, 179). Thus whilst Yeats may, on some level, believe that poetry makes something happen, Heaney's poetry constantly undermines such possibilities. Latent in each of Heaney's speaker's desire for action lies the guilty awareness that such literary postulations occur at the same moment as corporeal efforts to exact transformations:

*I was stretched between contemplation
of a motionless point
and the command to participate
actively in history.*

'Actively? What do you mean?'
The light at the rim of the sea
is rendered down to a fine
graduation, somewhere between
balance and inanition.

And I still cannot clear my head
of lives in their element
on the cobbled floor of that tank
and the hampered one, out of water,
fortified and bewildered ('Away from it All', 1984a, 16).

'Away from it All', and indeed the whole of *Station Island* never truly escapes the burden of this anxiety. And, as shown in relation to *The Spirit Level's* 'Weighing In', this concern remains at the forefront of Heaney's poetic sensibility. The juxtaposition of such meditations with a recognition of the material reality of

subversive acts, implicated in 'Away from it All', is rendered in the fourth section of 'The Flight Path' (1996, 22) from *The Spirit Level*.

In this section the speaker compares a dream in which an old school mate offers him an active role in the Troubles (to drive a van past a customs post), with an actual meeting between the two in which the speaker is accusingly questioned, but derides the rhetoric of his former friend:

'When, for fuck's sake, are you going to write
Something for us?' 'If I do write something,
Whatever it is, I'll be writing for myself.'

The powerful critique of the text lies, however, in the subsequent juxtaposition:

The gaol walls all those months were smeared with shite.
Out of Long Kesh after his dirty protest
The red eyes were the eyes of Ciaran Nugent
Like something out of Dante's scurfy hell,
Drilling their way through the rhymes and images
Where I too walked behind the righteous Virgil,
As safe as houses and translating freely:
When he had said all this, his eyes rolled
And his teeth, like a dog's teeth clamping round a bone,
Bit into the skull and again took hold.

This reference to the Dirty Protest alludes to a series of 'strategies of resistance' (Feldman 1991, 180) perpetuated by intolerable prison conditions and the government's withdrawal of the Special Category status for paramilitary prisoners (effective from 1975). These protests began with a refusal by many inmates to wear prison clothing, and culminated in the Long Kesh hunger strike of 1981. The reference to the Dirty Protest in 'The Flight Path' is evocatively

rendered, yet the textual symbolisation recognises its own redundancy when faced with such a manifestly corporeal subversion of state power.

Feldman describes the discursive and corporeal significance of this process at length in 'The Breaker's Yard', *Formations of Violence*. He points out the profound effect of the prisoners strategy's materiality:

To understand the symbolic systems of the H-Blocks one has to abandon the notion that political symbolization expresses an objectified reality that is somehow external to or independent of systems of representation. To comprehend the political formation of the H-Blocks it is also necessary to abandon the view of symbolization as a purely expressive activity [...] and to take up the notion of symbolization as an affective and determining material performance that reflexively transforms self and social structure. To refer to symbolic action in the H-Block protest is redundant. In the H-Blocks, symbol and action neither were opposed to each other nor complemented each other; to symbolize in the H-Blocks was to act politically and with finality (1991, 165).

The protest is ultimately uncontainable through literary representation because as a symbol of resistance it assumed an active role which textual symbolisation can only aspire to. Thus, at the moment the protest is rendered knowable in 'The Flight Path', through allusions to Dante's hell, that presumption is undercut by an image which physically destroys literary techniques: Nugent's eyes 'Drilling their way through the rhymes and images'. There is, therefore, a sharp recognition of the irony involved not only in writing poetry during such situations, but also of incorporating such references in poems.³ By making their

³ Desmond Fennell's pamphlet, *Whatever You Say, Say Nothing: Why Seamus Heaney is No. 1*, which criticises Heaney's position throughout, emphatically critiques the fact that his poetry 'says nothing'. 'What good to people is this goodness of poetry?', he asks, 'Has poetry, has the puritan lyric, any intelligible social function, and if so what? How can the poet who "says nothing", and leaves the world in darkness, do good, socially?' (1991, 38). He continues, suggesting that during the Long Kesh hunger strike Heaney 'suffered doubly because he wrote

corporeal existence assume an explicitly discursive and subjective role, the protesters can be seen as having emphasised the *failure of language* as a subversive tool. This is suggested in the text's return to the speaker's position. Whilst these prisoners turn their own bodies into inscriptions of state oppression, the speaker remains in the relative haven of textual representation - 'As safe as houses and translating freely'. The final lines of this poem, which repeat Heaney's translation of Dante's *Inferno* in 'Ugolino' (1979, 61), work to embed the poet in a world of literary allusion rather than politicised action.

The irresolvable tension between passive and active complicity in communal uprising is raised again in 'Mycenae Lookout' (1996, 29) where Heaney conflates many of the predominant motifs developed throughout his poetry. The sequence is split into five parts, each voiced through the palace watchman. The poem is based on mythical events of King Agamemnon and the Trojan war. Heaney foregrounds this firstly in the title which points to Agamemnon's kingdom, and then through the prefatory quotation from Aeschylus's tragedy *Agamemnon*: 'The ox is on my tongue'.

King Agamemnon of Mycenae (Argos) called upon the country to launch a war of revenge against the Trojans after his sister-in-law, Helen, had been taken by Paris, King of Troy. Once Troy had been captured, Cassandra, an oracle and Paris's daughter, was given to Agamemnon's party as a prize of war. On returning home, Agamemnon and Cassandra were murdered by Clytemnestra (Agamemnon's wife) and her lover, Aegisthus (although in Aeschylus's play the murders are carried out by Clytemnestra alone). As Andrew Murphy notes, this story is part of a 'greater extended cycle' of murders which presents a world of

no poem about it' (1991, 38-39). Although 'The Flight Path' had not been written at this time, it - as well many of Heaney's poems from the 1980's - suggest that Fennell's posturing is arbitrary. Whilst Fennell expects poetry to do something, Heaney's work is all too aware of its impotence in the face of real physical suffering.

'atrocities heaped on atrocities in a spiralling cycle of tragic revenge' (2000, 104).⁴ Whilst the poem adopts a mythical structure of atrocity, it points towards the experience of an onlooker on contemporary violence, and 'speaks from the impotent position of the ordinary citizen caught in the crossfire of civil atrocity' (Vendler 1999, 156). Heaney incorporates a voyeuristic tension between eroticism and violence (raised throughout his body poems) whilst explicating the dialogue between active and passive forces encapsulated in the panopticon (as seen in 'Sandstone Keepsake'). By foregrounding a marginal voice, Heaney underpins 'Mycenae Lookout' with a structure of atrocity, but emphasises the experience of observing, from the sidelines, processes of war.⁵

The first poem, '*The Watchman's War*', mirrors the opening address of *Agamemnon* in Aeschylus's play, which is the only point in the tragedy that the watchman speaks. Heaney adopts images and metaphors from this address, but alters their portent to foreground a dystopian vision. For instance, the 'gleam of fire bringing news from Troy' which the Aegisthus's watchman is waiting for becomes 'A victory beacon in an abattoir' in 'Mycenae Lookout', and the fearful sleeplessness of *Agamemnon* becomes a sleep filled with nightmarish images. The poem looks back at the aftermath of Agamemnon's departure for Troy, and focuses on the sentry's experience of the ten years war. The text sets the speaker's feelings in opposition to a wartime camaraderie:

⁴ Aegisthus is Agamemnon's cousin and the only remaining child of Thyestes, whose other children were murdered, baked in a pie and served to Thyestes by Agamemnon's father Atreus. Murphy also points out that part of Clytemnestra's rationale for the murder of Agamemnon was his sacrificial slaying of their daughter (2000, 104) to appease the goddess Artemis, who had sent contrary winds to prevent Agamemnon's troops from sailing to Troy. In Hugh Lloyd-Jones's introduction to his translation of *Agamemnon* he traces the first reference of the friction between Artemis and Agamemnon to a post-Homeric epic, *Cypolia*, in which Agamemnon boasts that his skill in archery is superior to Artemis's. Calchas, a prophet, warns Agamemnon that the contrary winds would not end until his daughter was sacrificed (in Aeschylus 1970, 2).

⁵ Murphy analogises this experience to Heaney's own, '[l]ike Heaney, the lookout is a witness of horrifying events who feels both complicit in their horror and powerless in the face of that horror' (2000, 105).

Some people wept, and not for sorrow - joy
 That the king had armed and upped and sailed for Troy,
 But inside me like struck sound in a gong
 That killing-fest, the life-warp and world-wrong
 It brought to pass, still augured and endured.

Subsequently the speaker shifts into a description of his dreamworld:

I'd dream of blood in bright webs in a ford,
 Of bodies raining down like tattered meat
 On top of me asleep - and me the lookout

Continuity between dream and reality emphasises a tragic nightmare existence that the watchman's consciousness perpetuates. Heaney merges a metaphor of the gong's sound, used to create an impression of the reverberating 'killing-fest' on the speaker's mind, with ox and tongue from the prefatory quotation to complete the dream sequence:

And then the ox would lurch against the gong
 And deaden it and I would feel my tongue
 Like the dropped gangplank of a cattle truck,
 Trampled and rattled, running piss and muck,
 All swimmy-trembly as the lick of fire,
 A victory beacon in an abattoir...

Heaney's prefatory quotation comes at the end of the watchman's speech in Aegisthus's *Agamemnon*. He is imagining his joy at seeing the lighted torch and greeting his returned master:

Well, may it come to pass that the lord of the house
 comes back, and that I clasp his well-loved hand in mine.

But for the rest I am silent; a great ox stands
upon my tongue; but the house itself, if it could find a voice,
could tell the tale most truly; for I of my choice
speak to those who know; but for those who do not know I forget (ll.34-
39).

Referring to the betrayal of Agamemnon through Clytemnestra's adultery, the watchman suggests that he is bound to silence. When echoed in '*The Watchman's War*' this is inscribed with nightmarish images of degradation and butchery in which the speaker is,

Exposed to what I knew, still honour-bound
To concentrate attention out beyond
The city and the border,

'Mycenae Lookout' physically realises Aeschylus's metaphor of the watchman's constraining silence through his dreams, and consequently foregrounds tensions between prophecy and silence, and action and inaction. These tensions are echoed in the second poem of the 'Mycenae Lookout' sequence as well as in *Agamemnon's* Cassandra. After a spell of silence in *Agamemnon*, Cassandra begins to reflect back upon the atrocious history out of which Agamemnon's family has grown. Finally Cassandra prophesies her own and Agamemnon's murder by Clytemnestra and points towards a continuation of reciprocal violence heralded by the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus by Agamemnon's son. By imagining the watchman as surveyor of land and consciousness, Heaney places both watchman and prophet in a symbolic conflation which prefigures their overlapping significance in the following poem.

The second stanza of '*The Watchman's War*' opens with a more positive account of the sentry's world, in which he correlates the horizon's breaking of light with his own regeneration. This is, however, undercut by the 'ten years'

wait that was the war'. His observation of the adultery of Clytemnestra compromises his role as overseer of Agamemnon's kingdom. Consequently, the watchman posits himself within an image of a balancing apparatus, a motif that governs *The Spirit Level*. The image of dawn reappears hereafter altered; now instead of suggesting regeneration, it is projected as a 'raw wound', 'igniting and erupting, bearing down/ Like lava on a fleeing population'. When the speaker repeats the physical description of himself carrying out his sentry duties ('Up on my elbows') in the final lines of the poem, it too is altered. Initially it connotes a sense of meditative stasis, 'Up on my elbows, gazing, biding time', but now it presents the speaker attempting to evade external reality:

Up on my elbows, head back, shutting out
 The agony of Clytemnestra's love-shout
 That rose through the palace like the yell of troops
 Hurlled by King Agamemnon from the ships.

This image, echoing that of the speaker in 'A Northern Hoard' who attempts to insulate himself from the noise of suffering, continues in the aftermath of the war through the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra.

The second poem, '*Cassandra*', places an emphasis on voyeurism and complicity which extends back into '*The Watchman's War*'. Initially the watchman's point of view appears to overlap with Cassandra's, evoking at one and the same time a voyeuristic eroticism and victimisation. The short, clipped verse form, set in three line stanzas mimics the sexually charged and violent atmosphere of the poem's thematic emphasis. The shift in verse structure (which occurs at the start of each new poem in the sequence) points to a possible shift in point of view; this is furthered by an ambiguity of address in the opening stanza. However, in the second stanza a seeing-being seen opposition comes to the fore, returning unambiguously to the watchman's voice:

No such thing
as innocent
bystanding.

Her soiled vest,
her little breasts,
her clipped, devast-

ated, scabbed
punk head,
the char-eyed

famine gawk-
she looked
camp-fucked

and simple.

The opening stanza places both reader and speaker in a dangerous complicity with Cassandra's oppressors which is exacerbated by a focus on her physical presence, moving from her chest to her face, foregrounding (as in 'Punishment' and 'Act of Union') a sexually objectified female. The repetition of 'No such thing/ as innocent' in the eighth stanza reiterates the opening passage's condemnation, once more disrupting the voyeurism of address in a moment of conflated perspectives and self-conscious revelation.

When Cassandra's silence is broken, the sharp accentual emphasis of the stanza form is momentarily waylaid:

And then her Greek

words came,
 a lamb
 at lambing time,

By metaphorically identifying Cassandra with a lamb, Heaney points towards a correlation between Cassandra and Jesus Christ. The poetic moment thus resonates with the mistreatment of Christ, his silence at his condemnation, followed by his prophetic words and his subsequent sacrifice (previously foregrounded in 'Weighing In'). Because of the continuity of intertextual allusion developed in the bog people poems, and sustained throughout Heaney's later works (in poems such as 'The Mud Vision'), the emphasis on complicity in the 'No such thing/ as innocent' passages are infused not only with connotations of Christ's crucifixion, but also with an extended reference to the guilt and complicity of the onlookers of Northern Ireland's Troubles. Implicit allusions to Christ and the Troubles problematise images of sexual desire and rape which extend out of Cassandra's speech:

And a result-

ant shock desire
 in bystanders
 to do it to her

there and then.

Little rent

cunt of their guilt:

The sexual violence of this image forces into play a dialogue between power and desire which highlights the speaker's voyeurism. The significance of these

lines is furthered by its reference to 'bystanders', which points back to the complicity of onlookers in the structures of power that govern victimisation. Their 'shock desire/ to do it to her' is linked to their guilt, creating a structure in which violent sexual desire and power are potentially harnessed as ways to override Cassandra's speech and undermine her prophetic power. This echoes 'Roots' from 'A Northern Hoard' which in turn echoes The Acts of the Apostles (7.51-58). In The Acts of the Apostles, as in 'Cassandra', violence is engendered as a way to deflect the accusation of (prior) violence.

The following poem, '*His Dawn Vision*', sets the speaker's quasi-pastoral vision in tension with the society from which he feels dislocated:

Still isolated in my old disdain
Of cliques who always needed to be seen

And heard as true Argives.

By describing the people as 'cliques' the speaker ironises their desire to be 'seen/ And heard as true Argives' as a superficial expectation. A tension between language and silence, raised in 'Cassandra' and in poems such as 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces' and 'Weighing In', is once more implicated as the speaker suggests that the Argives' discussion cannot be translated out of language to resolve the physical reality of war:

No element that should have carried weight
Out of the grievous distance would translate.
Our war stalled in the pre-articulate.

This stanza is followed by a retreat into a pastoral dawn vision through which the speaker, 'felt the beating of the huge time-wound/ We lived inside.' The speaker's longing for a conflation of his pastoral vision with a cityscape (imagined through the repeated image of 'cities of grass') is finally undercut in

the closing stanza because the structure of violence and the observation of violence perpetuate:

Small crowds of people watching as a man
 Jumped a fresh earth-wall and another ran
 Amorously, it seemed, to strike him down.

'*The Nights*' opens with the watchman describing his priestly-confessional role for both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. His impotence within the power triangle being played out between Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is subsequently forced into the foreground:

The king should have been told,
 but who was there to tell him
 if not myself? I willed them
 to cease and break the hold
 of my cross-purposed silence

The watchman's guilt and 'self-loathing' envelops his inaction; this is mirrored in the subsequent stanzas through his retreat into imagery of and allusion to the gods. The image of the ox from the opening of 'Mycenae Lookout' reappears 'motionless as a herm', and the speaker likens his role to Atlas's with the weight of 'the gods/ and goddesses' love-making 'wholly on his shoulders'. The watchman's conflation of stately duty with his feelings of complicity in Clytemnestra's sexual misconduct echoes the relationship between voyeurism and violence in '*Cassandra*'. This is realised in the fifth stanza of '*The Nights*', when the Trojan horse becomes sexualised:

When the captains in the horse
 felt Helen's hand caress
 its wooden boards and belly

they nearly rode each other.
 But in the end Troy's mothers
 bore their brunt in alley,
 bloodied cot and bed.
 The war put all men mad,
 horned, horsed or roof-posted,
 the boasting and the bested.

The shift from an initial eroticism of Helen's caress of the horse to images of madness is formally marked by alliterative stresses in the latter half of this stanza, which are carried into the final stanza of *'The Nights'*. By identifying the madness of 'all men' with himself ('roof-posted'), the cuckold Agamemnon ('horned') and Aegisthus (the previous analogies of sexual activity and riding are repeated through the term 'horsed'), the speaker once more centralises a correlation of sex, war, violence and the complicity of the observer.

The fifth and final poem of 'Mycenae Lookout' is *'His Reverie of Water'*. The title holds a double allusion. Firstly, it points to the death of Agamemnon described in the final lines of *'The Nights'* in which the speaker assumes his complicity in the King's murder. Rather than projecting himself as an impassive onlooker, the speaker grammatically places himself in an active role:

it was the king I sold.
 I moved beyond bad faith:
 for his bullion bars, his bonus
 was a rope-net and a blood-bath.
 And the peace had come upon us.⁶

⁶ By rhyming 'gold' with 'sold' ('King Agamemnon/ had stamped his weight in gold/ [...] / It was the king I sold.') Heaney alludes to Robert Burns's 'Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation' (Poem 375, 1971, 511), in which the 1707 Act of Union and the Scottish aristocracy are critiqued: "We're bought and sold for English gold". This allusion thus points to the underhand nature of

Secondly, the title can be read as alluding to the *speaker himself*, marking a moment, as in *'His Dawn Vision'*, in which the text detaches its point of view from that of the narrator to explicitly focus on the narrator as a subject. In this sense, the implications of wildness attached to Agamemnon's reverie, and imagined in the fourth stanza, are altered to take on associations of potential joy and daydreaming which mark the speaker's immediacy of focus ('our own') in the closing stanzas of the poem.

The opening of *'His Reverie of Water'* takes a temporal shift backwards to a moment before the king enters his bath. This moment is suspended within the speaker's consciousness:

At Troy, at Athens, what I most clearly
see and nearly smell
is the fresh water.

A filled bath, still unentered
and unstained, waiting behind housewalls

By preceding this scene with that which chronologically follows it, the speaker actively displaces the text's temporal continuity, and foregrounds possibilities held in the (Christian) symbol of 'fresh water', subsequently disrupted by Agamemnon's arrival, 'moaning/ and rocking, splashing, dozing off.' The significance of the temporal complexity of the opening stanzas is furthered by a juxtaposition of past and present verb participles:

A filled bath, still unentered
and unstained, waiting behind housewalls
that the far cries of the butchered on the plain

the creation of the United Kingdom, and to economic and social marginalisation to which Scotland, Ireland and Wales have been subjected within the UK state.

keep dying into, until the hero comes
 surging in incomprehensibly
 to be attended to and be alone,

The text freezes the scene it describes by inscribing it within the present progressive of 'waiting'. However, a reversed chronology of its context, announced in the shift from the 'blood-bath' of *The Nights* to the 'fresh water' bath of the opening stanza of *His Reverie of Water*, fills the latter with connotations of its future state. The description of the bath as 'still unentered/and unstained' serves to emphasise this formal and grammatical play on tense and temporality, negating and inscribing the bath's future state onto its initially tranquil one ('un-entered' and 'un-stained'). The anamnestic emphasis in the continuing present of 'keep dying into' echoes that of 'At a Potato Digging' from thirty years before and serves to further encode effects of this war on the speaker's psyche.

The fifth stanza marks a shift in focus from the murder of Agamemnon and the Trojan war to a physical description of the steps leading up to the well at Athens, 'where what was to be/ Greek met Greek'. The description of the well's 'old lifeline' then becomes explicitly metaphorical and recreates a sense of telescopic history foregrounded in the opening stanzas:

the ladder of the future
 and the past, besieger and besieged,
 the treadmill of assault

turned waterwheel, the rungs of stealth
 and the habit all the one
 bare foot extended, searching.

Before the text focuses on the spiritual and symbolic associations of water and wells, it imagines the ability to appropriate water as a source of human production (as seen in 'Personal Helicon'). Thus the transfer and redistribution of water, imagined through the waterwheel image, is conflated with a human preoccupation with reciprocating violence. In what follows the speaker retreats back into a space of possibility which echoes the transformation of the kaleidoscope as 'a marvellous lightship' when it resurfaces from the 'muddied water' in 'Station Island' (1984a, 61):

And then this ladder of our own that ran
 deep into a well-shaft being sunk
 in broad daylight, men puddling at the source

through tawny mud, then coming back up
 deeper in themselves for having been there,
 like discharged soldiers testing safe ground,

finders, keepers, seers of fresh water
 in the bountiful round mouths of iron pumps
 and gushing taps.

Andrew Murphy argues that, by,

[d]rawing together the source of pure water, the omphalos, and the navel stone of Delphi, home of the Greek oracle, we might say that Heaney ends 'Mycenae Lookout' by imagining a parallel prophesy to Cassandra's, which conceives of a positive future, in which the cycle of atrocity and revenge can be broken (2000, 107).

Certainly the text's ending opens up possibilities which it has hitherto rejected, and the idea of water metaphorically holding restorative qualities has recurred

through Heaney's work. One notable instance of this comes in one of the Chorus's main speeches in *The Cure at Troy* which points directly to Northern Ireland and envisages hope in 'healing wells':

The longed-for tidal wave
 Of justice can rise up,
 And hope and history rhyme.
 [...]
 Believe in miracles
 And cures and healing wells (1990a, 77).

Although this imagines hope in history, an implicit irony can be read into this. Within the structure of Greek tragedy, the end of *The Cure at Troy* only illusively resolves the violence which Greek myth embodies. In 'Mycenae Lookout', the reference to 'fresh water' and 'gushing taps' can also be read as containing within it an echo of the past which pervades the watchman's psyche.

Whilst the text parallels, and even temporarily conflates Cassandra and the watchman, it ultimately contrasts their prophetic qualities: the watchman is seer of an immediate future, seeing and announcing what is on the horizon, whilst Cassandra prophesies what she cannot actually see. The speaker's oracular role is foregrounded throughout the sequence as a visual and material one that is consequently filled with guilt, a guilt which extends to incorporate the whole significance of Cassandra in his voyeuristic desire 'to do it to her'. Cassandra's prophecies, whilst ultimately proven correct, are overshadowed in 'Mycenae Lookout' by the material reality of the watchman's visions. The final movement towards hope enunciated in the last stanzas is achieved through a process of reversal in which the speaker incorporates his point of view with a community ('And then this ladder of our own') which he has so far imagined as alien to his sensibility. The two occasions previous to this, where the speaker uses communal pronouns, come in '*His Dawn Vision*' and serve to further the

distance imagined between a communal reaction to the Trojan war, and the speaker's. In *'His Reverie of Water'* the commonality articulated is followed by a reversal of images of rain which have previously marked the text:

I'd dream of blood in bright webs in a ford
Of bodies raining down like tattered meat
On top of me asleep (*'The Watchman's War'*).

I felt the beating of the huge time-wound
We lived inside. My soul wept in my hand
When I would touch [the violets], my whole being rained

Down on myself (*'His Dawn Vision'*).

The appropriation of rain in these lines serves to emphasise firstly the speaker's nightmare vision and secondly his self-contained and torturous guilt. Rather than symbolising regeneration and cleansing, rain becomes a further embodiment of the speaker's complicity in atrocities of war. This, along with the opening of *'His Reverie of Water'*, problematises the ease of reading the text's end as a simple prophecy of a 'positive future'. Whilst an undoubted sense of hope is imagined, the temporal play of the opening stanzas is echoed in the repetition of 'fresh water' at the text's close. As was previously suggested, the wish-fulfilment of the speaker's opening vision is disrupted at the same moment as it is articulated through an anamnestic movement in which the fresh water of Agamemnon's bath is filled with latent implications of the 'blood-bath' of *'The Nights'*.⁷ The fresh water is thus prefigured with its later state and foregrounded

⁷ Edna Longley, talking about *The Spirit Level*, points to what I have termed Heaney's anamnestic manipulation of temporality. However, I have suggested that this function mostly serves to highlight the resonance of the past in the present and the recurrence of reciprocating violence. As is the case with 'Mycenae Lookout', the apocalyptic future to which Heaney points will shatter the seeming stability of the present. Longley, on the other hand, reads Heaney's inflections as creating temporal and textual resolution through circularity: 'Because his religious teleology finds its end in the beginning, his cycles differ from Yeats's. The gyre returns to an

as an attempted un-doing - un-entered and un-stained. 'Mycenae Lookout' thus extends its focus on bystanders' complicity in violence to incorporate the beginning of a process of reimagining the future. However, the poem is not released from a promise in the present of a future fulfilment of past violence. The text, in its final articulation, frames and contains the potential release imagined in 'the bountiful mouths of iron pumps/ and gushing taps' within the 'seers of fresh water', which are 'still', but only temporarily, 'unentered and unstained'.

'Mycenae Lookout' pulls various significant threads of Heaney's poetic oeuvre together and foregrounds their collective secular and dystopian vision of society. Rather than offering a transfiguring escape, the text encloses itself in a return to violence, oppression and social complicity. Possibilities of transubstantiation, translation and transfiguration are consistently undercut by a secular structure which fills and appropriates the sacred structure of the promise of the future. A tragic reflex runs throughout Heaney's poetry, and finally rests in its secular form with no sacred or spiritual possibility for redemption. Word and body are left irreconcilable as the profanity of lived, corporeal experience punctures any hope for its transubstantiation into the godly, the universal or the spiritual. What is ultimately announced in Heaney's poetry is that the subjective and individual nature of bodily experience, and the inability to utter any truth beyond that body, is unendingly marked with the desire to do just that. In *On Belief*, Žižek explains such a drive:

[i]n one of his (unpublished) seminars, Jacques-Alain Miller comments on an uncanny laboratory experiment with rats: in a labyrinthine set-up, a desired object (a piece of good food or a sexual partner) is first made easily accessible to a rat; then, the set-up is changed in such a way that the rat sees and thereby knows where the desired object is, but cannot

integrated and integrative starting-point, its circular movement sometimes explicated as the poem being "foreknown" in the event' (2000, 306).

gain access to it; in exchange for it, as a kind of consolation prize, a series of similar objects of inferior value is made easily accessible - how does the rat react? For some time, it tries to find its way to the 'true' object; then, upon ascertaining that this object is definitely out of reach, the rat will renounce it and some of the inferior substitute objects - in short, it will act as a 'rational' subject of utilitarianism. It is only now, however, that the true experiment begins: the scientists performed a surgical operation on the rat, messing about with its brain, doing things to it with laser beams about which, as Miller pointed out delicately, it is better to know nothing.

So what happened when the operated rat was again let loose in the labyrinth, the one in which the 'true' object is inaccessible? *The rat insisted*: it never became fully reconciled with the loss of the 'true' object and resigned itself to one of the inferior substitutes, but repeatedly returned to the 'true' object and attempted to reach it. In short, the rat in a sense was *humanized*, it assumed the tragic 'human' relationship towards the unattainable absolute object which, on account of its very inaccessibility, forever captivates our desire (2001, 103).

This anecdote can be seen to embody the tragic reflex of Heaney's poetry. Through the four decades of its development it has continually returned to themes that encircle questions of corporeal and discursive reality. It has tried to reconcile them in a transubstantiation which would not only alter their substance, but bind the role of poetry firmly onto a physical struggle. Yet the two remain disparate, conjoined only in spiritual faith, or in the aspirations of secular desire, their very separateness forever captivating the structures of our belonging.

11. Conclusion

Rather than reading Heaney through a framework influenced by his critical writings, this thesis has adopted the Eucharist's structure to demarcate and address prevalent and recurring themes in his poetry. Having charted his predominant concerns through a spiritual structure that, in Catholicism, effects a movement from individuality to an embodied commonality, a contrary movement has been explored in Heaney's poetry. Theories that were appropriated also work in contradistinction to the Eucharist. The poetry analysis in 'Word', for instance, was influenced by deconstruction, and by Homi Bhabha's appropriation of Derridean theory. 'Body' made use of anthropological theory, from René Girard's and Allen Feldman's writings in particular, whereas Jean Baudrillard's object theory and Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian psychoanalysis came into play in 'Transubstantiation'. Where these theories emphasise a division between signifier and signified, word and body and desire and possibility, the Eucharist bridges these divisions through its leap of faith.

Whilst this thesis has addressed Northern Ireland's identity, history and Troubles, an emphasis on thematic concerns has placed these national issues within a broader social dialogue. For instance, this thesis's interpretation of Heaney's body poems has said as much about a general tendency in contemporary western society to disregard human suffering as it has done about a particular recurring instance of this in Northern Ireland. Using various contemporary theoretical positions has emphasised this. As the interpretation of 'Mycenae Lookout' suggests, in *The Spirit Level* (and *Electric Light*) ideas of poetry's role in society are expressed with an intensity that embraces levels of discovery and understanding which a thirty year old dialogue between words, bodies and transubstantiations has engendered. So, by analysing primary themes throughout Heaney's oeuvre, ongoing preoccupations are emphasised and a way of reading his later works via these is established.

In *The Spirit Level*, for instance, words are emphatically 'polluted' (1996, 38) as 'A Sofa in the Forties' (1996,7) demonstrates:

HERE IS THE NEWS,

Said the absolute speaker. Between him and us
A great gulf was fixed where pronunciation
Reigned tyrannically.

'Two Lorries' (1996,13) and 'Damson' (1996, 15) engage with sectarian violence as it has permeated their speakers' imaginations. However, as this violence is expressed through poetry, it is distanced from materiality and brought into dialogue with literary imaginings. The ending of 'Damson' recognises this:

Ghosts with their tongues out for a lick of blood
Are crowding up the ladder, all unhealed,
And some of them still rigged in bloody gear.
Drive them back to the doorstep of the road
Where they lay in their own blood once, in the hot
Nausea and last gasp of dear life.
Trowel-wielder, woundie, drive them off
Like Odysseus in Hades.

Poems like 'The Swing' (1996, 48) and 'A Call' (1996, 53) embrace possibilities of language and translation, whilst 'A Dog Was Crying Tonight in Wicklow Also' (1996, 55) enforces the secularity of such hopes. As does 'Mint' (1996, 6), which also emphasises literature's ineffectuality, and society's collusion with violence and power, weighing out responsibility and failure in relation to 'our' complacency:

let all things go free that have survived.

Let the smells of mint go heady and defenceless
 Like inmates liberated in that yard.
 Like the disregarded ones we turned against
 Because we'd failed them by our disregard.

Similarly, the poem sequence, 'On His Work in the English Tongue' (2001,61) (in memory of Ted Hughes) from *Electric Light* questions poetry's social role. But language remains as something which can affect individuals:

Post-this, post-that, post-the-other, yet in the end
 Not past a thing. Not understanding or telling
 Or forgiveness.

But often past oneself,
 Pounded like a shore by the roller griefs
 In language that can still knock language sideways.

'Passive suffering' is justified as a poetic theme in the third poem, but actual suffering is distanced as the poet's creative role is foregrounded - 'And the poet draws from his word-hoard a weird tale/ Of a life and a love balked, which I reword here'. The fourth poem is a passage from *Beowulf*. Recognising a gap between poetry and reality, the reader is asked to make an imaginative leap, to feel another person's pain:

'Imagine this pain: an old man
 Lives to see his son's body
 Swing on the gallows. He begins to keen
 And weep for this boy, while the black raven
 Gloats where he hangs: he can be of no help.

The wisdom of age is worthless to him.
 Morning after morning he wakes to remember
 That the child has gone; he has no interest
 In living on until another heir
 Is born in the hall, now that this boy
 Has entered the door of death forever.
 He gazes sorrowfully at his son's dwelling,
 The banquet hall bereft of all delight,
 The windswept hearthstone; the horsemen are sleeping,
 The warriors under earth; what was is no more.
 No tune from harp, no cheering in the yard.
 Alone with his longing, he lies down on his bed
 And sings a lament; everything is too large,
 The steadings and the fields.

Such were the woes
 And griefs endured by that doomed lord
 After what happened. The king was helpless
 To set to right the wrong committed ...'

By integrating a translation in quotation marks Heaney doubly embeds 'On His Work in the English Tongue' in literature. This detracts from poetry's authority as a cultural signifier, reminding readers that what is in front of them is always imagined, and what this often occludes is real suffering.

Whilst moving away from commonality, Heaney's recurring emphases on possibility and hope mark a central ambivalence in his poetry. Chronologically, an ongoing secularisation of possibility occurs. This has been seen in a movement away from ideas that poetry can speak for and embody a community and in the questioning of literature's effect on society. Nevertheless, these themes recur. And by persistently returning to them, Heaney's secularisation of belonging is constantly marked by its opposite - an ongoing desire to engender

communal belonging and raise literature to a plain of physical (and spiritual) transubstantiation. Because this thesis has interpreted Heaney's concerns through complementary contemporary theories, and framed this with a contrary movement in Catholicism's Eucharist, this ambivalence in his poetry and its engagement with questions of belonging has come to light.

Such ambivalence is exemplified in 'At the Wellhead' (1996, 65). The speaker describes his next door neighbour who, blind, 'played the piano all day in her bedroom'. Rosie, the 'blind-from-birth, sweet-voiced, withdrawn musician', is metaphorically linked to water and wells. In Heaney's work, this posits associations of rebirth, renewal and spiritual potentiality into Rosie and her music. Rosie's world is differentiated from that of sighted people through her books ('like books wallpaper patterns came in'), her active hands and her eyes 'full/ of open darkness and a watery shine'. The poem ends with an assertion of poetry as an expression and transferral of material images - 'When I read/ A poem with Keenan's well in it, she said,/ "I can see the sky at the bottom of it now"'. The hopefulness of 'At the Wellhead' comes not only from an interaction and mutually beneficial relationship between poet and blind pianist, but also from an underlying assurance that poetry can affect us. The gift of poetry in 'At the Wellhead' is a gift of vision. Whilst beautifully rendered, this vision is insubstantial - Rosie's world remains one of darkness. So, whilst it lightens spirits, it does not change material reality. Just as the king is helpless 'To set to right the wrong committed', so too is Heaney. Poetry as an imaginative transcendence remains, but it can no longer speak for a community. Unable to match or confront atrocities mankind enacts, its purifying, regenerating potential is spoken for and by individuals who can, for one moment, step beyond materiality and imagine another world.

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