

VENTURING IN THE SLIPSTREAM
THE PLACES OF VAN MORRISON'S SONGWRITING

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.



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Abstract

This thesis explores the use of place in Van Morrison's songwriting. The central argument is that he employs place in many of his songs at lyrical and musical levels, and that this use of place as a poetic and aural device both defines and distinguishes his work. This argument is widely supported by Van Morrison scholars and critics.

The main research question is: What are the ways that Van Morrison employs the concept of place to explore the wider themes of his writing across his career from 1965 onwards?

This question was reached from a critical analysis of Van Morrison's songs and recordings. A position was taken up in the study that the songwriter's lyrics might be closely read and appreciated as song texts, and this reading could offer important insights into the scope of his life and work as a songwriter. The analysis is best described as an analytical and interpretive approach, involving a simultaneous reading and listening to each song and examining them as speech acts. At the same time as the analysis was being undertaken, a divergent body of literature spanning popular music and literary traditions was opened up. As a result of this process, a group of songs was chosen to illustrate the use of place in Van Morrison's work, and these are then organised into the specific expressions of place across the thesis.

Organised into chapters, this expression explores the way Van Morrison utilises place in his songwriting, and the emblematic and temporal perspectives that different places bring to this process. Some show how home places hold childhood and adolescent reminiscences, where simple pursuits jostle for importance within more serious deliberations about human meaning. Others reflect on what influences drive his moving away from home, what this means for his future symbolic exile, and how

returning home becomes an imaginative and textual exercise. Elsewhere, chapters highlight ways that the songwriter looks to escape the trappings of the city and the pressures of the music industry through excursions into a natural world, where responses arise from encounters with landscape and weather.

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1. Introduction: Van Morrison and the Poetics of Place

In the Foreword to the Faber and Faber publication of Van Morrison's selected lyrics, *Lit Up Inside* (2014), Ian Rankin writes that 'not every songwriter's lyrics cast such a spell when stripped of the accompanying music' (p. xii). On a video recorded in 2016 when *Lit Up Inside* was featured as part of the *Aspects Festival*, Rankin added, 'Van Morrison's lyrics repay close scrutiny'.¹ Both these comments pick up on a critical point underpinning the work of this thesis. That is, Van Morrison's lyrics might be closely read and appreciated as song texts, and furthermore, such a reading offers important insights into the scope of his life and work as a songwriter.

The specific research focus of this thesis is the use of place in Van Morrison's songwriting. The key argument is that Van Morrison employs place in many of his songs at lyrical and musical levels, and that this use of place as a poetic and aural device both defines and distinguishes his songwriting. This significance of place in his work is the result of a concentrated analytical process involving an interpretive reading of all of his work from 1965 to the present day, together with an examination of the extensive scholarship about Van Morrison. This delineation has narrowed the research focus to a specific lens through which the songwriter's work can be understood, while at the same time opening up a divergent body of literature spanning literary and popular music

¹ Video downloaded at: <https://www.vanmorrison.com/videos/an-evening-with-van-morrison-lit-up-inside-september-2016>. Quote is at 6.39.

traditions.² ‘Place’ has then become an interpretive framework and a theoretical tapestry for the research. The central question that this study explores is:

What are the ways that Van Morrison employs the concept of place to explore the wider themes of his writing across his career?³

With this question in mind, the introduction leads off with an interpretative reading of ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ (*Saint Dominic’s Preview*, 1972). There are good reasons for beginning a thesis on place in Van Morrison with a consideration of this song. First, this song provides a concrete example of the different ways that Morrison utilises place in his songwriting. Second, it highlights the ways his songs very often return to and re-imagine places through memory, and how there is frequently a fluidity of place and time in their lyrical energies. Third, in the song’s often oblique and unsettled series of emblematic spaces, there are embedded many of the songwriter’s major themes. These include - childhood memories, formative musical influences, isolated exile thoughts, music industry blues, and a sense of social and cultural dislocation.

‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’

Ideas about place are integral to the history of ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’. Van Morrison was living in Fairfax in Marin County (San Francisco Bay area) when he wrote the song. He had seen an advertisement in a paper about a peace vigil for

² In this thesis, the term ‘popular music’ is used to denote ‘contemporary popular music’ and ‘contemporary rock music’. In this sense the ‘popular’ works across debates about what differentiates the ‘popular’ from the ‘serious’ (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1977), and focuses on both ‘cultural products (CDs, music videos, concert performances) that are numerically or financially successful in different countries’ and ‘the social contexts in which ‘fans’ emerge with distinct cultural attachments to a sound or an artist’ (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 5).

³ These years span Van Morrison’s songwriting from the first Them album in 1965 (*The Angry Young Them*) to his latest albums of original material.

Northern Ireland to be held at Saint Dominic's church in San Francisco (Yorke, 1975, p. 95). He told journalists at the time that the song was influenced by his Belfast childhood, and more specifically it was 'about the scene going down in Belfast' (Heylin, 2002, p. 256).

The opening lines of 'Saint Dominic's Preview' move restlessly across different places - from the first image of a domestic chore, a city street and a church across the way, to that of a 'jagged story block' and a city far removed in distance and time from the comfort of friends and home. Later in the song the scene shifts urgently again between supermarket car parks, country crossroads, railway lines, restaurants and high-class apartments. What becomes apparent as the song proceeds, is that these are also places marking out spaces that are both familiar and foreign, where tensions play out across location and time, between past memories and more immediate and pressing experiences. Beyond descriptive words and phrases, they are also lived 'social places', echoing with the sounds of music and conversation, filled with symbolic objects, caught up with interpersonal relationships. As such, they are embedded with meanings, capturing a range of emotions, including nostalgia, uncertainty and dislocation.

Drilling down into the song reveals a symmetry to the construction of the nine verses, highlighting these utilisations of place. The first three verses move between the past and the present, and represent a contrast between the innocence of earlier times and the uncertainty of a conflicted here-and-now.

Chamois cleaning all the windows,
Singin' songs about Edith Piaf's soul.
And I hear blue strains of 'Ne Regrette Rien'
Cross the street from Cathedral Notre Dame

Meanwhile back in San Francisco
I try hard to make this whole thing blend
And we sit upon this jagged
Story block with you my friend

And it's a long way to Buffalo.
It's a long way to Belfast city too.
And I'm hoping that Joyce won't blow the hoist
'Cause this time, they bit off more than they can chew

In the third verse the mood shifts at the line, 'It's a long way to Belfast city too', and perceptibly, what was once the quietly personal, intensifies and becomes caught within a wider hint of political unrest. Thus, the way is paved for the middle three verses that intersperse symbols of conflict, and 'emblems' that mark out age-old territorial and ideological boundaries.

All the orange boxes are scattered
Against the Safeway supermarket in the rain
And everybody feels so determined
Not to feel anyone else's pain

No one making no commitments
To anybody but themselves
Talkin' behind closed doorways
Trying to get outside empty shelves

And for every cross-country corner,
For every Hank Williams railroad train that cries
And all the chains, badges, flags and emblems
And every strain on the brain and every eye

Here is the fulcral balance of 'Saint Dominic's Preview', locating private thoughts within wider cultural and political observations. The final three verses stand in marked contrast to the song's opening images. Earlier memories of home and music contrast sharply with scenes of flash restaurants, free grog, professional pressure and uptown apartments. The latter as the trappings of the 'hip', the 'wino few' and the 'jet set' are far removed, both physically and socially, from the isolating story block of the earlier verse.

All the restaurant tables are completely covered
And the record company has paid out for the wine
You got everything in the world you ever wanted
And right about now your face should wear a smile

That's the way it all should happen
When you're in the state you're in

Have you got your pen and notebook ready
Think it's about time, time for us to begin

And meanwhile we're over in a 52nd Street apartment,
Socializing with the wino few,
I used to be hip and get wet with the jet set.
But they was flyin' too high to see my point of view

The sense of social dislocation could hardly be stronger. While this is happening the words of the chorus, and the extended coda fashion an indeterminate 'beyond space', set somewhere between a momentary 'gaze' and a vision of what the future might become.

Viewed within this symmetry of its three parts, 'Saint Dominic's Preview' is a movement across place and time that looks to resolve an individual set of doubts with a widening realisation of cultural and historical uncertainty. The opening image traces this movement back to childhood streets, and earlier times when the songwriter worked as a window cleaner. These opening lines signal the pull of home that will run through the song, even as he tries to make things 'blend' in faraway places (see, Heylin, 2002, p. 257). Thus the 'chamois cleaning all the windows' becomes a memory of a less conflicted time, a coming-of-age metaphor; one that quite literally invokes a sense of clarity and opening of internal spaces to the outside world. This economical image of a simple task will interact with later observations about the city as a more conflicted space. Not surprisingly for a songwriter, both memory and image are 'heard' in music that recaptures the past. The 'blue strains' of Edith Piaf's 'Je Ne Regrette Rien' provide a backdrop for the cleaning. The song marks out a determination to move beyond the past, just as listeners are invited to think about the inescapable paradox of such a determination within the tragedy of the French artist's life and premature death, a life also composed of professional and personal difficulties. As the verse ends, the memories wrought from the working-class streets of Belfast, and the representation of Paris and Notre Dame Cathedral are merged in an undefined space that talks of social and cultural liminality, an imagined movement between the familiar and the foreign.

This is the central conceit of the song, a personal narrative of exile and dislocation where earlier decisions are second-guessed, and also regretted. The ‘meanwhile’ that introduces the second verse blurs distinctions between past and present - an example of how, for Marcus, the song’s words continually ‘unfix time and place’ (Marcus, 2010, p. 161).

Within the song’s journey, these verses represent the present vantage point for the songwriter as he ‘tries hard to make this whole thing blend’, a reconciliation of past memories with more immediate concerns. It is, indeed, ‘a long way to Belfast’, and the feelings of loneliness are emphasised in a picture of the large city, with the ‘jagged story block’ a strangely isolating place, even while it may well be a new home. The isolation drives doubts and confusion, and so the earlier ‘I regret nothing’ sits as an ironic reminder that perhaps he might have indeed ‘blown the hoist’. The aural landscape of the recording turns at this point, as the personal fuses with the political. It had started out with soft vocals, the singer’s ‘head voice’ almost whimsical within its measured intonations, but now the instruments swell in behind the lyrics, and the stakes become raised (Marcus, 2010). Marcus talks about a 1996 live version, and how, in the third verse, the singer begins to ‘push’, how his voice lowers and begins ‘to play with the harsh vowels of his own gruff tone, when the hint of violence crept in’ and the pushing down catches the history of the country (2010, p. 161). The reference to James Joyce (‘I’m hoping that Joyce won’t blow the hoist’) provides a glimpse of Ireland, and an implicit association with another exiled Irish artist. As these images collide, the song moves on beyond the immediate, the chorus bridging gaps between places and time.

As we gaze out on, as we gaze out on
As we gaze out on, as we gaze out on
Saint Dominic’s Preview
Saint Dominic’s Preview
Saint Dominic’s Preview

As noted above, the middle three verses are spatially removed and distracted, almost as if the songwriter's mind has now wandered beyond his own situation. There is a finely wrought sense of self-admonishment, a realisation that personal issues might well pale when considered alongside of the wider social, cultural and political fractures of his homeland. This admonishment is heightened within the consciousness of the songwriter's exiled position. Now, from afar, places of the wider homeland conflict are captured in images of desolate supermarket car parks scattered with rubbish - pointedly an American brand littered with 'orange boxes' (read Protestant), a further reminder of geographical and national distances. Further on, the pain and lack of commitment at the heart of sectarian strife are stories hidden behind the closed doors and 'the chains, badges, flags and emblems'.

At this moment the musical references are not held in the pathos and unfounded determination of 'Je Ne Regrette Rien', but in the compromised sell-your-soul 'blues' deals at Robert Johnson's 'cross-country corner', and the loneliness of a Hank Williams railroad song. Both these observations allude to musical influences that have driven the song's present exiled narrative. Hughes (2014) talks about the way that the songwriter constantly and symbolically expands Belfast, and notes here that 'the chains, badges, flags and emblems' of Belfast are seen to be on an equal footing with the archetypal blues location of the crossroads and the crying railway trains of country music' (p. xx). There is an increasing intensity in the aural landscape of the vocals and music while these streetscapes unfold. The vocals are quickened and the head voice becomes urgent, the words hurried against each other as they are crammed into the lines – now eleven and twelve syllables in comparison to the seven and eight of the opening verses. This lyrical and performative pattern is repeated in the following verses. Behind, the instruments and backing vocals drive in, straining and competing with the singer, in lyrical and performative unison with 'the strain and brain on every eye'.

In the second chorus, the atmosphere quietens again, the sounds back off and the singer re-employs his earlier voice as he lays out what he needs to 'blend'. The song has now swung from the streets of Belfast to New York City. Here, deals with record companies are set against the backdrop of restaurants, again a long way from the remembered places caught in the opening images of the song. The contrast between these places is dramatic. The former standing for the innocence of earlier employment, the latter for the new business that is caught up in high flying deals. Note the mocking affected tone of 'wi-ine', a not so subtle dig at competing perspectives of what counts in the different worlds of the exiled 'boy' from East Belfast and the hangers-on in the new place - the 'wino-few' and the 'hip jet set'. Consider also the subtle movement to the second person in verses seven and eight, the thoughts apparent echoes and parodies of words thrown out in business dealings in order to seal the deal. Regrets become recriminations, the threats of the pen and paper hide as much as they reveal. The lack of transparency replaces clarity – and the face *should*, but cannot, wear a smile. Clashes between the drive for authenticity in music that began in the early days in Belfast and the harsh dealings of commerciality pull against each other. The completed images combine to become even more heightened social places, as the earlier singing and talk make way for symbols and chatter of disharmony and tension, a submissive business signature, increasing social distances. In these lines, what become finalised are connections and disconnections between the political and the personal, between Belfast troubles and brutal personal bargains, between memories of home and the tense realities of what leaving home now means. These are inscribed in competing dialectics of home and away and of closeness and separation, of the loneliness and alienation of exiled experience.

All the while the chorus forces itself around the vagaries of what the future might hold, and so held together are memories, realities and uncertainties. Tensions

between rootedness and mobility and a metaphorical exile come firmly into play, and these are driven again by the increasing intensity of the vocals and the music as the song moves to its end through its extended coda.

As we gaze out on, as we gaze out on
As we gaze out on, as we gaze out on
Saint Dominic's Preview
Looked at the man
Saint Dominic's Preview
Looked at the band
Saint Dominic's Preview
Said they're freedom marching out in the street
Freedom marching
Out in the street
Looked at the man
Turned around
Come back
Come back
Turned around
Looked at the man
Said, 'Hold On'
Saint Dominic's Preview
Saint Dominic's Preview
Soul meeting
Saint Dominic's Preview

It is not uncommon for Van Morrison to extend his more structured lines in this way. These are beyond mere improvisations, but ways to emphasise and aurally explore central ideas. Here, as the backing singers force out the words and the piano pounds at the back, the singer disconnects from the band, and metaphysically joins the freedom march out in the street in San Francisco. In this joining he has brought his own past memories, his current dilemmas and the Troubles of Belfast together. It is a vision that now sees the place as representational in its overlaying of the physical with the imaginative (Cooper, 2008). Within this culminating imaginative movement, there is a turning, a 'hold on', a call to come back, and for a fleeting moment this 'preview' of past, present and future just might be revealed.

This reading of ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ highlights a number of key aspects to this thesis. The first is about the analysis and discussion of the songs. The songs chosen to support the arguments about the importance of place in Van Morrison are closely read throughout as texts. While the lyrics are the main area of investigation, there is also a consideration of how words and performance intersect in the recording, and how this intersection works within the songs’ intentions.⁴ This is referred to as the ‘musical palette’ of the text (drawing on, Frith, 2002, Griffiths, 2003, and Astor, 2010. See below).

The reading also draws attention to some of the ways that Van Morrison utilises place in his songwriting, and in particular, the emblematic and temporal perspectives that different places bring to this process. As with many Van Morrison songs, there is biographical interest in the personal nature of the lyrics, and this is held within the symbolism of the different places the song takes listeners to. The East Belfast alluded to in the opening lines marks out a difference between early memories, with concerns now pressing into the isolation of the San Francisco apartment block. The narrative of the exiled experience is traced within a restless movement across place and time, movement between places across spatial and temporal dimensions. Back stories interplay with current narratives. This adds to the sense of conflict. New York City stands for a lost idealisation, a promise of what a musical career might have held is now missing within high-flying showiness. Buffalo is just another place on the road, a measure of distance between away and home, and between the past and the present. The everyday cultural places of car parks and cross roads serve as reminders of how wider issues interplay with personal anxieties in the songwriter’s world.

⁴ Throughout the thesis the consideration of the musical palette is from the original album recordings.

While ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ does not fully embrace the thematic scope that Van Morrison’s songwriting explores, it nonetheless anticipates the ways place has been considered as a poetic and aural device across the thesis. Later chapters take this notion further. Some discuss how home places hold childhood and adolescent reminiscences, where simple pursuits jostle for importance within more serious deliberations about human meaning. Others reflect on what influences drive Morrison’s moving away from home, what this means for his future symbolic exile, and how returning home becomes an imaginative and textual exercise. Elsewhere, chapters highlight the ways that the songwriter looks to escape the trappings of the city and the pressures of the music industry through excursions into a natural world, where responses arise from encounters with landscape and weather.

Place in Van Morrison’s Songwriting

There is a general agreement among Van Morrison scholars and critics that ‘place’ is a key poetic device and thematic driver in much of his songwriting. For Mills (2010) there is a complexity in his writing about place, one that extends beyond simplistic notions of ‘nation’ or cultural identity. He argues that there are ‘aspects of exile and liminality ... feelings of displacement and not belonging, and the burdens and freedoms, of being perpetually in motion, moving down the road’ (p. 251). For Sørensen, competing feelings of ‘longing and belonging’ (2005, p.159) are central to Van Morrison’s constructions of place. While for Mills, it is this notion of being ‘an outsider everywhere’ (Mills, 2010, p. 252) that is caught in many of the lines of ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’. Picking up on this sense of movement and associated tensions between being home and away, Hughes observes a defining conflict over place in Van Morrison’ songs, and how they ‘move in two directions, drilling down and back into

origins and memories, and surging outwards in ever-expanding waves to other places and to that territory that is beyond place' (2014, p. xviii). What Hughes is paying attention to here are the dialectical relationships between, the fixed, lived and remembered places, both real and imaginatively 'constructed', and abstract and indefinite spaces that feature in particular songs. Imaginative projects play out within these relationships, and as such, allow Van Morrison to occupy common ground with a range of writers and artists. As both Kennedy-Andrews (2008) and Alexander and Cooper (2013) point out in relation to British and Irish poetry, spaces become places as images and identities take shape and particular cultural meanings are produced, shared and understood. That is, there is a close interconnection between place, culture and identity, and this is often found in descriptions of local culture and accounts of relationships with particular places.

In noticing an extra dimension in Van Morrison's songs that he terms 'beyond place', Hughes highlights the indeterminate search for the mystic and spiritual 'wonder' that quite often finds the songwriter travelling beyond known and recognisable locations. So, the worlds that Van Morrison produces through his songs are fluid intersections of everyday cultural places (rooms, streets, clubs, crossroads and apartment blocks), local neighbourhood haunts (*the creek, the avenue, the church, the railway line*), real life cities (Paris, San Francisco and Buffalo), and spaces that can only exist as fictional 'beyond places' (for example, gazing 'out on Saint Dominic's preview'). For Hughes, such worlds become stepping off points for discovery, not specifically described, but rather ascribing wider social and cultural meanings (Hughes, 2014). Another Irish critic, Dawe, identifies this idea in the seminal *Astral Weeks* and later albums, claiming that the naming of these different and diverse places 'takes on incantatory significance', and it is not so much the reference to specific places that

characterises Van Morrison's songs, but instead the 'alluring poetics of space' (2007, p. 68).

The Poetics of Place and Space

Throughout this thesis the term 'poetics of place' is used. This relies on a conceptualisation of place as an 'experiential accomplishment' (Moore & Metykova, 2010, p. 174). Put simply, place is more than a spatial location, and it differs from space when it is transformed by the routine practices and feelings of its inhabitants. As Tuan (1977, p. 73) argues, 'when space becomes thoroughly familiar ... it has become place' (quoted in Moore & Metykova, 2010, p. 174). Thought about this way, the poetics of place describes a centrality of the production of human meaning that writers ascribe to locations that feature in their work. Alexander and Cooper (2013) write about it this way: 'If place can be defined as a spatial location invested with human meaning, then the poetics of place refers to the ways in which such meanings are produced, understood and contested in literary texts' (p. 5). They add that the term 'poetics of place' derives etymological meaning from artistic and creative production; poetics from the Greek - *poiesis*, and place as an open space, from the Latin - *platea*. When these are brought together, place is considered through notions of scope and connectivity, rather than 'inherent circumspection'. That is, places do not simply exist but are being continually made or remade by historical, social and cultural forces (Alexander & Cooper, p. 5). In this remaking, the relationship between self and place is often culturally experienced and imagined by writers from within a phenomenological perspective. Such definitions draw on a strand of spatial theory influenced by the writing of Heidegger (1927, 1954)

and Bachelard (1958).⁵ The work of both philosophers is relevant to this study. There are two interrelated concepts introduced by Heidegger that are important in understanding connections between self and place, and provide critical frames as we think of the spatial dynamics of Van Morrison's work. The first is the concept of *Dasein*, and the second is the way he writes about dwelling and connectedness. Heidegger outlines his understanding of *Dasein* in his 1927 essay, *Being and Time*, and this concept forms the basis for his subsequent writings about spatial relationships. For Heidegger, *Dasein* is the experience of 'being-in-the-world', and functions across both ontic and ontological dimensions. He puts it this way: '*Dasein* is ontically not only what is near or even nearest ... nevertheless it is ontologically what is farthest away' (1993, p. 58). What he is getting at is that 'being' is to be physically and locally situated - but being-in-the-world also involves negotiations with and movement through other spaces. That is, there is something about what he terms the 'average *everydayness*' (p. 59) that constitutes 'being', but its very nature still opens up possibilities for openness and potentiality, and critically, the reaching out to different places. This related idea is elaborated in *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1954). Heidegger draws spatial distinctions between 'dwelling' and 'building', drawing on the old High German word, *buan* (building), and its etymological connections to the modern German, *bin* (as in *ich bin* – I am). The argument here is that *buan* really means 'to dwell', and this signifies 'to remain, to stay in a place', with a clear link to the notion of being (1993, p. 348). He further explains that:

The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth is *buan*, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell ... man *is* insofar as he dwells ... (p. 349).

⁵ Martin Heidegger's work is referenced from the 1993 collection of work. Those that have most significance for this study are *Being and Time* (1927), and the essay *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1954). Gaston Bachelard's work is referenced from the 1994 edition.

As Cooper (2008) points out, these conceptualisations show connections between dwelling and ideas of rootedness and situatedness (p. 808), that have currency in Irish literature (see, Kennedy-Andrews, 2008, p. 4). And if we think back to Heidegger's underlying notion of *Dasein*, then being and experience also means ontologically moving away from what is familiar and bound within locational 'everydayness'. When Van Morrison's songwriting is considered within these ideas, there is a strong sense of what McLoone (2008) refers to as the contradictory forces of rootedness and transcendence in his lyrics (p. 166). This is first explored in Chapter 4 where songs are read that show a primacy for the East Belfast house where he grew up, that is, under Heideggerian terms, a 'dwelling' in which complex relationships are enacted that get to the very essence of his being and identity. There is also the sense that once this home place is physically left behind, Morrison can only now poetically inhabit it through feeling, memory and imagination. As discussed below, this discursive framework around place, experience and meaning sits across all chapters in the thesis. In following chapters this framing helps understand how the songwriter deploys the room as conscious space between the imaginative haven of home and stepping away from that idea, and how streets evince a sense of a local and everyday place where identity is explored through an emotional sense for belonging. When later chapters focus on songs about experiences away from home and the local streets, Heidegger's work on *Dasein* is useful in locating interactions between the personal, the natural and the transcendental, and the ways Van Morrison writes about the 'everydayness' of these encounters, the phenomenological awareness of 'being-in-the-world' that embraces both feelings of rootedness as well as a reaching out to new places.

Bachelard picks up on the ideas of Heidegger in his exploration of the 'everydayness' of the house as a dwelling. As he focuses on both the interior places of the house and its outdoor context, Bachelard writes about the interplay of physical and

imaginative spaces in what he terms ‘the humble home’ (p. 4). He is deeply interested in how we ‘inhabit our vital space, in accord with all the dialectics of life, how we take root, day after day, “in a corner of the world”’ (p. 4). It is here that Bachelard finds a strong imaginative relationship between the house and the memories associated with it through the state of ‘oneirism’ or daydreaming. He puts it this way as he rejects minute description for a more nuanced and poetic recapturing of place: ‘... the real houses of memory, the houses to which we return in dreams, the houses that are so rich in unalterable oneirism, do not readily lend themselves to description’ (p. 13). As he connects poetry with the oneirically everyday place of his own home, he writes:

All I ought to say about my childhood home is just barely enough to place me, myself, in an oneiric situation, to set me on the threshold of a day-dream in which I shall *find* repose in the past. Then I may hope that my page will possess ... a voice so remote within me, that it will be a voice we all hear when we listen as far back as memory reaches ... (p. 13).

Bachelard is making claims that the house is a reservoir for the most elemental of human emotions, and further that poets are best equipped to handle the ‘hesitation of being’ (p. 214) that is the most fundamental human imagination of space (see, also, Smyth, 2001, p. 5). We write and read rooms and houses, he suggests, and in that process we unlock a door to daydreaming in both the writer and the reader (p. 14). In concert with the Heideggerian concepts outlined above, Bachelard’s work has been utilised in this thesis in the pillars around place, experience and meaning that are established in the early thesis chapters, and then revisited throughout. For example, it is shown that Van Morrison’s conceptualisation of home includes the privileged position of his childhood home as a place where critical human drama is enacted. These ideas from Bachelard, are further applied in the reading of songs, ‘Astral Weeks’ (1968) and ‘Wavelength’ (1978), where the adolescent bedroom is conceptualised as a deep

impressive space and a critical location for the negotiation of identity (see also, Croft, 2006). The readings show that these songs about Van Morrison's adolescence are creative places of daydreaming and writing, and the inner expressions of the imagination are symbolically displayed through the physical and aural spaces of the bedroom.⁶

Such observations cast us back to the reading of 'Saint Dominic's Preview', where it was noted that the different places that the lyrics traverse are more than physical descriptions - they are lived social places that are inhabited with sounds, objects, symbols and relationships. The streetscapes and buildings are caught up with ideas of location and dislocation, and with questions of 'how to make this whole thing blend'. The opening lines mine early ideas of East Belfast and belonging, while later lines suggest places and experiences beyond home that require more complex transactions about identity. Symbolic exile invariably asks questions from within these transactions. These themes are bound with competing notions of rootedness and openness. As we will observe throughout this thesis, writers like McLoone (2008) and Onkey (2006) talk about how Van Morrison's songs frequently explore these contradictory forces, and how such tensions are a critical component of his songwriting identity. This exploration is also one of the major themes emerging in the new ideas of space and place in Northern Irish literature from the late 1960s onwards (Kennedy-Andrews, 2008). As a result, it is reasonable to suggest that the songwriter might not only be aligned with the ways popular music frequently connects with specific places (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 1), but also 'with a long tradition of poetic engagements with space, place and landscape' in Irish literature (Alexander & Cooper, 2013, p. 2).

⁶ It is recognised that there is a longstanding debate about whether song lyrics should be thought about as poetry, and indeed whether songwriters should be considered poets. At this point in the thesis, the position taken up is that lyrics are 'speech acts' (Frith, 2002, p. 59), and these, in the hands of certain songwriters, work within poetic themes, devices and techniques. See below in this chapter – The Study Of Place in Van Morrison's Songwriting.

Space, Place and the Irish Cultural Imagination

It is to this broader Irish context of space extending beyond the domains of literature that Smyth (2001) pays attention. Drawing on the critical work of Heidegger and Bachelard (discussed above) to theoretically frame his arguments within discourses surrounding what he terms ‘spatial imaginations’ (p. 1), Smyth suggests that not only is ‘Irish cultural history amenable to spatial analysis’ (p. 1), but also that the long history of Ireland’s interest in local places extends into the new millennium to the point that ‘modern Ireland is ... obsessed with issues of space’ (p. xiv).⁷ He sees that the philosophical work of both Heidegger and Bachelard is important in understanding how the relationship between abstract space and specific place as ‘one of the fundamental elements of human life’ (p. 3). Fundamental to this relationship is Heidegger’s concept of ‘dwelling’ (the ability to be *in* and *of* a place), and Bachelard’s corresponding view that the house is the most fundamental of human location (see above). Smyth connects both these frames with Irish cultural and historical traditions that have long shown a strong and deep relationship with authentic place as the foundation of human existence (p. 3). He goes on to argue, in line with ideas emerging from ecocriticism and postmodern geography, that space and a reinvigorated geographical imagination ‘matters’ (pp. 11-12), and also sees the importance of Lefebvre’s notion that society is spatially produced (p. 16). For Smyth it then becomes clear that under these theoretical claims, the primary theme of Irish political, social and cultural history is geographical. Indeed, he writes that there is a ‘special relationship’ between people and place, and that ‘matters of space are widely understood to have been of the utmost importance in the formation of Irish character and culture’ (p. 20).

⁷ See, also, Kovács (2003).

With this theoretical context in place, Smyth focuses on four ways that discourses of place and space have been taken up in Irish critical, cultural and political domains – travel and tourism, mapping/naming, poetry, and city/country - and thinks about what these mean for issues of space, culture and identity in modern Ireland. Of these four ways, his observations about mapping/naming, poetry and city/country have the most relevance for the concerns of this study. Mapping and naming are seen to be critical aspects of the human experience in its relationship to place. This is because abstract and empty spaces become meaningful historic places through these twin processes (p. 41). Smyth points out that the Irish relationship to place derives from the early Celtic – *dinnshenchas*, translated as ‘the traditional lore of notable places’ (Mac Giolla Léith, 1991, cited in Smyth, p. 47). The argument is that there has been a special relationship between place and identity in Irish life from the earliest times, and there is a scholarly view that *dinnshenchas* points to ‘an understanding in which place and identity are inseparable (p. 48). Subsequent chapters in this thesis pick up on this relationship between place and identity as it impacts both Van Morrison and his audiences and listeners. With regard poetry, Smyth cites examples spanning more than 1000 years (from a fragment of text from the 9th Century to the poetry of Seamus Heaney and John Montague) to show what Seamus Deane argues to be ‘the production of cultural space in Irish writing’ – ‘the imaginative and cultural resources that have at different times undertaken the production of a range of literary images of Ireland’ (pp. 75-76). As we shall see throughout this thesis, Van Morrison is very much involved with this production in the lyrical representation of, and location of, different places in the built and natural worlds in his songwriting. When Smyth writes about Irish discourses of place and space with a focus on city/country he hones in on ongoing debates about the spatial divisions between the countryside and the city, arguing that it is difficult to develop a sense of the significance of any place without thinking about

central divisions between the country and the city (p. 76).⁸ Van Morrison's depictions of both the city and the country are interesting here, and as will be pointed out throughout the thesis, there are some critical differences in the way he views the relationship between these two spatial locations, and, indeed, he very often challenges the false dichotomy of urban and rural sensibilities.

As Smyth locates discourses of place and space within Irish critical, cultural and political domains, he draws attention to the emphasis on personal and local experience as responses to the economic and political changes of late 20th century Ireland, as many people were compelled to consider how they are impacted by the 'cultural and political systems' that they are caught up in (p. 93). For Smyth, such a coming together of experience and consciousness had critical implications for questions surrounding identity and how political, sociological and historical factors influenced its development (pp. 93-94). He then offers critical readings of Seamus Deane's *Reading In The Dark* (see footnote) and U2's 1987 album, *The Joshua Tree* as examples of how these questions might be explored. It is the second of these - the analysis of the spatial practices and motifs of U2 - that has significance for the study of Van Morrison's songwriting about place. It is to this analysis that this chapter now turns, first as a way of examining how the theoretical and methodological contexts throw light on the discursive contexts in which this study operates, and second, to compare the different spatial frames that are in play between the Dublin group and the Belfast singer and songwriter.

⁸ In a later chapter Smyth discusses Seamus Deane's *Reading In The Dark*, and writes about the way the city and the country hold different representations of the human emotion across fear and freedom, and the central character, having been corrupted by the city, is forced towards a 'voluntary exile' as depicted by the inside and outside spaces of the house (pp. 155-157)

Popular Music Contexts

A starting point for a consideration of the spatial practices of songwriters and performers is that music operates in different ways to literature and painting. According to Smyth, this premise holds that music is most strongly positioned to create imaginary landscapes because of its basic function as ‘sound’ (p. 159). His argument is backed up by Tuan (1977) and Shepherd (1991) who write about how sound can evoke spatial impressions, and, moreover, a different sense of space from other phenomena. He then goes on to contend that sound is dynamic and suggestive of movement and energy because of its fundamental properties of loudness, softness, depth, distance and proximity, and that ‘the ability to hear is always already a spatial ability’ (p. 159). When these suggestions and movements are thought of within the wider context of music and the more focused case for this study of popular music, there is an argument that the sounds become a map by which listeners are guided on journeys through sonic landscapes, and these become enhanced through properties such as tempo, harmony, counterpoint, phrasing and volume (p. 161). Smyth further observes that modern popular music has been developed with increased technological sophistication, and cites Moore’s (1993) explanation of the way texture spaces are produced in modern rock songs. He compares early Beatles songs like the primitive stereo mix in ‘Love Me Do’ (1962) to the ‘rich stereophonic soundscape’ of later songs like ‘Penny Lane’ (1967). We might equally think of the basic garage rock sounds of early Van Morrison songs like ‘Gloria’ (1965), in comparison to the more textured ‘When The Leaves Come Falling Down’ (1999). Throughout this thesis careful attention is paid to the texture of Morrison’s songs through a consideration of their musical palette (see below).

There are other spatial considerations strongly in play, and both U2 and Van Morrison provide important cases in the way identity is widely invoked through music.

Smyth makes the point that it is hard to read or hear anything about U2 without confronting the fact that they are an ‘Irish’ band. Even though, he argues, it is impossible to pin down their ‘Irishness’, a large part of their significance resides in their national status and associated connotations surrounding their identity into the 21st century (p. 164). And of course, the same can be said about Van Morrison’s status as an Irish musician, though we will see that his ‘Irishness’ is on show through the themes of many of his lyrics that resonate in perspective and detail with contemporary Irish writers and musicians, and the way his vocal performances often connect with the localness of his Belfast home. It is this latter point about home that offers some interesting dynamics about the spatial discourses within which each is positioned. Waters (1994) offers that U2’s contradictory spatial affiliations around home encouraged band members to recreate a sense of home through a musical landscape in which they could place themselves, adding that while other bands make records that reflect where they came from, ‘U2 make records that reflect their lack of a place to call home’ (p. 146). Smyth cites Moore (1993, pp. 143-144) to argue that this sense of homelessness is spatially reflected in their music through open-ended chord structures, a minimal rhythm section, an energetic lead guitar technique and Bono’s vocal style (Smyth, 2001, p. 173). He later deploys Heideggerian concepts in his analysis of ‘I Will Follow’ to show that the range of teenage emotions find their ‘natural’ expression in ‘discourses around the notion of dwelling’ (pp. 175-176). This conceptual framing is similarly utilised in this thesis when Van Morrison songs about home are read – for example, ‘Beside You’ (1968), ‘Astral Weeks’ (1968), and ‘On Hyndford Street’ (1991).

In summary, Smyth’s theoretical framing that connects spatial theory with Irish political, social and cultural history provides a further context for this study. It is indeed, the ‘special relationship between Irish people and place’ he talks about with respect the

work of Heidegger, Bachelard and Lefebvre that strikes a chord with the songwriting of Van Morrison. Furthermore, the discursive contexts he outlines about the place of popular music to evoke spatial impressions and create sonic landscapes provide a foundation for a study that strongly pays attention to the way Morrison brings together lyrics, instrumentation and vocal performance in his recordings. Finally, these contexts around the spatial framing of identity mark out ways of thinking about Van Morrison's search for belonging in a long musical journey that takes him away from and back to the places of his East Belfast upbringing.

Theoretical and Contextual Approaches

To this point it has been proposed that place is a key poetic device and driver for much of Van Morrison's songwriting, and that there is a special relationship between people and place that is important in the formation of Irish character and culture. It has also been argued that key spatial theorists like Heidegger and Bachelard have provided critical foundations for the study, namely in the way their work throws light on the centrality of the production of human meaning that writers very often ascribe to their writing about place. While it is acknowledged that writers like Smyth (2001, pp. 1-19) and Cooper (2008) recognise that spatial theorists come from a variety of academic disciplines (including philosophy, ecocriticism, postmodern geography), their primary concern as they apply their ideas to the domains of popular music and literature is to consider what this means for the spatial practices and motifs of the work of writers they are studying, rather than reduce the theory to a particular ideological position. This is central to the way theory is utilised in the study. Ideas about the poetics of place run throughout each chapter, showing how Morrison's songs about place are embedded with meaning – they are lived 'social places' and, as Hughes points out, are 'richly

populated with a cast of formative influences' (2013, p. xxi). In a lengthy songwriting career that began as a Belfast teenager and extends to the present day, Van Morrison's relationship to place is complex, many-sided and constantly evolving. Consequently, the thesis has not ascribed any overriding ideological framework to the songs. Instead ideas about place in relation to the different places of Morrison's songwriting have emerged throughout as they are relevant to each aspect of his work under consideration. To this end, Chapters 2 and 3 consider Morrison as a writer within popular music and literary traditions. Following chapters establish notions around place, experience and meaning that then sits as a discursive framework within the rest of the thesis. From here the thesis considers the ways the songs might be understood better by thinking about how they work within existing popular music and literary traditions – for example, ideas around confined spaces as metaphors for inner consciousness, streets as critical places where the complexities of life are on display, everyday experiences in the natural world that render those experiences transcendent and otherworldly, and encounters in foreign lands that play out within psychological subjectivities around exile. The principle of this thesis is that the songs explore rich lived experiences across a variety of spatial locations, and this adds depth to our understanding of Van Morrison's life and work.

The Study of Place and Van Morrison's Songwriting

The central research question of this thesis was reached during a critical and detailed lyrical and aural analysis of all Van Morrison's lyrics from 1965 onwards.⁹ This

⁹ The lyrics used in the analysis were derived from three sources. Listed in order of reliability they were – from *Lit Up Inside* (2014), from album liner notes (where available), and from websites publishing lyrics (for example - <http://www.metrolyrics.com>). No official lyrics were made available despite efforts to obtain them from Van Morrison's management.

Lyrics from *Lit Up Inside* and album liner notes were considered to be the 'official' versions and accepted as such. Those from websites were seen to be less reliable, and these were cross-checked across multiple sites, and then against the recorded versions.

analysis is found in Appendix A (*Into The Music. Van Morrison – The Full Discography*).¹⁰ The research was mindful of a critical body of literature strenuously arguing that the written *and* performed words need to be taken together in any consideration of Morrison’s worth as an artist. Both Hinton (2000) and Mills (2010) make this point, and it is an argument that aligns with popular music critics, many of whom draw distinctions between song lyrics and poetry. Eckstein (2010) takes as a starting position that there is a similarity between lyrics and poetry, both employing verbal language that contains ‘characteristic rhetorical and stylistic devices’ to tell stories and confront important ideas about life and the world (p. 10. See also Negus & Astor, 2015, p. 234). However, as Eckstein further notes, it is self-evident that there are fundamental differences - the language of songs is ‘given the body of a voice and saturated in musical sound’ and ‘the art of lyrics is fundamentally a “performance art”’. Picking up on the ideas of Small (1998), Eckstein writes that the meaning of lyrics is not to be found in what has been created, but rather in ‘the acts of creating, displaying and perceiving’ (p. 10). It is important to note at this point that not all critics totally agree with Eckstein’s view. For example, Negus and Astor (2015) argue against the privileging of the position of listeners above musicians and songwriters and suggest that often ‘the songwriter’s practice is assumed, vaguely implied or neglected’ (pp. 228-

After the analysis was undertaken Van Morrison released *Keep Me Singing* (2016 – all original songs), *Roll With The Punches* (2017 – 3 original songs), *Versatile* (2017 – 2 original songs), *You’re Driving Me Crazy* (2018 – no original songs), *The Prophet Speaks* (2018 – 6 original songs).

¹⁰ The Full Discography serves a number of important functions for the study and the thesis. The analysis was undertaken in two stages. The first was to undertake a reading of every Van Morrison song from his Them days onwards, and the second was to revisit each of these readings in the light of existing thoughts from Morrison critics and biographers. As these readings came together, the place theme emerged as a sensitising theme and so the discography represents this process. For readers of the thesis it provides evidence of the place lens of the study across the whole Van Morrison catalogue, and is also a guide to the thinking about songs not discussed in detail in the thesis. Finally, it does what thesis appendices are intended to do – provide clear evidence that the study has considered all of the songwriter’s work in the determination of the key questions and interpretative framework for the study.

229). This is interesting in the context of the stance that Van Morrison most commonly adopts when pressed to talk about his songs. Apart from the early interview with Yorke (1975) in which he talks about the first seven studio albums (from the 1967 *Blowin' Your Mind* to the 1973 *Hard Nose The Highway*), he has been stubbornly reticent to 'explain' the meaning of his lyrics.¹¹ Differences aside about the intention and perception of songs and their lyrics, both Eckstein (2010) and Negus and Astor (2015) agree that poetry and song lyrics are 'bridged and blurred in practice' by listeners and readers (Negus & Astor, 2015, p. 233), and thus, from a song lyric point of view, they reason that there are a range of intentional, perceptive and contextual factors in play as we think about what the words mean.

And this brings us back to the analytical methods employed in this thesis. Although from the outset it has been argued that there is much to be gained from reading Van Morrison's lyrics as song texts, it should already be apparent (and as stated above in the discussion of 'Saint Dominic's Preview') that such readings very carefully consider both words and performance. There are two aspects to this process. The first is about the way Morrison uses his voice, and the second is concerned with the way music combines with the lyrics to support the meanings of the songs. Eckstein's (2010) outlining of what he calls a 'cultural rhetoric of lyrics' (p. 23) throws some light on this dual process. As the name suggests, his analytical framework for the interpretation of song lyrics encompasses both cultural and rhetorical perspectives, and addresses ideas around performativity and performance, song genre, musical experience, and mediality. Of these, performance, genre and musical experience are closest to the approaches to analysis utilised in this study, although the cultural resonances here are more strongly focused on issues surrounding identity, transcendence and exile than the structural

¹¹ Indeed, he often writes about this in his songs (for example, 'Why Must I Always Explain', 1991).

perspectives that sit at the heart of the Eckstein model. When Eckstein writes about performance he is thinking about more than the verbal content of the lyrics – he is also reflecting on how the words are carried in performance (pp. 30-35).

In this study the lyrical analysis considers what Griffiths (2003) labels ‘sung factors’ and ‘verbal space’ (p. 43), and Frith’s (2002) notion of song lyrics as ‘speech acts’ (p. 159). ‘Sung factors’ and ‘verbal space’ refer to the ways the performed words work within the musical spaces of a song’s lines, and the changing of positions and the extension and contraction of lines (Griffiths, 2003, pp. 43-48). When Frith writes about lyrics as ‘speech acts’, he is making a case for analysing the meaning of songs beyond treating them as poems or literary objects, to an analysis that considers them in performance, and this aligns with the Eckstein model. Frith (2002) goes on to suggest that when listening to songs, what are heard are *words* (semantic meaning), *rhetoric* (words used in musical way), and *voices* (words spoken or sung in meaningful human tones (pp. 158-159, emphasis in original). In agreement, Astor (2010) adds that ‘songs as texts’ function ‘more in the way of plays than poems’ (p. 147), while also arguing that words have a primary importance as the ‘more actual, concrete expression of feeling’ (p. 147). This was weighed up in the light of Van Morrison’s vocal phrasing as a function of dramatic effect. It is this feature of Van Morrison’s recorded performance that characterise his songs, and attention was paid to this in the reading and listening to the songs. Careful attention was thus paid in the analysis of the key ways that Van Morrison not only heightens the impact of, but adds meaning to the ideas behind songs through his vocal performance. Critics note these performative processes. For example, Elliott (2016) notes that Morrison’s voice and his phrasing often become a vehicle for ‘dramatic acts of enunciation’ with a resulting conflation of singer and protagonist through ‘a heightened vocal presence’ (p. 72, and also drawing on, Marcus, 2009, pp. 88-89). Many songs that are closely read in the thesis provide examples of the dramatic

and explanatory effect brought about by vocal performance. These readings indicate what McLaughlin and McLoone observe, when they draw attention to the ways words are often deployed by Van Morrison ‘as much for how they *sound* – their textural and timbral qualities – as they are for the images they evoke or for what they mean in an overarching narrative’ (2012, p. 101 - emphasis in original). They talk about the significance of the combination of *plaisir* and *jouissance* in his songwriting: ‘the use of words for *what* they mean ... and the way in which the lyrical/semantic register shifts into the voice as *sound* ... as an instrument, as timbre, where words, as it were, escape what is said’ (p. 101).

The second aspect of the study’s analytical methods is about the way the music and words come together in the meaning of songs. If we return to the Eckstein interpretative framework his thoughts on song genre and musical experience are pertinent. When Eckstein writes about generic conventions he is focussing on the ways that decisions made about the genre of the song (across the intersections of art, folk and popular music) influence the way songs are heard and then read (pp. 43-56). His thoughts about the interrelationship between verbal and musical experience in songs centre on the interplay of sound and verbal meaning. He draws on Booth (1981) who writes about ‘songfulness’ as the ‘subtle and fascinating’ way that song words are subject to the pressure of music – ‘they are reinforced, accented, blurred, belied, inspired to new meaning, in a continual interplay’ (p. 78). With this in mind, Eckstein posits that analysis should keep in mind that there are two complex meaning-making systems (verbal and musical) in a ‘feedback loop’ in which they ‘continually and dynamically reflect on each other’ (p. 78). In similar way, Bicknell (2011) writes about how the perception of song meaning is variously influenced by interactions between genre and the communication of song’s ‘dominant emotional mood’ through melody and rhythm (pp. 441-442). These ideas are consistent with the way this study scrutinises

what Astor refers to as, 'the sound palette of a track' (2010, p. 148) To this end, all components of the performance, including the music and instrumentation, are considered in an appreciation of the ideas being conveyed in the song. That is, the reading of each song pays careful attention to the lyrical and aural features at the intersection of words, performance and music. There is much to think about here, particularly when the works of Van Morrison range widely across different generic conventions. Throughout the thesis in the discussion of individual songs a critical eye and ear are kept on each song's verbal and musical interplay, and this is a fundamental aspect of the way its meaning is read and written about as each place of Morrison's songwriting is considered.

Persona in Van Morrison's Songwriting

In the previous section it was shown that Van Morrison's voice and phrasing very often become a vehicle through which singer and protagonist are conflated, and how a critical reflection on these performative processes was a key aspect of the analytical methods used in the study. This leads us to thinking about distinctions between writers, singers, performers and characters in songs, and, in turn, to important aspects of Morrison's work as a songwriter and performer, and related issues about how we should read his song lyrics with respect to the specific place lens of the study. It should be clear to this point in the thesis that a line has been drawn between song lyrics and poetry, and this line has turned on the meaning of song lyrics being bound within acts of creating, performing and perceiving (Eckstein, 2010, p. 10). For critics like Eckstein, there is a 'dramatic complication' in the communicative systems as they move from poetry to song lyrics (p. 45), and he cites Cone's work (1974, p. 62) to write about a fusion between the person singing and the persona.

The physical presence and the vitality of the singer turn the persona of the poetic-musical text into an actual immediate living being: the *person* of the singer invests the *persona* of the song with *personality*. If the impersonation is successful ... we hear this embodied persona ... as living through the experience of the song (Eckstein, 2010, p. 45, emphases in original).

Similarly, Bicknell (2011) writes about the way that the singer is able ‘to convey the sentiments of the person whose situation is depicted in the song’, and how the ‘acting’ of the singer both enhances and is necessary for a good performance (p. 442, drawing on Smith, 1982). There are questions here also about the ‘legitimacy’ and ‘authenticity’ of the song that bring us to the songwriting of Van Morrison. As Moore (2012) observes, decisions about whether or not ‘the persona is identical to the personality of the singer underpins much of the entire discourse around authenticity’ (p. 179). As we shall also see in the following chapter, these discourses are very much anchored in their ability to articulate shared places of belonging between the singer and the audience. It is fair to suggest, in agreement with Moore, that the way the audience perceives connections between the singer and the song’s persona is central to the way Morrison’s songs are heard and then read.

Then how might we approach issues about these connection in Van Morrison’s songwriting? How important is it in reading and listening to these song lyrics that we perceive that he is writing autobiographically, or taking ideas from personal experiences? Thinking about these kinds of questions offer critical insights into Morrison’s relationship with place. The work of Auslander (2009) provides a useful starting point. He picks up on Frith’s notion (1996, pp. 203-225) that there are three different (often simultaneously occurring) strata in the performances of popular music singers, and that we hear these singers as ‘personally expressive’ (cited in Auslander, p. 305). By ‘personally expressive’ Frith means singing in their own persons and from

their own experience, and he goes on to write that there are two other layers caught up in what he calls a process of *double* enactment. This means each lyric requires ‘a star personality (their image) and a song personality (the role each lyric requires) and the pop star’s art is to keep both acts in play at once’ (1996, p. 212, emphasis in original). Auslander (2009, p. 305) builds on these ideas to propose what he terms ‘three layers of performance’ – ‘the *real* person (the performer as human being), the *performance persona* (the performer as social being), and the *character* (Frith’s song personality). Moore (2012) adds that these three levels (performer, persona and protagonist) are always identifiable in a song, even though the relationship between them might not necessarily be self-evident’ (p. 181). As a way of getting to what should be expected of a song’s persona, Moore imposes options through a range of questions. The first asks whether the persona is *realistic* (coming directly from the singer) or clearly *fictional* (the singer takes on a particular character), noting that the distinction might not be readily apparent. The second asks whether the situation and the song’s narrative are *realistic* or *fictional*. The third asks whether the singer ‘is personally *involved* in the situation described, is singing from reputed experience affected by the situation, or is acting as an *observer* of the situation, external to it and simply reporting on it’ (p. 182, emphases in original).

When these ideas are brought to Van Morrison’s work, and particularly those discussed in this thesis, it is fair call to conclude from what we know of his biography and from contextual clues that some might be classified as strictly autobiographical – that is with realistic personae and situations, and reporting on direct experiences under terms set down by Auslander and Moore. We can bring to mind songs like, ‘The Story Of Them’ (1965), ‘Brown Eyed Girl (1967) ‘Cleaning Windows’ (1982), and ‘On Hyndford Street’ (1991). And to think more widely across the Morrison catalogue, it would be reasonable to speculate that many songs would involve a hybridity across

realistic personae and realistic/fictional situations. By hybridity it is meant here, and in agreement with critics like Rogan (2005, p. 205), that it is difficult (and indeed counterproductive) to read the songwriter's lyrics as literal and autobiographical, even though the great majority are written in the first person. Rather, they invariably work across temporal and physical spaces, and often combine fragments of narratives and ideas. Good cases in point are the *Astral Weeks* (1968) album, and songs like 'Saint Dominic's Preview'. It is clear that much of Morrison's art invariably interrupts what Moore (2012) labels the 'bedrock position of the persona' that much of popular music takes up (p. 183). As has been discussed above, it is an art that works its way across multidimensional locations in place and time, and with memory and nostalgia as key expressions of these movements. Keightley and Pickering's (2012) conceptualisation of the 'mnemonic imagination' is helpful in seeing how writers like Van Morrison draw on both experiences in the past amid their current situated places and associated feelings, and how this is reflected in their lyrics. They write about seeing the relationship between memory and imagination as an 'interstitial space between past and future in which cross-temporal transactions are made' (p. 43):

It is through these transactions that lived experience in the present becomes transformed into assimilated experience in a changed present. The remembering subject engages imaginatively with what is retained from the past, and moving across time, continuously rearranges the hotchpotch of experience into relatively coherent narrative structures ... given meaning by becoming emplotted into a discernible sequential pattern (p. 43)

It is this pattern that Keightley and Pickering posit that is central to ideas of changing identity. When, for Van Morrison, such an identity is frequently bound within feelings of nostalgia, it is possible to see implications for the interrelationship between Auslander's (2009) ideas around the *real* person and the *performance persona*. For

Keightley and Pickering, nostalgia is activated by the mnemonic imagination in ways that create various interactions between past, present and future, and is a distinctive form of remembering because of its often quite acute affective dimension that can be awakened ‘into a longing to be immersed again in an earlier moment of one’s life’ (pp. 115-116). In ‘Got To Go Back’ (1986) the lines, ‘Keep me away from port or whiskey/Don’t play anything sentimental it’ll make me cry’ are good examples of how taste and sonic catalysts can bring about these feelings for the songwriter. To return to the place lens of this thesis, we can see these feelings of nostalgia reflected in songs focused on Morrison’s East Belfast childhood haunts, and in those where being away from those places pose questions through which feelings surrounding dislocation, difference and cultural identity might be considered. There are other times when Morrison looks to the natural world as a place where transcendence and contemplation become part of a changed present and offer changing dynamics to his identity. In the later years of his career (from 1997’s *The Healing Game* onwards), the physical appearance of dark suits, sunglasses, and fedora hat became his trademark stage persona – at the same time seeming to present images of the ‘Mystic of the East’, the anonymous and aloof bandleader, the blues musician. In short, Van Morrison adopts a number of different personae across his career – including the coming of age adolescent, the nostalgic musician away from home and neighbourhood, the restless seeker of enlightenment, wonder and healing in the natural world, the artist forever trapped in existential exile. It is reasonable to conclude that each might be traced onto his own lived experiences in different places that subsequently become the privileged locations for his songs.

Thesis Overview

There are 10 chapters to follow in the thesis. Chapters 2 and 3 provide a context for the study, and Chapters 4 to 10 provide close readings of songs to illustrate Van Morrison's utilisation of place. The thesis is summarised and concluded in Chapter 11.

Chapter 2 ('Place, Popular Music and Van Morrison') focuses on place and popular music.

Chapter 3 ('Place and Literary Connections') draws parallels between the songwriting of Van Morrison and contemporaries in the sphere of Irish poetry.

Chapter 4 ('Home') conceptualises home as a poetic place of childhood and adolescent reminiscence, of simple pursuits and serious contemplation, an imaginative haven where ideas of transformation might be revisited and explored.

Chapter 5 ('Rooms') shows how the confined physical space of the room is used to capture the intensity of personal relationships, while simultaneously resonating with themes of leaving home and forging new personal and professional pathways in faraway places.

Chapter 6 ('Streets') highlights different vantage points on a continuing cultural journey, from formative childhood experiences, through early expressions of exile and then to feelings of healing and spiritual awareness.

Chapter 7 ('Other Narratives of Belfast') offers important insights into his sense of place as a songwriter, and how he sees and interprets the changing and changeless spaces of Belfast, and then imaginatively and creatively steps out from within these spaces.

Chapter 8 ('Nature') focuses on how Van Morrison is attuned to the natural world and discusses the ways that encounters in the natural world evoke emotional responses that wrestle at the interplay of transcendence and contemplation.

Chapter 9 ('City-Country') also picks up on these responses to nature, while showing ways that the songwriter represents experiences across both the natural world and built worlds, and how each is held in close physical and emotional proximity.

Chapter 10 ('Foreign Lands') details songs where being away from home and overseas are symbolic of the songwriter's perpetual and habitual movement, and narratives of exile.

2. Place, Popular Music and Van Morrison

When walking down from Abetta Parade into the Beechie River at the Hollow in East Belfast, there is a little stone bridge where Van Morrison was photographed at the launch of his tourist trail.¹ This is the setting of one of Van Morrison's most well known songs, 'Brown Eyed Girl' (1967). When asked about the importance of his local upbringing for his songwriting, Van Morrison replied, 'That's the source ... mine was East Belfast, Orangefield specifically'.² The idea of a 'source' is salient when place is thought of in Van Morrison's songwriting. While the worlds that Van Morrison creates in many of his songs may begin in real and experienced places, this local patch in East Belfast becomes important as a source for the poetics of place, where the lyrics and music explore and seek to understand social meanings imaginatively produced from the places surrounding his boyhood home. Hughes maintains these local places assume great significance. They are 'a site for the imagination ... a terrain that can expand and contract as creative needs dictate' (Hughes, 2014, p. xv). In utilising place as a central device in his songwriting, Van Morrison echoes the spatial journeys of other songwriters who see the importance of situating their work in specific and generic

¹ This trail is in partnership with the Connswater Community Greenway. Called, 'The Mystic of the East – Van Morrison Trail, it was launched in August, 2014. (<http://www.communitygreenway.co.uk/news/2014-08-21/van-morrison-returns-to-east-belfast-to-launch-his-first-ever-tourist-trail>).

² This is from interview with Ian Rankin referenced at the beginning of Chapter 1 - the Lyric Theatre, London, 17th November, 2014. Downloaded at: <https://www.vanmorrison.com/videos/van-morrison-lit-up-inside-q-a-london>. Quote is at 3.14.

locations. With this in mind this chapter considers the broader popular music contexts for his work. The first is in popular music more generally, and how expressions of place offer opportunities for songwriters like Van Morrison to explore social issues and consider questions about the human condition. The second is within the specific context of Irish popular music when Van Morrison was first setting out as a musician and songwriter. Together, these two contexts open out the conceptual terrain around the poetics of place, and locate Van Morrison's songwriting within the ways in which popular music has historically engaged with this terrain.

Expressions of Place In Popular Music

As Connell and Gibson argue (2003, p. 117), nothing signifies the relationship between music, place and identity more than the words of songs. Put simply, song lyrics matter, particularly when they work towards social commentary and questions about the human condition (Frith, 1988; Astor, 2010). Van Morrison's words often reflect these assertions. They are reminders of the youthful emotions of being a social outsider on the wealthy avenue just up the road from his own street of terraced houses in 'Cyprus Avenue' (1968 - 'And I'm conquered in a car seat'). They take listeners into city streets where differences between people are on show ('And passers-by/Would shudder with delight' - 'The Story Of Them' - 1965). And in 'Country Fair' (1974) there is a contrast between the possibilities of youth and the awareness of the passing of time as symbolised by the flow of the river ('We stood and watched the river flow/We were too young to really know'). When the breadth of Van Morrison's songwriting is considered, listeners come face-to-face with complex explorations of identity expressed widely across the places of his artistic world. There are memories of home places, observations about the rhythms of the city, senses of wonder caught in the natural world, an

examination of what it feels like to be wandering and away from home. These might be conceptualised across three common expressions of place in popular music that are recognised in the literature, and that have significance for this study. These include the formation and maintenance of cultural identity and its relationship to ideas of authenticity, the imaginative construction of the city, and the machinations of mobility and exile.

Cultural identity. When Van Morrison sings about formative experiences in the Hollow in ‘Brown Eyed Girl’ (1967), thinks about social distances in the wide tree-lined street in ‘Cyprus Avenue’, or reconnects with memories of home as he summons the aromas from the bakery near his home in ‘Cleaning Windows’ (1982), he is making specific connections with local places. In this way he is exploring a fundamental connection between place and identity. What it means to be ‘from’ a particular locality finds common ground in popular music, and is very often connected with specific physical locations, sometimes delineating different ways that place is viewed, at other times negotiating the social and cultural boundaries of identity (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 1). When songwriters write from a locational perspective, they help to co-define and co-shape relationships with places, and this becomes more than the naming of the features of streetscapes and landscapes.³ That is, place becomes a hook for songwriters to hang stories and ideas on. One might think of Lennon and McCartney looking back on earlier days as they reminisce about ‘Penny Lane’ (1967). Or Ray Davies, ‘in paradise’, as he watches another ‘Waterloo Sunset’ over London in 1967. Whiteley, Bennett and Hawkins (2004, p. 2) refer to such practice as the ‘narrativization of place’. This is a term that gets at the way popular music is one vehicle through which

³ This, of course, is generalising across popular music. The argument is not at all being mounted that this applies to all songwriters. Rather, the intention is to open out the idea that particular songwriters (Van Morrison as a key example) share common orientations towards place in their work.

the stories, experiences and emotions are tied to particular places and contribute to a wider sense of what those places might mean in the everyday lives of people. For these critics the process enacts a ‘musicalization of everyday life’, whereby music becomes a pathway through which individuals negotiate the ‘impersonal wilderness of life’ (Whiteley *et al.*, 2004, p. 7). Both ‘narrativization’ and ‘musicalization’, as conceptualised by Whiteley *et al.*, resonate with the notion of a ‘poetics of place’ put forward in Chapter 1. Thought about in this way, popular music plays an important role in imbuing places with significance and, ultimately, meaning. Thus in the words of Van Morrison, the Hollow symbolises a locus for a coming-of-age narrative, while the silence of the Beechie River (‘On Hyndford Street’, 1991) signals moments of heightened contemplation and spiritual awareness.

Music helps to build a common set of understandings about how people feel about particular places. At the intersection of narrativization and musicalization exists an understanding of the relationship between music and the local, and, in turn, how music informs ideas of collective identity and community. In this way music contributes to a sense of belonging and a shared past, what Lewis (1992, quoted in Whiteley *et al.*, 2004, p. 3), refers to as a ‘symbolic anchor’. Accordingly, when notions of community, belonging and shared past are brought together in popular music, then place becomes a key function in identity formation, and this is clearly recognised in the literature (see, Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 117; Frith, 1996, p. 124; Wade, 2000, p. 2). Connell and Gibson (p. 117) observe how this can become both a personal and collective project for both listeners and artists. By this they mean that individual listeners and, indeed, whole communities, can relate culturally to music, and, moreover, artists can project their cultural identities and personal experiences of place through their music. This then becomes an important project through which identity is explored, pulled apart and

assembled at the intersection of the musical processes of live and recorded performance, and audience and listener acceptance and appreciation.

Many of the critical responses to Van Morrison pick up on the poetics of place that is central to much of his oeuvre. McLoone (2008) suggests that *Astral Weeks* (1968) ‘remains one of the most evocative portraits of Belfast produced in any art form’, and ‘in its carefully layered references to Belfast as it was before the outbreak of violence there are textures of a recognisably ‘ordinary’ working-class lifestyle’ (p. 65). The album is indeed a radical reframing of how Northern Irish cultural identity is traditionally read in its focus on the interplay of the personal, the local and the universal. Elsewhere, as discussed in Chapter 1, Marcus (2010) picks up on the single line from ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ (‘It’s a long way to Belfast too’) from an outsider’s perspective, and writes that ‘the specificity of the bare nod to Belfast went off like a gun’ (p. 159). He argues that this single line, within the context of the song, sums up ‘both the aesthetic and the everyday life of avoidance in Northern Ireland’ (p. 159). In this instance in song, within the immediacy of 1972 and the Troubles, identity becomes caught within places that are at the same time profound and trivial, and the Belfast reference picks up on both of these. Marcus observes this conflation as an international outsider, while still experiencing (with the songwriter) the sense of being all around the world and unsure of where the ‘moral rightness’ lay as lives were being lost, and as identity was being delineated across past memories, current pressures and a wider political situation. Both McLoone and Marcus notice the significance in the way Van Morrison utilises place to think about identity.

Nor are these kinds of responses confined to critics. McLaughlin and McLoone (2000) consider what the deployment of local places in lyrics mean for listeners. They talk about how Irish music fans listening to *Astral Weeks* have ‘the thrill of witnessing the periphery take centre-stage’, of hearing local Belfast places like Sandy Row and the

city itself ‘being invoked in a space normally reserved for the likes of Memphis ...’ (p. 184). It is also worth keeping in mind that this impacts on both locals and others. For locals, the mention of familiar places speaks of identification when a place and time was undertaking significant changes. Dawe (2010, p. 171) describes how as a young Northern Irishman, he identified with the music of Van Morrison, who he felt was giving voice to an emerging mood and spirit of a changing Belfast.

In the summer of 1970, sitting on the tiny balcony of a flat that overlooked the square in an estate of houses my mother had moved to, I sat looking at the sky, when ‘These Dreams Of You’⁴ came over the radio. What more can you say? (2009, p. 171).

Here, Dawe was hearing the words of a songwriter who went to the same secondary school (Orangefield) as he had done. The memory of the song now takes him back to the atmosphere of a time and place that might otherwise have been lost, and to important ideas about resilience in the face of hardship.

Hearing the local in Van Morrison songs also impacts on audiences at overseas performances, and many of these would have no direct connection with Belfast. Listeners to the live recording of the concerts Van Morrison played in Los Angeles, Santa Monica and London⁵ can hear loud roars from the audience when Van Morrison sings the line from ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ about his hometown, no doubt an indication of strong personal or shared cultural identification with the songwriter and his native Belfast. It can really only be a matter of speculation whether the roars denoted an appreciation of the singer’s ‘exiled’ condition or concern for the political issues in Northern Ireland, both of which are central themes of the song. What they do

⁴ From the 1970 album, *Moondance*.

⁵ *It’s Too Late To Stop Now*, the compilation double album from the three venues was released in 1974.

indicate is the audience's emotional resonance with the place of the songwriter's hometown, and another example of a shared cultural relationship. This can also be seen in local performances. A sense of collective identity and shared community was apparent in the reaction by locals and visitors, when Van Morrison performed 'On Hyndford Street', with its references to local places and customs, in the concert on Cyprus Avenue (August 31, 2015).⁶ What these examples point towards are the ways music works, in concert with other cultural processes, to build cultural identities, and to see these as processes that are produced across social and cultural dynamics. It is also interesting to think about how they represent an inversion of the ways that Van Morrison is transported to other places as he listens to his father's jazz and blues record collection and tunes in to pirate radio to hear artists like Ray Charles, Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard – documented throughout the catalogue, for example, 'In The Days Before Rock 'N' Roll' (1990). This imaginative transportation would later become a physical relocation to the country where these artists performed their music.

Authenticity. Themes of authenticity and place in popular music have variously focused on the dialectic between the familiar and the exotic, between those instantly recognisable places and others caught in imagination. So there might be a longing for remembered places (and those perhaps lost in time) in early songs of notable songwriters like Bruce Springsteen ('The E Street Shuffle', 1973, 'Incident On 57th Street', 1973) and Joni Mitchell ('Big Yellow Taxi', 1970, 'Woodstock', 1970). Likewise, songs by Van Morrison, for example, 'And It Stoned Me' (1970), 'You Know What They're Writing About' (1979) and 'Coney Island' (1989) are clearly nostalgic and carry strong emotional attachments, often within a deeper search for existential meaning. Here lies a critical aspect of the link between place and authenticity

⁶ The concert celebrated Van Morrison's 70th birthday (*Van Morrison Live on Cyprus Avenue* – video downloaded at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99a2UNJakXU>).

that Moore (2012) delineates. He writes, drawing on Grossberg, 1992, that authenticity may not so much be defined in an ‘anchorage to the past’ or ‘integrity of the performers’ but ‘by its ability to articulate for its listeners a place of belonging’ through an emotional longing for places shared between artist and audience (Moore, 2012, p. 270). This emotional attachment to place is very often marked out in Van Morrison songs by a capacity to take personal and common feelings and experiences, and have them speak to a shared language. The sense of shared language across the personal and the common offers a further explanation for Gerald Dawe’s strong response when he heard the Van Morrison song from his balcony in a London apartment, why international and local audiences cheer when Belfast is mentioned in ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’, and why local place names around the songwriter’s home are heard as important places for the negotiation and production of identity.

Finally, it needs to be acknowledged that Van Morrison’s songwriting, and indeed, his identity as an artist, are both not completely defined by his focus on East Belfast places. As a critical source, it is commonly held that Van Morrison’s East Belfast birthplace is a setting that defines many of his songs, variously representing a cultural philosophical wellspring, a locus for nostalgic memory, and a metaphor for a powerful sense of homecoming. Yet, a close scrutiny of his catalogue shows that he is able to find the spirit of places in other locations, an observation also made by Mills (2010, p. 268). This will be illustrated throughout this thesis, for example in songs such as ‘Snow In San Anselmo’ (1973), ‘Angeliou’ (1979) and ‘When The Leaves Come Falling Down’ (1999) where American towns and Parisian streets evoke phenomenological responses and moments of contemplation.

Images of the city. Popular music is as intrigued by the city almost as much as it is by the highs and lows of love and personal relationships (Jones, 2010, p. 73). Certainly Van Morrison displays a good deal of this intrigue, especially in his earliest

songwriting. Much of this early writing focuses on the rhythm and energy of city streets. Early songs recorded with Them are located either in local streets where Morrison grew up ('Gloria', 1965, 'Hey Girl', 1966, 'The Story Of Them), or in cities like London that he was experiencing for the first time ('You Just Can't Win', 1965, 'Bring 'Em On In', 1966). Similarly, *Astral Weeks* (1968) picks out many of the artist's local haunts, either specifically or generically, in an exploration of rites-of-passage issues surrounding his farewell to Belfast. In these songs, and throughout his career as he returns in song to the city (for example, 'Cleaning Windows'), Van Morrison is inclined to commemorate the textures of their working-class energy, and immerse himself in their sights, sounds, discourses and aromas. As Hughes (2014, p. xvi) remarks in relation to songs like 'The Story Of Them', Van Morrison offers a different commentary to many of the descriptions of his home city. What he does share with much of popular music, is a recurring attentiveness to the city as a site for the investigation of the human condition, and this is a dominant theme around place in popular music. This can be seen in popular music contemporaries mentioned above, Lennon and McCartney's joyful nostalgia for 'Penny Lane', and in Ray Davies' laid back euphoria over another Waterloo Sunset. We might also consider Australian songwriters, Don Walker and his observations about loneliness ('Flame Trees', 1984), and seedy streets and the 'lost debris of the night' (Creswell, 1991) in 'Breakfast At Sweethearts' (1979), or Paul Kelly's 'From St. Kilda To Kings Cross' (1984) that talks about the city and change.

There are a number of common images of the city in popular music, and it must be noted that these are very often contradictory. This point is made also by Connell & Gibson (2003, p. 74), when they write that the ways the city is represented are 'often ambiguous, vague and inconclusive'. Contradictions abound. On one hand cities can be seen as treasured places indelibly connected to the songwriter's identity, and sites of

optimism for a new start. On the other hand, they can be harsh and anonymous lived spaces, characterised by social, racial and cultural conflict. Cities also offer the promise of ‘things illegal and forbidden elsewhere, of drugs and deals and strange liaisons, a place of excitement and danger, of decay and difference ...’ (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 74). Many of these uncertainties and challenges resonate with the common literary representations of Belfast as a place of danger and mayhem, a ‘confused blur of hurrying people’ (Sam Hanna Bell,⁷ quoted in Hughes, 1996), caught in a self-destructive urban tangle in which choices between belonging and exile are the brutal bargains for the inhabitants. The city’s depiction in popular music invariably stands in contrast to the country, to feelings of ‘rootedness’, and an essentialist sense of place where tradition, and continuity holds sway. It is here that we start to notice some critical differences in the ways Van Morrison views the city. Indeed, as many critics have noted (see, for example, McLoone, 2008, p. 166), the artist holds on to memories of the city he grew up in, and feels strongly rooted to the streets of ‘his’ Belfast. ‘The Street Only Knew Your Name’ (1974) is just one of the songs that focuses on the notion of rootedness in its celebration of local acceptance and street cred, and is discussed in Chapter 6.

Further challenging the false dichotomy of urban and rural sensibilities, it should be noted that Van Morrison inhabits an expansive world through his songwriting. It is a world of local urban locations as well as country places of roads, streams and hills. Where streets often stand for the importance of the local and become sites of a symbolic return to the spirit of former places and times, encounters and experiences in the country offer opportunities to seize transcendental moments and ask different questions about the nature of human experience. Indeed, as later chapters illustrate, Van Morrison ‘admits’ both the city and the country (Mills, 2010, p. 98), and sees the importance of

⁷ From Sam Hanna Bell’s 1951 novel, *December Bride*.

both. While songs like 'And It Stoned Me' and 'Coney Island' celebrate the rhythms of the natural world (see, Chapter 8), others like 'I'm Tired Joey Boy' (1989) suggest that the city and the country are mutually supportive places for the songwriter (see, Chapter 9). In these positions Van Morrison may well be drawing on a range of musical influences. Consider, for example, the celebration of rural places of country artists where landscapes offer 'salvation and refuge ... from the impersonal nature of the modern cityscape' (Lewis, 1997, p. 167, as cited in Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 80). 'Alan Watts Blues' (1987) summarises this neatly as it celebrates rural places as an escape from the city. Morrison might also be referencing blues artists who saw mobility as a way of easing personal troubles. What emerges, then, in Van Morrison's treatment of place is a frequent challenge to the common city-country dichotomy - one that offers a false contrast between the city as a place of alienation, and the country as a site of rootedness.

Mobility and exile. Van Morrison's constructions of place are often centred on notions of motion and exile (Mills, 2010, p. 251). That these are key concerns of a songwriter who is compelled to leave home at an early age and then continues to live the musician's life of touring and recording is understandable. For Mills, the influence of writers like Jack Kerouac also comes into play in the interrelationship between the Irish condition of exile and the beat writer's own sense of restlessness and movement (Mills, 2010, p. 56). Across the catalogue there are songs that pick up interrelated ideas of mobility and exile and delve into them in different ways. 'Hard Nose The Highway' (1973), for example, introduces the persona of the restless traveller. 'One Irish Rover' (1986) extends this into the idea of the perpetual wanderer, whilst 'End Of The Land' (2008) symbolises the need to drive to the extremity of place as a resolution of the exiled position (Mills, 2010, p. 261). Crucially, such dynamics have long been dominant subjects in Irish literature (Böss & Gilsenan Nordin, 2005). Furthermore, in

popular music, mobility and travel to 'other places' are commonly heard in the lyrics. Connell and Gibson write about how this is viewed from the perspectives of different genres of music, and these all have some relevance to how Van Morrison's songs are viewed. They contend that in much blues and country music, mobility is about a necessary escape from personal and social difficulties, and this is invariably associated with despondency and further problems. Moreover, they note that many early blues songs (for example, by artists like Robert Johnson) 'articulated intimate attachments and reactions to physical places - migratory and transient experiences were littered throughout blues songs dedicated to themes of escape, songs of wandering and leaving home' (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 138). Here there are clear links with Van Morrison's persona of the perpetual traveller that appear throughout the catalogue. In a slightly different way, much rock and roll music positions mobility as a sense of freedom and adventure, and 'highway songs' offer promises of new and open spaces. In these, the road is open to new meetings, places and people (Jacobsen, 2017, quoted in, Kuyper, 2017; Slethaug, 2017). Songs like Bobby Troup's 'Route 66',⁸ Bruce Springsteen's 'Born To Run' (1975), and The Triffids' 'Wide Open Road' (1985) are good examples of mobility being associated with independence and excitement, with lyrics that reflect on past, present and future places. Van Morrison travels a different path in his songwriting. Mobility in his songs is very often expressed in songs in a sense of displacement, movement and eternal restlessness (Mills, 2010, p. 96), that interplay with diasporic dichotomies of having to leave, but not being able to stay gone (Sørensen, 2005, p. 176). These are very closely linked to exilic perspectives.

Songs about exile are often tied up with feelings of displacement and dislocation. As Connell and Gibson (2003) claim, music is, for many, a critical aspect of

⁸ Many artists have recorded this 1946 song. Nat King Cole was the first, in 1946, but it was brought to the attention of the rock music audience through recordings by artists like Chuck Berry, the Rolling Stones and Them.

the exile experience, providing ‘a mechanism by which the ‘cultural baggage’ of ‘home’ can be transported through time and space, and transplanted into a new environment, assisting in the maintenance of culture and identity’ (p. 161). Further, they observe that Irish popular music ‘is replete with references to loss and longing, exile and emigration’ (p. 161), and there are enduring ambiguities surrounding physical and emotional contrasts between home and the ‘other place’. Similarly, Frith (2004) and Smyth (2005) both see that the exiled experience of many Irish people has led to the construction of systems of social meaning to explain, describe and comment on the different geographical and cultural places that they inhabit. And, music, as one of these systems of social meaning, has played an important part in the expression of the Irish experience across a broad spectrum. This is a significant aspect of Van Morrison’s songwriting. There is the expression of the seeds of exile in early songs like ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ or ‘Streets of Arklow’ (1974) where experiences of being away interrupt the remembrances of home. Later exilic songs of hardship, such as ‘Got To Go Back’ (1986), focus on the inevitability of being on the road. Towards the end of the catalogue there are ideas of a reconciled exile in ‘Song Of Home’ (2008) that reside in the acceptance of transience. Here Morrison expresses insights into personal feelings of dislocation and difference. The idea of a number of movements in Van Morrison’s expression of exile is taken up throughout this thesis and becomes a particular focus in Chapter 10. Movements constitute exile as journey, exile as compulsion and then exile as reconciliation. It is fair to say that these movements are a particular aspect of Van Morrison’s songwriting. Additionally, in a way that clearly connects with Van Morrison’s longing through memory for places forever lost, it is evident that his cultural identity incorporates both the past and present. Sørensen notices as such and draws on Hall’s second notion of cultural identity to describe this (2005, p. 160).⁹ This construct

⁹ Stuart Hall writes about two notions of cultural identity: the first as shared collective culture,

holds that it is the past as well as the present that critically determine a sense of belonging. When this is taken on board it gives shape to the movements in Van Morrison's expression of exile, and supports the position taken up throughout this thesis that the places of Van Morrison's songwriting travel across spatial and temporal dimensions.

The concepts discussed above show a clear connection with the concerns of Van Morrison and his deployment of place as a key feature in his songwriting. Importantly also, these concepts are given a particular inflection in the Irish context. When cultural identity and authenticity are brought to mind, there are questions about what these say about Van Morrison as an artist. When the image of the city is pictured, then Van Morrison's East Belfast depiction of his streets and ditches might well come into view. When mobility and exile are considered, there is a clear connection with the Irish diaspora, and from here it is worthwhile to think about how Van Morrison might be read as an Irish writer abroad and what that means for his identity. The next section examines these resonances in Van Morrison's formative musical experiences and takes into account their significance for the places he visits through his songwriting.

Place, Irish Popular Music and Van Morrison

'That was the job that I thought I was meant to be doing. I just followed what I thought was the job'. Van Morrison is talking about what he termed his 'vocation' in a radio interview with Miriam O'Callaghan (23rd December, 2018).¹⁰ Forming a skiffle band as

and the second as a matter of becoming as well as of being. It is this second notion Sørensen is employing.

¹⁰ Reported on the same day by Aoife Finneran for the *Irish Sun*. Downloaded at <https://www.thesun.ie/tvandshowbiz/music/3548371/van-morrison-music-genius-price-success-new-interview/>.

a 12 year old with some mates around his East Belfast home, contemplating becoming a folk singer, playing saxophone in a showband three years later, fronting a rock and rhythm and blues band as lead singer when he was 17, setting out on a solo singer-songwriter career at 22 - Van Morrison has been following his 'vocation' for over 50 years. This career had its beginnings in a series of critical movements in Irish popular music, and this context shows an awareness of the local, cultural and historical times that became drivers of Van Morrison's life and work as a songwriter. There are three important observations about the relationship between the local and the global that underpin this awareness.

First, music, and writing more generally, has always been central to the social and cultural life of Ireland, and has been significant in defining Irish identity through the telling of stories, and the expression of aspirations and challenges (Smyth, 2005, p. 2). As discussed above, the stories in song that Van Morrison shares about the places of his upbringing and those he experienced as an Irishman overseas, have contributed to an understanding of identity that extends beyond essentialist views. That he explored these views primarily through musical forms that might not be stereotypically coded as Irish, enhances this contribution. Second, Irish popular music has occupied a 'disproportionately large presence on the global market' from the 1960s onwards (McLoone & McLaughlin, 2008, p. 146). It is quite reasonable to conclude that this growth and popularity have both drawn on the early success of artists and bands like Van Morrison, Them, Rory Gallagher, Thin Lizzy, the Boomtown Rats, and later, U2, Sinéad O'Connor and the Cranberries (Smyth, 2005). In the case of Them and Van Morrison, this growth and popularity both in local and overseas markets is arguably associated with an audience appreciation of the discourses of identity and authenticity previously explored. Third, these times were indicative of the ease with which musical

influences had been able to traverse political and national borders, and the ways international musical trends and influences interplayed with Van Morrison's local musical scene.

With these observations in mind, the following section turns to significant developments in Irish and International popular music that have resonance for this study. The first is in the relationship between the traditions of the Irish showbands, and the emerging youth culture influenced by the cultural phenomenon of American rock and roll music - in turn strongly influenced by Black American blues, jazz and soul music. The second is the revival of folk and traditional music. The third is the skiffle and British beat and rhythm and blues movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Van Morrison has been involved with each at varying levels. A brief summary picks up on these perspectives, provides an important context for the study, and shows what they mean for the sense of place in his songwriting.

Irish Showbands. A particularly Irish phenomenon in the late 1950s and early 1960s, showbands dominated every town and city in Ireland. They were 'a specifically Irish response to American and British rock 'n' roll and pop music' (Miller, 2014, p. 77), cover bands that performed versions of original songs with local heroes aping the American originals' (McLaughlin & McLoone, 2000, p. 188).¹¹ Showbands were an important imperative for social change. Burke quotes music promoter Jim Aitken, who claimed that they played 'an enormous part in taking a closed Ireland into an open Ireland ... to an Ireland that did what they wanted to do ... It was an essential element in the evolution of Ireland' (Burke, 2013, p. 54). Smyth agrees, observing that the showbands 'were, if not exactly hip, then certainly in the vanguard of those who were agitating for a new Ireland, one less in thrall to the past and more open to the values of

¹¹ There was certainly some criticism that showbands were imitative, unauthentic and lacking in creativity (Miller, 2014, p. 91).

the wider world' (2005, p. 12). There are connections between these dynamics and Van Morrison's later writing about place that would often move away from the local East Belfast streets of the earlier songs.

The 15-year-old Van Morrison left school in 1960, registered with the Musicians Union, and soon joined the Monarchs Showband as a saxophone player (Rogan, 2006; Burke, 2013).¹² He then had a world opened up for him that extended beyond his East Belfast home territory. It was a world where the music he was hearing on pirate radio and through his father's extensive record collection (including country singers - Hank Williams, Jimmie Rodgers, gospel artists - Mahalia Jackson, jazz and blues performers - Jelly Roll Morton, Big Bill Broonzy, Muddy Waters, Louis Jordan – Rogan, 2006, p. 20) found a contemporary place on the stage. Interest in this music was a few years later to take him away for the first time from his hometown, when the Monarchs toured in England and Germany.¹³ While he was in Heidelberg (Germany) he came into contact with American GIs who introduced him to contemporary African-American acts like Bobby Bland, and he also played harmonica for the first time to Sonny Boy Williamson's 'Elevate Me Mama' (1946, Rogan, 2006, p. 62). The places of his musical world were ever expanding.

When place is considered in this context, it was a 'hybrid cultural expression' that reflected the negotiation of music originating from outside Ireland within 'local practices and consumption' (Miller, 2014, p. 78). The music that was mainly being produced across the Atlantic and heard on radio stations was translated into local performance. Its hybridity resided in the combination of 'non-Irish culture and

¹² Morrison later said in interview that they were originally a rock band but added the horn section out of the necessity to be booked for gigs (Heylin, 2002, p. 37). When the Monarchs disbanded Van Morrison joined other showbands - the Manhattan Show Band and then the Golden Eagles (Rogan, 2006, pp. 71-79)

¹³ Morrison received special permission to go abroad as an under 18 year old – Rogan, 2006, p. 61.

aesthetics (British and American popular music) with specifically Irish performance aesthetics' (dramatic and comedy skits as part of the show) (Miller, 2014, p. 79). For Van Morrison, it provided an opportunity to begin to experience as a performer what he previously could only participate in as a listener. It brought him closer to the music influenced by many of his musical heroes, and indeed closer to their ideas about place – the lonely life on the road of singers like Hank Williams, and the sense of attachment and reaction to locations that were the hallmarks of many blues artists. Later, Van Morrison would also write songs about the influences of listening to records and pirate radio ('Wavelength', 1978, 'In The Days Before Rock 'N' Roll'), and as a young performer ('The Street Only Knew Your Name', and 'Cleaning Windows'¹⁴) and locate these influences in his own places of the street corners of East Belfast and the city's local clubs. These were significant factors for Van Morrison's sense of place, demonstrating affection for former places while being away from those places.

Folk Music. If Van Morrison's experience in the Monarchs (and other showbands) had opened up new performative and creative opportunities and possibilities, his interest in folk and traditional music would have a further impact on his songwriting. It challenged him to think more widely about lyrics and meaning, and the broadening out of the themes that might be expressed through songs (Rogan, 2006, p. 33).¹⁵ Folk music was becoming increasingly popular both sides of the Atlantic at the time Van Morrison was beginning his musical career. In the United States the activism of Pete Seeger, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan drew attention to environmental and social issues (Ingram, 2008; Pedelty, 2012. See also, Chapter 8). In the United Kingdom, folk music developed an increasing focus on the natural world that spread across folk-rock

¹⁴ 'I was blowing saxophone on the weekend/In a Down joint'.

¹⁵ Van Morrison recalls in interview that he had planned to be a folk singer while he was still at school, even auditioning (unsuccessfully) with the BBC (Rogan, 2006, p. 33).

and psychedelia in a 'getting back to the garden' movement (Young, 2010, p. 7). How did these movements impact on Van Morrison and his songwriting? And what might also be seen in the concerns of folk artists that are paralleled in Van Morrison's utilisation of place?

The influence of Bob Dylan on Van Morrison in his early years helped Van Morrison see the different places where his songwriting might reside.¹⁶ Hage (2009) talks about it this way:

Morrison was not immune to his influence; in fact, Dylan's success may have given Morrison 'permission' to explore new realms, or at least it showed him that there was an alternative to the R&B and pop world he had been dwelling in (p. 30).

It is fair to read this as an opportunity for the young songwriter to think differently about the concerns and locations of his writing – opening up the possibilities for him to challenge some of the existing themes of popular music. Interviews with Van Morrison support this. While still in Belfast, he heard Dylan's *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1963) with lyrics strongly focused on social and political issues. He enthused, '... the subject matter wasn't pop songs, ya know, and I thought this kind of opens the whole thing up' (Heylin, 2002, p. 134). This seems significant for Van Morrison's sense of place in his songwriting. As well as social protest songs ('Blowin' In the Wind' and 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall'), there are others like 'Girl From The North Country', 'Down The Highway', 'Bob Dylan's Dream' and 'Oxford Town' where issues of relationships, loneliness and cultural harmony are located within specific places, and these became an important lens through which the ideas might be explored. The

¹⁶ Note also that this influence extended into his early albums (*Moondance, His Band And The Street Choir*) when he relocated to Woodstock from New York City in 1969, and was a neighbour of Bob Dylan and several members of The Band (Rogan, 2006, p. 234).

location of important ideas that are mediated through places was to become a critical component of Van Morrison's artistic work.

At the same time, Van Morrison was increasingly interested in the 1930s and 1940s folk and blues musician Huddie Ledbetter (Lead Belly). Burke (2013) records Van Morrison saying that he was inspired to play guitar by listening to records by Lead Belly: 'My major influence was Lead Belly. If it wasn't for him, I may never have been here' (p. 42). Van Morrison was also quoted as saying that he listened to Scottish folk singer Rory McEwen who performed Lead Belly songs (Burke, 2013, p.43). Again, it is not a stretch to conclude that the issues Lead Belly was singing about would influence Van Morrison. Davis (1995) writes that in the late 1930s folk music was perceived by many to be 'an outlet for social protest' (p. 177), and that Lead Belly songs such as 'Bourgeois Blues' (1937) and 'The Scottsboro Boys' (1938) were meeting a demand for original songs with social relevance. These songs utilised specific places to explore issues of social relevance – and this would later become Van Morrison's stock-in-trade.

At a more local level, Van Morrison talks about how he was inspired by The McPeake Family. He recalls hearing the McPeakes' performing their song, 'Purple Heather':¹⁷

I heard the McPeakes do it at a party in Belfast a long, long time ago. I'd probably heard it first from my mother but the McPeakes sold me on it. I just thought it was one of the greatest things I'd ever heard (Mills, 2010, p. 192).

It is noteworthy that the lyrics of 'Purple Heather' contain many of the motifs (changing seasons, falling leaves, mountainsides, shared journeys) that Van Morrison would later employ in songs about place and the natural world (see, Chapter 8). Van Morrison's

¹⁷ This is a traditional song alternatively named 'Wild Mountain Thyme'. Van Morrison recorded 'Purple Heather' for his 1973 album, *Hard Nose The Highway*. It was one of the first cover songs he recorded in his solo career.

catalogue is replete with songs that explore the rhythms of and relationships with the natural world, and these are discussed across the chapter in this thesis (for example, 'Brown Eyed Girl', 'And It Stoned Me', 'Country Fair').

When we think about the influence of Bob Dylan, Leadbelly and the McPeakes, a picture emerges of Van Morrison exploring new ideas in the lyrics of songs and locating these in places across the built and natural worlds. Beyond these direct influences, it is also possible to see wider parallels in folk and traditional music with Van Morrison's relationship to place. When authenticity is considered in its emotional connections to place between the performer and listener, then folk music (and blues) has long been associated with music that resonates with 'emotional triggers', and where the direct appeal to emotions is critical (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 29). As noted above, emotional responses to Van Morrison songs have been central to the relationship between his writing and his listeners (see, McLoone, 2008, Marcus, 2009, Dawe, 2010). There is also a strong sense of 'belonging' to particular places that is central to folk music, with artists historically emphasising roots and locality. This certainly coincides with Van Morrison's feeling of rootedness in songs that return to local places through memories and seek to 'preserve' these as a critical aspect of his identity (see also, McLoone, 2008, p. 166). Folk music is also interested in the lives of ordinary people, and we find this throughout Van Morrison's songs, most particularly those located in streets ('Cleaning Windows', 'The Healing Game', 1997, 'Behind The Ritual', 2008). Finally, the natural world is very much the privileged location of folk music, and this features in many songs throughout Van Morrison's career, starting as early as the 1970s in the *Moondance* album (1970), and gaining momentum through the 1970s and 1980s (see, for example, *Tupelo Honey*, 1971, *Into The Music*, 1979, *Common One*, 1980, *Avalon Sunset*, 1989).

Skiffle and British beat and rhythm and blues. Skiffle music provided another connection with the music of Lead Belly. It was driven by the raw energy of early rock and roll, and the influences of Black American and 50s British jazz (Mills, 2010, p. 32). One of its best-known musicians, the Glaswegian, Lonnie Donegan, came to the early attention of Van Morrison. The connection between Donegan's music and Lead Belly was key to this attention. In a 2005 interview Van Morrison proclaims, 'For me, skiffle tapped into the Lead Belly thing ... when Lonnie Donegan started coming out with versions of Lead Belly songs, that's when it all kicked in for me' (quoted in Burke, 2013, p. 43).¹⁸ It kicked in early. Van Morrison formed a makeshift skiffle group, The Sputniks, with neighbours and friends from around his Hyndford Street home as a twelve year old in 1957. Early ideas around place and identity might be traced to this time. 'The Street Only Knew Your Name' looks back to early days playing music, and, as is argued in Chapter 6, fits within the period of the skiffle movement with its strong street associations (Mitchell, 2012). In this song there is a message about the importance of local acceptance and street 'cred', and how his identity that is forged through interactions across community brings a sense of belonging and solidarity.

There was a more auspicious introduction into the world of rock and roll and rhythm and blues when he fronted the Belfast band, Them.¹⁹ The British beat and rhythm and blues movement²⁰ had followed the American rock and roll scene (and, to a lesser extent, the skiffle scene). What these shared in common was their youth

¹⁸ Van Morrison recorded a live album with Lonnie Donegan, jazzman Chris Barber and Dr John (among others) in 1998 - *The Skiffle Sessions – Live In Belfast 1998*.

¹⁹ Them began their musical career as The Gamblers in 1962 and Van Morrison joined them as a 19 year old playing saxophone and harmonica and doing some of the vocals (Burke, 2013, p. 66)

²⁰ Also referred to as the 'British Invasion' - the term used to describe the period in the 1960s when rock acts became popular in the United States.

orientation and their ‘music-led set of attitudes and practices ... consciously at odds with dominant (showband) and other emergent (folk and traditional) forms’ (Smyth, 2005, p. 24). Early Irish beat bands like the Greenbeats and Bluesville looked to distance themselves from the commerciality of showbands, and instead strove for what was perceived as a more ‘authentic’ sound. Authentic here meant drawing on Black American music (blues, rhythm and blues, soul) and the ‘energy and speed’ of rock and roll’s back beat (Smyth, 2005, pp. 26-32). This is close to what Moore (2012) refers to as the ‘commonest attribution of the [authentic] term ... the maintenance of the origins of a performance practice’ (p. 263). This notion of authenticity stands alongside its conceptualisation as a connection between performer and listener through links to particular places and times (see, above). It is fair to say that Them were to straddle both these conceptualisations of authenticity. They covered Black American music (for example, John Lee Hooker’s ‘Don’t Look Back’ (1964), Jimmy Reed’s ‘Bright Lights, Big City’ (1961), Ray Charles’ ‘I Got A Woman’ (1957), James Brown’s ‘Out Of Sight’ (1964),²¹ but also recorded 11 Van Morrison compositions for *The Angry Young Them* and *Them Again*. Many of these original songs use place as a key lens through which their ideas are explored (see, below).

Them’s first gigs were at the Maritime Hotel in College Square North in April 1964. The history of the band tells the story of legendary improvised performances by Van Morrison, heated disagreements about musical style and damaging managerial and contractual issues (see, among others, Heylin, 2002; Rogan, 2006). Suffice to say that Them’s involvement in the British beat and rhythm and blues movement (among others, Rolling Stones, Animals, Yardbirds, Pretty Things, all bands playing American blues and rhythm and blues), and their penchant for unruly and unreliable behaviour together

²¹ It is also of interest that they recorded Bob Dylan’s ‘It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue’ (1965), given his influence on Van Morrison.

with uncompromising blues performances, quickly earned them a reputation that took them to London. Here Van Morrison met notable performers - Little Walter, John Lee Hooker and Gene Vincent (Rogan, 2006, p. 109).²² Importantly, their 'blackness' in the form of their playing of American rhythm and blues was seen as challenging and escaping from sectarianism, offering alternatives to Belfast and Irish youth from fixed notions of Protestant and Catholic identities. This was an alternative conceptualisation of identity that was predicated on place in a different way. For a group of young people the symbolism of the Maritime Hotel resided in its importance as the place where popular music crossed local and international boundaries and times. Here, a home-grown band connected with and pioneered music that was now spanning generations of Black music, and becoming a critical mid-1960s movement. Here, identity as a follower of music was not circumscribed by social, cultural or historical orders. Here the 'Spanish rooms on the Falls' ('The Story Of Them') was not a place just for those with certain backgrounds, but where all could hang out regardless of background and hitherto perceived differences. This conceptualisation of identity is presented in 'The Story Of Them' (see Chapter 7), with its lyrical energies around interruptions to a prevailing social order, and differences and acceptances that rely on symbolic and physical border crossing.

Other Van Morrison songs recorded by Them highlight his developing sense of place. The seminal Van Morrison song, 'Gloria' (the B side to Them's second single)²³ is seen to be 'the moment when the actual compositions of Van Morrison first gathered real heat and seeped into the collective consciousness of popular music on both shores of the Atlantic ... two-and-a-half minutes of hard-nosed, call and answer garage rock

²² Them also shared the stage with now famous artists, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Kinks, The Animals, The Moody Blues and Georgie Fame (Rogan, 2006).

²³ The A side was 'Baby, Please Don't Go', a traditional song popularized by Delta bluesman Big Joe Williams in the 1930s and subsequently recorded by musicians like Big Bill Broonzy and John Lee Hooker – both listed among Van Morrison's inspirations.

muscle’ (Hage, 2009, p. 20). Beyond its rock appeal, there is an important relationship between the localness of the lyrics and its wider international appreciation. Dawe (2007) makes explicit connections between the song and the songwriter’s home town, and talks about how the brashness of the calling out in the street was very much part of a common Belfast street scene (p. 64, see, also, Chapter 5). ‘Local’ here is not so much bound to a specific place but to a deployment of an aesthetic, and is very similar to the ways Van Morrison sings with an East Belfast accent (for example, ‘If You And I Can Be As Two’, 1965, ‘Coney Island’).²⁴ As one of the very early-recorded songs by Van Morrison, ‘Gloria’ foreshadows Van Morrison’s use of place in his future writing (see, Chapter 5). Other songs on the two Them albums reinforce this prescience – from the graveyard image of ‘Mystic Eyes’ (1965), to the Dylanesque protest song, ‘You Just Can’t Win’ (1965) (Rogan, 2006, p. 127),²⁵ with its geographical references to London rather than Belfast, to the Belfast-inspired foggy city bay and mountain slopes of ‘Hey Girl’ (1966).

What can be summarised in Van Morrison’s musical career to this point, as he moved from skiffle to showband, and then to fronting a rhythm and blues band? He was very

²⁴ It is worth noting that critics who are alert to these nuances are from both Irish and non-Irish backgrounds. Englishman Brian Hinton writes about ‘If You And I Could Be As Two’ - ‘words are closer to prose than poetry – a walk in the darkness – delivered with an aggressive Irish accent’ (Hinton, 2000, p.55). American Greil Marcus picks up on the Irish accent in ‘Tupelo Honey’ (1971) - ‘Morrison has all but been kissing his words, lolling over them; then his clearwater tone breaks, and he takes a breath ... “You can take ... all the tea in Chiney” – and with “Chiney” ... the scene shifts from the Woodstock hills and the open seas of the seven oceans to a Belfast wharf ... “Drop it, smack dab, in the middle of the deep blue sea” (Marcus, 2010, p. 21). Irish-born David Burke comments on the inflection in ‘Coney Island’ and how it elevates the sense of place in the locations visited - ‘... the thick Ulster brogue of Morrison’s recitation over Fiachra Trench’s exquisite string arrangement’ (Burke, 2013, p. 191). Clearly they commonly see how ‘localness’ and identity might be as tied to performance as well as the naming of places.

²⁵ Rogan is concluding its ‘protest’ as similar to Bob Dylan’s ‘Positively 4th Street’, 1965 - about ‘gold-digging’ (2006, p. 127).

much involved in discourses around identity and authenticity. Identity was positioned between the places of his formative years, and the imperatives that compelled him to leave those places. Discourses of authenticity would ply the common ground between connection to specific places and times in Van Morrison's songwriting and the 'blues ideal' of appropriating musical forms, and then performing them in local contexts (Smyth, 2005, p. 33). Here was the beginning of a musical vision that held that:

... both Ulster and the United States have their compensations and their drawbacks, their attractions and their limitations, and [Van Morrison's] music may be understood as an ongoing and evolving response to the paradoxical situation in which, as an Ulsterman, with access to a particular African-American musical tradition, he found himself. In this vision, early Them represents some kind of Edenic balance between the innocence of Belfast and the excitement of America, a time and place when these imagined places could be experienced and appreciated as a function of their relationship with each other (Smyth, 2005, p. 34).

Finally, this visioning and positioning point to one of the defining characteristics of the Irish popular music movement from the 1960s onwards, as it responded to evolving points of contact between the local and the global, and worked against older values and notions of identity. McLaughlin and McLoone explain this in relation to concepts of 'hybridity' in Irish music, arguing that this has grown out of perspectives on each side of the liminal spaces surrounding an essential 'Irishness and the global culture of rock music' (2000, p. 183). Hybridity sits at the heart of negotiations within the dominant themes of identity and authenticity and the impact of mobility and exile that have played out across much of the Irish popular music scene. Such negotiations lay ahead of the young Van Morrison as he ventured professionally and imaginatively away from the places of his upbringing towards a wider musical world. They would be later

caught in experiences across temporal and physical locations, a physical and spiritual mobility that would have him travelling to faraway places, on a restless 'path to enlightenment' (Hage, 2009, p. 97), while at the same time harbouring a yearning to recapture earlier times. They would be found in city streetscapes and country landscapes - in home places of streets and ditches, in the enclosed spaces of rooms, in the expansive reaches of the natural world, in indeterminate and specific foreign lands. These are the places of Van Morrison's songwriting.

3. Place and Literary Connections

The songs came out of some inner expression of trying to cope with what was happening around me. It came out of people I knew and snatches of conversations, snatches about people's lives ... Most of it was capturing the spirit of what was going on with my peer group at the time in Belfast (Van Morrison, in interview with Sean O'Hagan, 1990, quoted in Rogan, 2006, p. 242).

Van Morrison is talking about *Astral Weeks* (1968) and how he drew on the 'spirit' of the places to write the songs on the album. *Astral Weeks* continues Van Morrison's introduction of Belfast place names into popular music (Cyprus Avenue, Fitzroy, Sandy Row). It had started with songs like, 'The Story Of Them' (1965) with its settings of the Maritime Hotel and 'the Spanish rooms on the Falls'. 'Brown Eyed Girl' (1968) and the grassy bank of the Hollow followed. This is a personal construction of the Belfast of his childhood and adolescence. The places that are deemed important are utilised by the songwriter in an expression of what it felt like to be growing up and changing in this patch of his hometown. *Astral Weeks* was released in America towards the end of 1968. At the time Van Morrison had already left Belfast and was living in a bohemian enclave in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Walsh, 2019). When it arrived on the United Kingdom market almost a year later, the Troubles in Northern Ireland had dramatically escalated. Rogan writes that 'the timing was eerily appropriate'. It was the songwriter's farewell to Belfast, a 'personal requiem for a city that seemed increasingly lost to him', and now 'it served as a painful soundtrack to an era that was no more' (2006, p. 242). Walsh is right (2019, p. 267). While the unravelling political context in Belfast seems appropriate for a

farewell album to that city, it is more coincidence than causation, and as listeners to *Astral Weeks* will know, any awareness of the wider political upheaval is held back within the pouring out of memories through the songwriter's subconscious.

The release of *Astral Weeks* in the later years of the 1960s is also notable for another context of which the young songwriter at the time is yet to be aware. It came at a time when, as Dawe (2007, pp. 76-77) observes, 'a new and powerful generation of Irish poets' was emerging – Derek Mahon (*Night Crossing*, 1968), Seamus Heaney (*Death of a Naturalist*, 1966, *Door into the Dark*, 1969), Michael Longley (*No Continuing City*, 1969), and Paul Durcan¹ and Brian Lynch (*Endsville*, 1967). Dawe writes that the lyrics of *Astral Weeks* 'explore (and corroborate) much of the imaginative ambition and desire' of Van Morrison's poetic peers. In positioning the musician and this 'powerful generation of poets' as 'peers', Dawe suggests that serious attention be afforded Morrison's lyrics, a central tenet of this thesis. Furthermore, the scholarly literature on Van Morrison shows that this close scrutiny has been very often undertaken by those with a background in literary criticism - most notably, Erik Hage (2009), Eamon Hughes (2014) and Gerry Smyth (2019).² It is reasonable to conclude then, that insights taken from the domain of literature might be applied to the domain of popular music. With this in mind, the chapter considers the work of Van Morrison

¹ Dawe cites Paul Durcan as the writer of *Endsville* – the collection was actually a collaboration with Brian Lynch. See References under Lynch.

² There is a broader context. Poetic critics have looked closely at the lyrics of songwriters, and Christopher Ricks' (2004) analysis of the songs of Bob Dylan as works of literature is a notable example. It is also interesting to think about what Gerry Smyth writes about Van Morrison in his 2011 review of Peter Mills' *Hymns To The Silence: Inside the Words and Music of Van Morrison* (2010). Smyth argues that one of the strengths of the book is the many 'close readings' (or 'listenings') of the songs, and goes on to wonder why Van Morrison has not attracted the same level of critical and academic attention as Bob Dylan (Smyth, 2011, pp. 243-244). As argued from the outset, this study is underpinned by the idea that Van Morrison's songs might be closely read and listened to as texts, and this would offer insights into his life and work as a songwriter.

within a wider context of place in Irish literature, and this context of music and poetry illuminates the significance of place within Van Morrison's songwriting.

'What You've Been Searching For You Already Are'

Van Morrison's early songwriting is strongly connected to the places of his childhood and youth. It is also apparent that a wider tie-in with contemporary artists from literary domains later becomes an important part of his identity as a writer. He explains it this way:

When I started writing songs at a very early age, I didn't have a clue what I was doing. Later on I tried to connect what I was doing with my contemporaries ... I wanted to find out where I stood and which tradition I came from ... You find out that what you've been searching for you already are. This writing comes from places I used to go – for example, when I was a kid, the area I was brought up in. The thread took me from there to research poets like Yeats, Keats, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, eventually to the Glen Poets of Northern Ireland (from the 1990 television documentary, *Coney Island Of The Mind*,³ quoted in Burke, 2013, p. 204).

The words, 'You find out that what you've been searching for you already are', are particularly telling. They highlight a developing awareness of what place means for Van Morrison within a broader context than merely popular music. Many of the observations about Van Morrison and place discussed so far find parallels in the work of his literary contemporaries. Thus, thinking about literature and Irish writers can help us get closer

³ The title of the documentary was taken from beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti's 1958 collection of poems. It featured contributions by Northern Irish poets, Michael Longley, Seamus Deane and John Montague in conversation with Van Morrison.

to Van Morrison's work and better understand the manifold ways in which conceptions of place inform his writing.

In 'Saint Dominic's Preview' Van Morrison writes about his early memories of Belfast streets, about feelings of isolation in an apartment block in a faraway city, and about social dislocation when emotionally 'trapped' in upmarket, uptown hangouts. There are a number of resonances between this song and Northern Irish literature of the same period. First, expressions of place are written from the perspective of being away, so listeners feel the nostalgia for earlier times and the sense of loneliness and dislocation. Second, it is the fine-grained detail of place that the song hones in on, from the window cleaning chamois, to the scattered orange boxes, to 'the chains, badges, flags and emblems'. Third, it elevates the deployment of memory as a crucial source of artistic inspiration. These are the three pillars around which this chapter is organised, and these contexts provide insights into Van Morrison's relationship with place.

Writing From Away

Van Morrison is strongly associated with Belfast and that association is clearly bound with his identity as a songwriter. Kennedy-Andrews (2008, p. 1) and Alexander and Cooper (2013, p. 6) note that Irish poets have continuously used place as important drivers of their artistic work, and that place has figured prominently in the work of Irish writers, including Seamus Heaney, John Hewitt and Michael Longley (Kennedy-Andrews, 2008, p. 1). Kennedy-Andrews goes on to observe that one of the influences on the ways that identity has been re-imagined has been through the diasporic experience of many writers. Like Van Morrison, Northern Irish poets - Seamus Heaney, John Montague, Derek Mahon and Paul Muldoon - have all lived away from their homeland for extended periods of time (2008, p. 12). They have written from away and,

while indelibly connected with their original culture, they have been continuously involved in processes of re-imagining the places they both originated from, and subsequently left behind. As Kerrigan (2004) observes, ‘being elsewhere ... [is] so compatible with Irishness that it could also serve to confirm it’ (pp. 125-126). Being elsewhere has long been the artistic experience of Van Morrison. He left Belfast for New York City as a 22 year old to record *Blowin’ Your Mind* (1967), and remained overseas for a long part of his career.⁴ His writing from away is found in a number of expressions of place. It can be seen in the nostalgia for formative locations and times – the teenage bedroom in ‘Wavelength’ (1978), the local hangouts in ‘Brown Eyed Girl’ and ‘You Know What They’re Writing About’ (1979), street corners in ‘The Healing Game’ (1997), and East Belfast in ‘Cleaning Windows’ (1982) and ‘On Hyndford Street’ (1991). For Marcus (2010, p. 166) nostalgia grips Van Morrison like quicksand, and it makes sense to imagine this grip is intensified through physical distance. Many of his songs explore the textual spaces between home and away – spaces that interrogate feelings at the intersection of compulsion and uncertainty, in songs like ‘The Back Room’ (1967) and ‘Astral Weeks’ (1968). Furthermore, Van Morrison’s expression of place as an ‘away writer’ is very noticeable in his songs about exile, where his artistic persona longs for a former place that is no longer recoverable (Wagner, 2001, p. 105), and where the quest for home is integral to the metaphorical search for identity (Gurr, 1981, p. 14. See, Chapter 10). Exile then amplifies a sense of home, and poses questions about where he belongs as a writer and performer. It sharpens Morrison’s awareness of different places that he both encounters and brings back through memory, and heightens his emotional relationship with place.

⁴ Van Morrison returned to Ireland in 1992, first living in Dublin, and then later back in Belfast (Rogan, 2006, p. 406).

It is at this final point that resonances with a long line of Irish writers come into play. The tropes of exile have long been extant in Irish writing (Böss, 2005), and we can go back to James Joyce as an early and notable example. There are some striking similarities between the exiled experience of Van Morrison and James Joyce, and its impact on their writing. Both write about formative experiences in their home streets. Consider this comment about Joyce that might equally apply to Van Morrison – ‘[He] always showed a keen determination to maintain a connection with that time he spent as a boy and young man in Ireland’ (Gillespie, 2015, p. 23). Both circumscribe aspects of their identity through redefining the worlds they came from. Both might be seen as exile writers because of decisions they made that their creativity would be better sustained outside of their home country. As Gillespie (2015) writes, ‘the most convincing reason for seeing Joyce as an exile writer comes not because he fits any received view of the term but because events in his life made it possible for him plausibly to see himself as one’ (p. 2). He further notes that it is the psychological, emotional and instinctive responses that distinguish the exilic experience, and that in this case exile may well be driven by an overriding artistic need - ‘exile replaces inclination with compulsion’ (p. 4).⁵ Clearly compulsion sits at the heart of Van Morrison’s feelings of exile, and McLoone (2008, p. 171) labels this the ‘ultimate irony’ - being rooted in Belfast culture while at the same time being driven to escape it. This is a compulsion that sits at the centre of his engagement with place, and is a force that straddles his work as both a writer and performer. In this way the need to be away becomes both a physical and a textual stance. ‘Whatever Happened To PJ Proby’ (2002) sums up these opposing forces, the enduring compulsion to move and the continuing need to go back:

⁵ Van Morrison quite possibly sees a connection between his own experience of exile and that of James Joyce. Bear in mind this line from ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ about the inherent dangers in leaving home to pursue an artistic career – ‘And I’m hoping that Joyce won’t blow the hoist’.

All the cards fell so many rounds
Down the road apiece Jack
I saw a bus coming and I had to get on it
I'm still trying to find my way back

Thinking about exile as a psychological, emotional and compulsive response carries a reminder that there are inherent contradictions in the way it is viewed, especially within the context of recent Northern Irish literary times. Derek Mahon and Paul Muldoon are two writers who both pick up on these contradictions, exploring the concept of exile as an 'existential phenomenon', resisting what they see as stereotypes about the condition in the Irish context (Kennedy-Andrews, 2008, p. 16). Here there is both resonance and dissonance with the work of Van Morrison. Exile is clearly a central theme in much of the latter's writing – 'a state towards which [he] seems drawn' (Mills, 2010, p. 251). Despite Mahon's general disinclination to attach emotionally to particular places (Rankin Russell, 2010, p. 301), and attendant lack of nostalgia for home (Kennedy-Andrews, 2008, p. 16), poems like 'Spring In Belfast' (1968) resonate with many aspects of Van Morrison writing. Consider, for example, the lines from 'Spring In Belfast', beginning with, 'One part of my mind must learn to know its place', where the poet is caught between an affinity for the local and the freedom to wander mentally to other places (Rankin Russell, 2010, p. 301). Similar parallels may be seen in Paul Muldoon. His more strident 'tetchiness' of being labelled an 'exile' (Kerrigan, 2004, p. 126) is found in works like *The Prince of the Quotidian* (1994), where he rejects the label of 'true home' within an existentialist project. Here, 'Home' is no longer a place, but the poetic space ... endlessly, the poet must map his own place in a world ... the materiality of place is dissolved in textual place' (Kennedy-Andrews, 2008, pp. 17-19). This is indeed the kind of textual landscape that Van Morrison traverses in much of his writing –

I'm nothing but a stranger in this world ('Astral Weeks')

I'm stranded at the edge of the world
It's a world I don't know
Got nowhere to go
Feels like I'm stranded ('Stranded', 2005)

Travelled up and down all around the world
Just to get to nowhere' ('Out In The Cold Again', 2016).

In these kinds of expressions Van Morrison frequently rehearses the existential project of exile within the emotional hardship of an artist writing from away. Writing then becomes the process of how writers like Van Morrison and Paul Muldoon come to know their place in the world.⁶ Indeed, Muldoon's *The Prince of the Quotidian* might well be thought of as a neat encapsulation of Van Morrison's work as it was influenced by folk music traditions – significant ideas written about everyday experiences. Looking for detail in places that might otherwise be seen as ordinary is another parallel between the work of Van Morrison and Northern Irish writers.

The Details of Place

Van Morrison is fascinated by place, and it is a fascination that extends beyond the description and naming of places. The fine-grained detail in his songs is what both Mills (2010, p. 230) and Rankin (2014, p. xi) refer to as the search for something marvelous in the 'everyday' and the 'commonplace'. This eye for detail connects his work with the Beat poets, like Jack Kerouac, who Van Morrison read widely as an adolescent.⁷ As

⁶ It is also worth noting that Paul Muldoon is a musician as well as a poet. His band, Rogue Elephant, plays original songs and spoken lyrics by Muldoon (<https://www.paulmuldoonpoetry.com/music>).

⁷ When asked by Gerald Dawe about critics seeing similarity in his lyrics with Kerouac's *On The Road*, Van Morrison replies: I was just coming in on the tail end of the '50s generation of people. I think that book really opened up people's minds. In fact, he opened up the whole '60s freedom vibe ... he opened up the spontaneity of ideas and writing in general. He was the spearhead of the Beat poetry movement that included poets like Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Corso and Burroughs (Dawe, 2011, p. 181)

Mills (2010) observes, the ‘eye for the small local detail which somehow both begets the grander, universal picture that is inherent in Morrison’s work is also to be found in Kerouac’ (p. 255). Van Morrison immerses listeners in the texture of streetscapes and landscapes - rooms, streets, ditches, hills and rivers. It is a detailed immersion in which all of the senses are engaged. So, listeners are encouraged to feel the exaltation of the pouring rain on the backs of the boys leaning against a fence in ‘And It Stoned Me’ (1970). They can sense in the unseasonal weather in ‘Snow In San Anselmo’ (1973) the portending of something operatic in the silenced and ice-bound cascade. They can think of Van Morrison’s interest in the whiffs, flavours and sounds that he recaptures in songs like ‘Cleaning Windows’ as a way of beckoning listeners into the energies of the local patch with its interplaying of work and music and good-humoured fun - the aroma of baking bread, the taste of lemonade and Paris buns, the music of Lead Belly and Blind Lemon. ‘A Sense Of Wonder’ (1985) concludes with a roll-call of local sights and sounds - ‘the man who played the saw outside the City Hall, ‘pastie suppers down at Davey’s chipper’. And, in ‘Real, Real Gone’ (1990) there is a sudden awareness that Sam Cooke is on the radio and in the ether and air around us (Mills, 2010, p. 126), filling the night ‘with space’ at the same time as the closeness of fingertips touch the face.

These examples speak to a finely tuned attention to place and highlight the different ways that Van Morrison invites listeners to get closer to the places he is writing about, and this heightens the awareness of the ideas that the songs explore. It is worth bearing in mind that such attention to detail across the senses and the quest for the extraordinary in the everyday can also be seen in many Irish poets. Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Ciaran Carson are cases in point. For Corcoran, Heaney was strongly influenced by writers who created poetry out of the textures of the local area and background (1998). Newsweek journalist, Jack Kroll, is regularly quoted as saying that ‘Heaney makes you

see, hear, smell, taste his life'.⁸ Similarly, for Corcoran (1998), in Heaney's earliest poetry the facts of his experiences 'are conveyed in a language of great sensuous richness and directness' and 'with a strong gauze of sound' (p. 1). In agreement, Healey (1997) observes that the importance of place is 'woven tightly' into Heaney's early life, and that 'place is a vital stimulant for the imagination' (p. 16). The poetry of another Northern Irish poet, Michael Longley, covers a diverse range of subjects, and when he writes about place in poems like 'Landscape', there is a similar tendency towards a depth and richness of imagery (Reid, 2008, p. 525. See below). Furthermore, Longley's attention to detail can be found in his detailing of the flora and fauna in County Mayo, and this has gained him a recognition as a poet who moves as easily through the gorse in Northern Ireland, as he does through the streets of war-torn Belfast (Rankin Russell, 2010, p. 300). Inevitably, thinking of city streets draws attention to the poetry of Ciaran Carson, who seeks out literary riches in the back streets of Belfast through the art of walking and depicting the city as a spectator – clearly aligned with the concept of the *flaneur* and the writing of Walter Benjamin (Jones, 2010, p. 107. See, also Chapter 6). This closeness to the textures of the city streets offers an 'intense exploration' of city life (Hughes, 1996, p. 143), in which sensory perceptions are key facets (Corcoran, 1992, quoted in Alexander, 2010, p. 129), and where his 'richly textured apprehensions' are enhanced by all the senses coming into play, including taste and smell (O'Brien, 1998, quoted in Alexander, 2010, p. 129). Again, when listeners are invited by Van Morrison to smell the bakery in the opening lines of 'Cleaning Windows', or hear the 'pitter patter' of rain in 'Autumn Song' (1973) or feel the sunshine touching 'the side' of the face in 'Coney Island' (1982), there is the same kind of connection to place as an all-encompassing sensory experience. If we think about these examples in relation to those of Heaney, Longley and Carson, there is a sense that all are fine observers of the

⁸ Quoted in *Poetry Foundation – Seamus Heaney* – retrieved from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/seamus-heaney>.

minutiae of everyday life across landscapes and streetscapes, and bring these observations to life through words that elevate these to a wider understanding of the human condition.

In the work of each of these poets there are illustrations of these senses coming into play. Fine detail is critical to the concerns of Seamus Heaney's 'Digging' and 'Death of a Naturalist'. The first poem locates itself in the natural home setting and plies the sounds of the spade as it sinks into the ground, the smell of potato mould and the 'squelch and slap' of the 'soggy peat', as the poet ponders issues of inheritance and tradition (O'Brien, 2009), and negotiations between his primary (upbringing) and secondary (writing) worlds (Corcoran, 1998, p. 96). The second poem works its way first through descriptions of the dam with its 'gargling bubbles' and 'strong gauze of sound and smell', and then to a conclusion where newly hatched frogs croaked and farted, slapped and plopped. These are both good examples of what O'Donoghue (2009, p. 108) observes as Heaney's early precise and evocative language about place. This is also on display in the 'sensuous vocabulary' (Rankin Russell, 2012, p. 47) he deploys as he observes the sounds and sights of the blacksmith in 'The Forge' - with its ring of the anvil, 'the fantail of sparks', the hiss of the horseshoe being toughened in the water, the hairs on the nose, the sounds of horses outside and the grunting of the worker inside. In these examples the coalescence of memory and the fine details of the everyday bring forward contemplations about important ideas. We can think about this in the ways Van Morrison also hones in on the ordinary in order to comment on bigger issues – a pinecone opening in 'Country Fair' (1974) speaks to fertility and the possibilities of youth, and 'Choppin' Wood' (2002) takes a common manual task and fashions it into the pathos of just going through the motions in life.

Similarly, Michael Longley looks for meaning within the interaction between nature and experience in his poem, 'Landscape'. It is a detail that seems to be located in

the everyday of Ireland but which hints at restlessness and connections to other places (Hughes, 2001, quoted in Reid, 2008, p. 527). The imagery (turfstacks, ‘racing cloud shadows’, sea mist, ‘the splay of the badger’) makes connections between the narrator’s intellectual and physical experience (‘my imagination’, ‘I am clothed, unclothed’, ‘Me and my reflection’) of being in the landscape (Reid, 2008, pp. 525-526). This resonates with Van Morrison’s engagement with place in the way that he uses a sense of being in, and responsive to, the natural world to bring about heightened states of consciousness. Being in the landscape in ways that catalyse a phenomenological response is found in his nature songs like ‘Autumn Song’ and ‘Coney Island’, and these are discussed in Chapter 8.

By comparison, Ciaran Carson’s concentrated focus on the textures of the city point out aspects of change and discontinuity. In, *The Irish For No* (1987) and *Belfast Confetti* (1989), details point to ‘contending and conflicting meanings’ that are read in the ‘graffiti, street names and shop signs, the names of bars and clubs and commodities’ (Alexander, 2010, p. 190). Elsewhere, poems like ‘Smithfield Market’ zoom in on detail - the burnt out aisles, the ‘unstitched’, the ‘unravelling’ and the mouldy bits and pieces of hardware, seething maggots - and these point to a wider disintegration of the city (Alexander, 2010, p. 126). Carson’s spotlight on the most troubling aspect of the city stands in marked contrast to Van Morrison’s many depictions of his home town as a place in time when divisions were bridged in ‘The Story Of Them’ (1965), or when localness is celebrated in ‘Street Only Knew Your Name’ (1975). Contrasts reside in the ways that the songwriter takes points of difference and thinks about the ways these are interrupted, and barriers are dismantled across social, cultural and religious borders. This is notwithstanding the oblique references to strife in songs such as, ‘Linden Arden Stole The Highlights’ (1974) and ‘Burning Ground’ (1997. See, Chapter 7).

So it is fair to see that there are parallels between a fascination for the details of place between Northern Irish poetry and the songwriting of Van Morrison - an eye for detail across all the senses, and a keenness to look for what is extraordinary in the everyday. For Van Morrison, we can think of how these commonplace images connect with the songwriter's themes of coming-of-age and expressions of identity - the holding onto formative places, while ever pushing outwards, towards new worlds and new understandings.

Remembered Places: 'Do You Remember When ... ?'

The image of the 'chamois cleaning all the windows' that opens 'Saint Dominic's Preview' (1972) is a memory of a more innocent place and time. It also alludes to an act of clarification - an opening out from the inside to the outside world. Distances between home and away are measured here, and in the lines that follow. There is a sparse detail of these opening words (as reliant as they are on cultural literacy - a window-cleaning job as a young man around the streets of East Belfast) and they carry memories of a stable image of home at a time when being away generates feelings of misgivings and uncertainty. Within these ideas there are some pointers to another likeness between Van Morrison's songwriting and contemporary Irish poetry that is worth considering. To bring together the two previous sections, many writers who have left their homeland find an importance in remembered places. That is, they bring back earlier times through their writing, and do this with a detail that captures the spirit of that place and time. Indeed, this is one of the characteristics of exilic writing - a metaphorical 'quest for home' (Gurr, 1981, see above) and the 'fabrication' of images from home through memory (Böss, 2005, p. 31. See also, Chapter 10). Fabrication in this sense does not so much mean a falsification of earlier memories, but rather a process of textually

revisioning and establishing a 'static world' as a counterpoint to the inevitable insecurities surrounding being away from home.

This is one of the conceits of 'Saint Dominic's Preview'. It also brings to mind the use of memory in the poetry of both Ciaran Carson and Seamus Heaney. What Van Morrison and Carson have in common is the bringing together of different places and times and events in the construction of their writing. This is what the songwriter was getting at when he talked about 'snatches' of conversations and lives in the quote that started off this chapter. Songs featured later in this thesis are illustrative of this point. 'T.B.Sheets' (1967) and 'Ballerina' (1968) blur the lines between a realistic and fictional persona (Moore, 2012) in their exploration of the themes of staying or leaving (see, Chapter 5). 'Coney Island' assembles a 'jumbled road map of memories' (Mills, 2010, p. 274) to present an atmosphere that celebrates and evokes the localness of place and the responses that these bring forward (see, Chapter 8). This is important in understanding Van Morrison's art, and as Rogan (2005, p.205) argues, few of the artist's songs 'are transparently autobiographical'. What sets Van Morrison and Ciaran Carson apart is that the latter is more likely to deploy memory as a transformative and interpretative device. For Alexander (2010), Carson sees a 'temporal disjuncture' between the 'recollected past' and the 'present moment of recollection' (p. 113). Here, memory transforms and interprets images from the past in a process that requires 'the capacity for endless interpolations into what has been' (p. 139). In *Belfast Confetti* this process has the city continuously in tension between the past and the present, 'as time lapses and everything is revised' (p. 115). As Alexander argues, the process is neatly illustrated in 'The Exiles' Club', a poem that might be 'read as a self-reflexive allegory for Carson's own deployment of memory in his writing' (2010, p. 115). Again there is the zeroing in on the details of the tastes of home (stout, cigarettes, whiskey), as the men reconstruct through memory their images of the Falls Road, and in so doing

‘revisit’ a version of their home (Alexander, 2010, p. 115). While there might not be the same level of ‘revisiting’ in Van Morrison songs, there are nonetheless parallels between the details of earlier home places as they are ‘revisited’. In ‘Brown Eyed Girl’ there are the fine details of the places in the Hollow, nicknamed and for those in the know – ‘the old mine’, ‘rainbow’s wall’, ‘the waterfall’ (see, Chapter 4). Memories of innocent times interplay with ‘moments of heightened experience’ (McLoone, 2008, p. 171) in ‘Madame George’ (1968) – ‘The kids out in the street collecting bottle tops/Gone for cigarettes and matches in the shops’, ‘And that smell of sweet perfume comes drifting through/Early cool night air like Shalimar’. ‘See Me Through Part II (Just A Closer Walk With Thee)’ (1991) revisits influences heard in Morrison’s home that have taken him away from that home:

Memories, memories way back
Take me way back, Hyndford Street and Hank Williams
Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet on Sunday afternoons in winter
Sidney Bechet, Sunday afternoons in winter
And the tuning in of stations in Europe on the wireless
Before, yes, before it was the way it was
More silence, more breathing together
Not rushing, being
Before rock ‘n’ roll, before television
Previous, previous, previous

In these and other songs Van Morrison brings back these places through memory as a way of connecting with earlier times while at the same time understanding what it means to be away.

Perhaps more closely aligned with the ways Van Morrison utilises memory in his songwriting is Seamus Heaney. Remembered places are also important in much of his writing, and Cavanagh (1998, p. 117) uses the term ‘return’ as a way of thinking about what it means for the poet. He suggests that the poet ‘returns’ to places through memory, that the memory itself is a return, and, through the processes of repetition, the

poet is always able to renew his world. Within this renewal, memories are transfigured - some through the poet's adult imagination, others through youthful transfigurations (Cavanagh, 1998, p. 117). Van Morrison songs 'And It Stoned Me' (1970) and 'Behind The Ritual' (2008) similarly see the songwriter return to and transfigure earlier worlds. The childhood adventures in the former, while recalled through the innocence of the young boys' narrative, become, on reflection, moments of *ecstasis* where the experiences become transfigured into different understandings of the human condition (see, Chapter 8). These reside within ideas about the harmony and correspondence between the human and natural worlds. 'Behind The Ritual' layers a number of observations of earlier days and works them into the idea of healing through 'keeping it simple' (see, Chapter, 6). In Heaney's 'The Schoolbag' and 'Mid-Term Break' there are good examples of a return to a childhood memory. Again, these memories pore over fine details. In 'Schoolbag' he remembers 'blue-lined jotters', 'classroom charts', wallmaps and the daisies and dandelions on the road outside, and the schoolbag becomes a symbol of his school days and the knowledge carried with him since those days. 'Mid-Term Break' holds back a painful memory within everyday details (school bells ringing, a baby cooing) and building hints of a tragedy (his father crying, old men shaking his hand and saying sorry). It is an emotional and physical space (O'Donoghue, p. 34), and the detail delays the narrative by focusing on everything except the central event, and when this event is revealed the tenderness is reflected in the details of snowdrops and candles (Huhn, 2016, p. 43). While poems like this represent a small part of the poet's work, they illustrate some of the ways Seamus Heaney 'circles back through his past' in order to connect ideas around the past and the present (O'Donoghue, p. 34). They also remind us of the ways that Van Morrison similarly 'drills back' through memory to ponder his present and future concerns. He remembers and identifies loco-specific places that had been earlier consigned to memory, and were

forever suspended within childhood and adolescent times. Songs remembering these places invariably pick out themes around personal transformation. He also remembers generic street corners that take him back to the early days of playing music, and these carry reminders of the importance of the 'local' as a source for his songwriting, and how a symbolic return can rekindle the spirit of these former places. There are also memories of the natural features of streams, hills and mountains, and their rhythms and energies. These become places of transcendence and contemplation. Elsewhere, Van Morrison contemplates his place in the world, framing far-off locations as locations that sharpen his sensitivities and fine-tune him to the emotional pitch of his exiled experience.

This chapter has suggested two touchstones between the songwriting of Van Morrison and other Irish writers. The first followed the observation by Dawe (2007) that, in the late 1960s and at the time of the release of *Astral Weeks*, Van Morrison was on the same imaginative wavelength as a notable group of emerging Irish poets. Furthermore, it was proposed that many of the ways that Van Morrison thinks about and deploys place are paralleled with other Irish writers of the time. It was also acknowledged that Van Morrison freely admitted that his connection with Irish writers was something that he only became aware of later in his career. Indeed, in another interview, he said, 'I didn't study poetry or read Irish writers. We didn't get Irish writers at school. All we got was Shakespeare, no Irish writers. There wasn't one book by an Irish writer in our school' (Rogan, 2006, p. 35). So the intent is not to over-read the connections, and, from there conclude that his literary directly influenced Van Morrison. Rather, it is to propose that these influences and connections operate in different ways for the songwriter. Peter Mills sums this up in the Introduction to *Hymns To The Silence* (Mills, 2010), when he observes about Van Morrison and other Irish writers: '... he somehow and sometimes

seems to be working the *same seam* (emphasis added) as they did ... we discern a mixture of conscious and unconscious influence, mixed with natural and unnatural connection' (p. xv).⁹ As we have seen, this is a seam that stretches widely across the domains of both popular music and recent Irish literature.

If Van Morrison plies his trade within popular music conceptions of place, if his sense of place is influenced by his early experiences in the music industry (Chapter 2), and if he works the same seam as his Irish literary contemporaries (Chapter 3), what does this mean for getting closer to the particular dispositions that Van Morrison utilises in his poetic expression of place? The thesis now turns to this question in chapters looking closely at songs that illustrate the different places in his songwriting world.

⁹ Mills is specifically referring to the connections sometimes seen between Van Morrison and writers like W.B. Yeats, Samuel Beckett and William Blake. He earlier talks about this in a discussion of Van Morrison's aural poetry (1994), arguing that the songwriter's 'most powerful and acknowledged influences' were Joyce, Yeats and Blake (p. 91). It is important to balance this view with the words of Van Morrison. When asked by Gerald Dawe about the connection that some writers see between his 'sense of mystery' and that of Yeats, replied that he had written about 100 songs before he had read any poetry by Yeats (Dawe, 2010, pp. 180-181).

4. Home

‘Belfast is my home. It is where I first heard the music that influenced and inspired me, it is where I first performed and it is somewhere I have referred back to many times in my songwriting over the last 50 years’.¹

When Van Morrison thinks about home as a place of influence, inspiration and return, he has in mind particular stamping grounds that he can utilise as he thinks about formative and transformative experiences - ‘ways to another world’ as Mills puts it (2010, p. 58). It is commonly held that Van Morrison’s East Belfast birthplace is a setting that defines many of his songs. Rogan (2006, p. 3) quotes a Van Morrison contemporary as saying ‘East Belfast runs through him like Blackpool Rock’.

Elsewhere, there are claims that Van Morrison’s songs capture the essence of Belfast and that a working knowledge of their lyrics would make first time visitors to the city feel at home (Buzacott & Ford, 2005, p. 33). Caution is needed here. While Hughes observes that Belfast is as good a name as any for the world found in the songwriter’s words (p. xv), an analysis of his songs shows that this world is a localised place, and his songs do not project a wider depiction of the geographical, social and cultural localities of Belfast. With this in mind, if we are to understand more fully Van Morrison’s conceptualisation of home we need to look more widely than through the *Astral Weeks* (1968) window that many consider to be the definitive Morrison portrayal of Belfast. This will bring us closer to the localness of many of his songs. This home world comprises carefully sourced and localised East Belfast places. Some are recognisable

¹ Quoted in ‘The Mystic of the East’. See footnote 1, Chapter 2.

(Cyprus Avenue, Hyndford Street), others less so (the Hollow, the ditch in the back road). What they share, as both Hughes and Dawe (2011, p. 68) concur, is that these haunts take on significance for Van Morrison as emblematic and imaginative sites, rather than being deployed to offer some 'local colour' (Dawe, 2011, p. 68). Yet it is the invitation into the visual and aural detail of these that marks out Van Morrison's conceptualisation of home. He lingers in the memory of these places, exploring their features, working within their nuances as he ponders his own place in the world. Here he often parts company with the representation of home in much popular music. For Lynskey (2006), home in popular music is very often seen as boring and suffocating, and cites Graham Nash's 'Our House' (1970) as a classic example. He goes on to say that songs about home mostly picture it as a place that needs to be left behind before getting on with the business of living, and that the majority of songs about home involve motion – the lyrics are about leaving or returning, rather than actually staying there. Paul Simon's 'Homeward Bound' (1966), Edwin Starr's 'Twenty-Five Miles' (1969), and John Denver's 'Take Me Home Country Roads' (1971) are well-known examples of this trope (Lynskey, 2006). Denver's song reminds us that yearning for home and homecoming are the essence of country music, a genre that glorifies safe home comforts (Jarvis, 1985, p. 116). In a similar way, Van Morrison's songs often explore themes around leaving and returning home, though they invariably couch return to home places in imaginative rather than physical terms (for example, 'On Hyndford Street, 1991, 'The Healing Game', 1997), and pay more careful attention to the features and experiences in the home. Closer to Morrison's concept of home are songs like Carole King's 'Home Again' (1971), and Bruce Springsteen's 'Jungleland' and 'Backstreets' (both 1975), where home is *the* place that makes you 'feel right' (Connell & Gibson, 2003, pp. 210-211). We might also find something of the detail and return to more innocent times that Van Morrison brings to many of his home places in the

minutiae of Madness's 'Our House' (1982), a song that Hall (2012) sees as a utopian ode to the home that once was.

If we bring together ideas around localness, detail and significance, there emerges a picture of the ways that Van Morrison conceptualises home, and that picture reveals important insights into his life and work as a songwriter.

Home and the Poetics of Place

Van Morrison conceptualises 'home' across three intersecting frames. The intersection of these frames highlights the poetics of place in Van Morrison's song texts - the ways meanings are produced, understood and contested through his lyrics and music. The first frame positions his home as the neighbourhood patch he grew up in around Hyndford Street, East Belfast. In this positioning, his house and his framing of home are very closely related, though not conflated. Thus, while it seems clear from interviews and song lyrics that the family house holds symbolic power as a place where ideas, interests and influences were formed, that is, 'a place of origin and return' and 'a place from which to embark on a journey' (Mallett, 2004, p. 63), Van Morrison's physical conceptualisation of home extends beyond the rooms and discursive spaces of the house of his childhood to the surrounding streets and waterways, with their churches, bridges and pylons, and streams, ditches and natural landscapes. There is an inside and outside dimension, and an associated expansive quality to Van Morrison's expression of home (see also, Onkey, 2006, p. 266). This expansive view of home does not override the primacy that is often afforded in lyrics to the Hyndford Street house where Van Morrison grew up. Indeed, under terms proposed by Heidegger (1993), the songwriter falls in line with the idea of the house being more than a physical and located building, but rather, a 'dwelling', where a complexity of human practices is enacted that marks

out issues concerning ‘the nature of being, consciousness and reality’ (quoted in Smyth, 2006, p. 15). As Smyth (2006) observes (drawing on Bachelard, 1994, and Heidegger), spaces take on meanings from the lived experiences that happen within them, and, within those processes, ‘the house represents a peculiarly privileged position for the enactment of human drama’ (p. 15). This certainly holds for Van Morrison when we think of songs like ‘Astral Weeks’ (1968), ‘Wavelength’ (1978) and ‘On Hyndford Street’ (1991).

The concept of home that includes the privileged position of the house *and* the expanded world of local haunts, leads to the second framing of home in the poetic world of Van Morrison. ‘Home’ also includes these local places around the East Belfast address *and* a set of experiences strongly associated with those places. These play out at the levels of human action and relationships across temporal spaces (boyhood escapades, adolescent adventures, interpersonal negotiations) and formative influences (the radio, recorded music, literature). Furthermore, experiences have visual, aural, kinaesthetic and imaginative aspects. Listeners are invited to see the intricacies of local places, to hear the sounds of music and whispered voices, to imagine feeling the rain and the misty fog, to be caught in the feelings and imaginations that these places evoke. Representations of home in Van Morrison songs are thus framed around the essence of everydayness (Bachelard, quoted in Cooper, 2008, p. 808), that allows an imaginative overlaying of meaning onto familiar places.

Rogan (2006, p. 357) talks about ‘the strange combination of the mystical and the mundane’ in Van Morrison’s works. His expansive view of home picks out places that might, to others, seem unremarkable, and yet become fashioned into sites of importance as experiences stretch out from and beyond bedroom walls and the confines of the house. As these are rejoined, ‘home’ becomes those inside and outside places that are first remembered and recaptured, and then poetically explored in ways that overlay

meaning onto familiar locations. This phenomenological project is the third framing of home in the songs of Van Morrison. It is a project that works across intersections of rites of passage and transformative experiences, where the poetically recaptured place becomes both a repository for memories and a site for contemplation. In this final way, home is as much concerned with the ideas emerging from experiences in particular places across time, as with the physical features of buildings, streetscapes and landscapes.

Home as Poetically Imagined

When these three frames are put together, it can be seen that the East Belfast home becomes much more than a physical location. Mills (2010) talks about ‘the spirit of place’ with reference to Van Morrison songs that mention places close to his home (p. 57), suggesting that they are not so much ‘about’ these places, but these sites are utilised to think about ‘other worlds’ (pp. 57-58), where questions relating to, ‘Who I was?’ and, ‘What has impacted my becoming?’ come firmly into focus. Elsewhere, Dawe observes that the local places visited in Van Morrison songs move beyond descriptions and ‘local colour’ towards a wider exploration and expression of the meaning of earlier times (Dawe, 2009, p. 162). Both these ideas have currency in Van Morrison’s conceptualisation of home. It is easy to see, hear and feel the colour and spirit of home places in many of the songs, while it is equally possible to discern other worlds of wider meanings held in their experiences. There are also temporal and spatial scales at play across these worlds. In Van Morrison songs that utilise home as a source, connections and disconnections between home and faraway locations are almost always present. From a dual perspective, home is invariably seen through the prism of being away, and away is nearly always countenanced through memories of home. This is to become the

very essence of Van Morrison's future exiled condition. His musical ambitions had taken him across the Atlantic at the age of 22. He travelled overseas to record the songs for his first solo album (*Blowin' Your Mind*) in New York City in March 1967, and then, in November that year, he returned to America to take up residence to further his career. And so, his East Belfast house and home had been consigned to memory at a young age. Consequently, his memories of home were forever to be held in childhood and adolescent places and times. There is the persistent Van Morrison persona of the nostalgic wanderer-away-from home where interactions between the past and present are interplaying (Keightley & Pickering, 2012). Compulsion and ambition had severed ties with the physical place of home. Here Morrison falls more in line with the poet than the popular music artist, the latter invariably still looking for a physical return to home. As Brewster notes about other artists in this position, when this happens home can now only be inhabited poetically through feeling, remembering and imagining (2006, p. 143, drawing on Bachelard and Heidegger). This poetic inhabitation is central to Van Morrison's conceptualisation of home. As found in the opening lines of 'On Hyndford Street', Van Morrison is inevitably driven to be 'taken back' poetically to home and the experiences and emotions resonating from memories of formative and transformative times. This is the drilling down and back through origins and memories that Hughes (2014) and other writers single out as one of the defining characteristics of Van Morrison's songwriting.

The songs discussed in detail in this chapter are examples of Van Morrison's conceptualisation of home, and the ways it throws a light on critical aspects of his work as a songwriter. Through these songs Van Morrison shows how home becomes a site through which intersections of rites of passage and transformative experiences might be detailed and understood, and where the poetically recaptured place of home becomes both a repository for earlier memories, and a site for contemplation. Each song is set

within recognisable home places, and each focuses on the features and experiences of these places. They directly refer to the Belfast of Van Morrison's childhood and adolescence, but with an explicit focus on personal and formative experiences. In 'Brown Eyed Girl' (1967) there are references to the Hollow, a green common space and a river that passes close to his home in Hyndford Street. This untamed and fertile haunt takes on significance as a site where coming-of-age experiences are detailed. The ditches and bridges around abandoned railway tracks beneath the southern side of Cyprus Avenue (less than a mile from his home), and the young songwriter's bedroom feature in 'Astral Weeks' (1968). Both these outside and inside places symbolise tensions between the importance of familiar stomping grounds, and competing compulsions surrounding new beginnings in far away places. The radio takes on an essential significance as a conduit connecting the adolescent bedroom and the outside music world in 'Wavelength'(1978). In 'On Hyndford Street' (1991) a sense of spiritual and cultural awakening is held in the memories of home.

Outside Home Places: the Avenue, the Hollow, The Viaduct, the Ditch.

The Van Morrison walking trail (*The Mystic of the East*) takes visitors to a number of places around the Hyndford Street home that the songwriter directly refers to in his lyrics. Bounded by Upper Newtownards Road to the north, the Connswater River and Beechie River to the west and south, and North Road to the east (all mentioned in Van Morrison songs), it is a compact area and easily traversed by foot. When listening to Van Morrison songs about these places, and visiting the trail in person or through virtual reality, it is not difficult to imagine local East Belfast kids out and about in these haunts - exploring, meeting, playing, soaking up the sights and sounds and smells. These are places where the songwriter marks out a particular meaning of home that is

caught and held within his own experiences. In these places, home is the realm of the child and the adolescent, and meaning is expressed through the prism of these places in time. Even as home becomes a place where other worlds of meaning are contemplated through recollection, it becomes, at the same time, the childhood and teenage escape to create 'own spaces'. Among these sites are Cyprus Avenue, the Hollow, the bridge over the disused railway on North Road, and Hyndford Street. Each has a symbolic contextual importance for the songwriter's ideas of what home means for his artistic vision, and, in turn, provide insights into emerging themes around spatial connections, between innocence and experience, and between awakening and transformation.

Cyprus Avenue. Cyprus Avenue is a lofty avenue of stately mansions, under a mile up the road from the worker terraces of Hyndford Street where Van Morrison was born. Cyprus Avenue is an 'other place', visited by Van Morrison only as an outsider. This East Belfast home territory maps out seemingly untraversable social and emotional distances. In 'On Hyndford Street', Cyprus Avenue is where kids grab some apples spilling over from the wealthy fences to the lowly railway tracks below. These are stolen moments, where enclosed and open spaces point out social gaps between home in the lower (physically and socially) locations down the hill, and the grander enclave that looms large from above. Fences are boundaries and markers of staked out and enclosed territory, while railways are open and symbols of movement and available 'other spaces'. Away from home can be as close as a mile in this childhood world. Social distance and geographical distance work against each other, the immense spaces of the former emphasised by the close proximity of the latter. The avenue of the 'Cyprus Avenue' song (1968) is a reminder that the outsider is the position of the traveller, the exile, and, often the lonely musician. This is a trope that Van Morrison will deploy throughout his career, and listeners are made aware of this, even as he sings about memories of home. Hage (2009) talks about how 'the lyrics turn away from the title

street itself to wander near the railroad ... far safer for a boy from the more working-class streets of Belfast and a world away from the social status that Cyprus Avenue represents' (p. 43). It is this turning away from what is unattainable physically and emotionally that pulls the songwriter back to places that are welcoming and supportive. Home is always located imaginatively in places visited way back then as someone in the know, where the features are recognisable and familiar, even as they stand for memories of 'another time and another place'. The Hollow, the viaduct and the ditch in the back road hold onto symbols of the childhood and adolescent past at the same time as new beginnings away from home are being countenanced.

The Hollow. The Hollow, and the Beechie River running through it, is a block away from Hyndford Street. This has been, over the years, an untamed place, in some spots dense, overgrown and wild.² It has a strong significance for important home memories. Electrical pylons run through the Hollow, a slightly at-odds interplay of the natural and the built environment. They are mentioned in 'You Know What They're Writing About' (1979) and 'On Hyndford Street'. In both these songs, the pylons represent standout landmarks for kids to arrange meetings, close to home but still secluded, and well away from the interference of adults. While these coming-of-age experiences, by circumstance and need, quite often take place outside the home, they still carry critical memories of times and a place firmly associated with home.

In 'Brown Eyed Girl', the physical features of the Hollow capture the sense of fertility, adventure and carefree abandon at its heart. Its wildness also carries hints of recklessness and loss, and the song's lyrics are tinged with regret, ringing with a sense of yearning for lost times and places that might never be refound. Hinton (2000) sees

² The area has recently undergone a major facelift as part of the Connswater Community Greenway (<http://www.irishnews.com/news/2016/10/25/news/major-investment-down-in-the-hollow-made-famous-by-van-morrison-753175/>)

the relationship between context and theme in the song, suggesting Edenic undertones in the ideas around sexual temptation and luxuriant growth, when he writes, ‘... Paradise regained, in Belfast’ (p. 78). There is certainly something in the relationship between place and narrative that supports this. The interplay of childhood naïveté and teenage worldly knowledge form the centrepiece of the song, and an appreciation of the song within its setting throws further light on how Morrison represents a particular Belfast of his home days. The song starts with an invitation to remember.

Hey, where did we go, days when the rains came
Down in the hollow, playing a new game
Laughing and a-running hey, hey
Skipping and a-jumping,
In the misty morning fog with our, our hearts a-thumping
And you, my brown eyed girl
You, my brown eyed girl

The listener immediately becomes the outsider being brought into the intimacy of this home-based world, and also, by association, the person being sung to, and about. A number of dominant Van Morrison motifs are there in the first verse and these combine to underscore the innocence-to-experience themes. The rain conjures feelings of fertility and the potential for renewal and awakening. The fog is an image that invokes pictures of escape and seclusion. Importantly also, it is an image that the songwriter frequently employs as a symbol of home (for example, ‘Into The Mystic’, 1970, ‘So Quiet In Here’, 1990). These images combine to provide a tapestry against which the characters are ‘playing their new game’. The coming of age sexual searching at the heart of the song (only suggested now, but dramatically confirmed in the song’s final line) takes on a special significance when we think of games as forms of exploration and innovation, and locate these games within the source in the natural playground haunt. Old childhood games become new adolescent games. And ... hearts are ‘a-thumping’. The wild fertility of the song’s context emphasises the associated feelings of risk and abandon.

The second verse alludes to other remembered times, and alternates images of music ('transistor radio'), darkness ('the old mine') and light ('sunlight').

Whatever happened, to Tuesday and so slow
Going down the old mine with the transistor radio,
Standing in the sunlight laughing
Hiding behind a rainbow's wall
Slipping and a-sliding all along the water fall
With you, my brown eyed girl,
You, my brown eyed girl

These images support the strongly interplaying ideas of openness and secrecy, space and seclusion, childlike enthusiasm and teenage fun that are shown in the sequencing of the lines. Places here ('the old mine', 'the rainbow's wall' 'the waterfall') are affectionately nicknamed, localised, spots and names only for those kids 'in the know'. The evocation of place temporarily overrides the narrative. This is very much nostalgia for home suspended within childhood and adolescent memories - nostalgia for simpler times as all the while those times are being replaced. Here is the kind of thematic territory later explored in songs like 'Cleaning Windows' (1982) and 'Coney Island' (1989). Time is also delayed - it is Tuesday (mid-week, trapped between weekends) and time is 'so slow'. These are not yet workdays, and days of young fun seem to last forever. Looking back those carefree days now seem long gone - 'Whatever happened to?' Note also the temporal connection between the opening lines of the first two verses - 'Hey, where did we go?' 'Whatever happened to?' The final verse rejoins the narrative and the sadness of love lost.

So hard to find my way, now that I'm all on my own
I saw you just the other day, my, how you have grown
Cast my memory back there, Lord,
Sometimes I'm overcome thinking about
Making love in the green grass, behind The Stadium
With you, my brown eyed girl
You, my brown eyed girl

Time has past, people have changed ('My, my, how you have grown'), and only memories remain. These memories now bring together personal sorrow, nostalgia for earlier simpler times and an emerging longing for the homeland. Such emotions are highlighted in the final lines - green grass as an image of home and an idealised Irish world. The seemingly simple story of loss of innocence can be read as an early point in a lengthier narrative about the exiled experience, as part of the existential search for belonging focused on memories of home.

The viaduct and the ditch in the back road. If *Astral Weeks* is seen as Van Morrison's 'farewell to Belfast' and his home, and an expression of the songwriter's dealing with changes across emotion, time and place (Rogan, 2006, p. 224), then its title song lays out these changes as an artistic rebirth. The farewell to home is decisive yet tenuous - the physical departure never quite matched with an emotional separation. Home is thus framed in this song as a place of transformation and rebirth - but a place that can never be really 'left behind'. 'Astral Weeks' is one of only three songs in the catalogue that offer glimpses into the family home.³ Yet it is not the family home that the song first drops listeners into. It is an unused railway track down the hill from Cyprus Avenue, a symbol of childhood haunts and imaginings.⁴

If I ventured in the slipstream, between the viaducts of your dream
Where mobile steel rims crack, and the ditch in the back roads stop
Could you find me? Would you kiss my eyes?
To lay me down in silence easy, to be born again

In this location, future dreams mark out tensions between new beginnings and familiar haunts, as imaginings ('venturing in the slipstream') merge and disconnect with remembered places (the viaduct and 'the ditch in the back road'). Tellingly, the symbols

³ See also, 'On Hyndford Street' and 'Choppin' Wood' (2002).

⁴ The North Road Bridge is a former railway bridge over the old Belfast and County Down Railway. The corridor where the train ran is now the Comber Greenway.

pull at and tease each other, the living flow and energy of the slipstream against the dead ends and decaying, disused wheels (the cracking ‘mobile steel rims’). In a few words the mystical venturing of the first line stands in stark contrast to the signs of the past that follow. The viaduct is, at the same time, the childhood landmark on North Road, and a metaphorical overpass between the dreams of the future and the remnants of the past. Van Morrison told Ritchie Yorke (1975) that the ‘transforming energy’ of the song was like ‘going from one source to another with it being born again’ (p. 54). New lives and earlier endings sit side by side here, a point noted by Mills (2010, p. 132), who sees beginning and ending points in this opening verse. But we are soon reminded that this is an uneasy and tentative venturing out, and that, for the songwriter, physical and imaginative journeys are always taken with backward glances. ‘Could you find me?’ The question is both rhetorical and plaintive, a plea that the songwriter hopes to be followed and emotionally ‘found’ in the journey. ‘Find’ in this sense denotes recognition and acceptance. The following images (‘kiss my eyes’, ‘lay me down in silence easy’,⁵ ‘to be born again’) merge notions of comfort and ‘surrender’⁶ (Marcus, 2010, p. 55), a passing of time (a kind of ‘death’) and new beginnings. If the opening lines echo these interchanges, the music pushes along with a quiet intensity, dropping in behind the dominant vocals. Mills (2010, p. 285) notes the ‘autumnal shiver’ of the strings as they fall in (at 0.28). Listeners might well detect in this late seasonal ‘shiver’ a hint of foreboding and time passing, in line with the song’s opening tensions.⁷ Even while these opening tensions are held within the unremarkable places of childhood

⁵ This is the first use of ‘silence’ in the Van Morrison catalogue. In this song it is associated with transformation and renewal, and as a dominant motif for the songwriter it later brings up feelings of contemplation and solitude.

⁶ Marcus (2010, p. 55) says about the line, ‘Would you kiss my eyes’ – ‘what a surrender of body and soul are in those lines!’

⁷ The musical analysis of the song by Mills (2010, p. 285) is thoughtful and instructive. He talks about how the song builds with ‘a graded gradual grace’, how it ‘gathers its own momentum’, how the ‘music flows from and into itself as much as it moves forward.’ It is acknowledged that the reading of ‘Astral Weeks’ has been informed by this analysis.

adventures, a foundation is being put down for the idea of home expressed through the intense, private and inner spaces of the adolescent bedroom.

Inside Home Places: The Adolescent Bedroom

There are two expressions of home through the spaces of the adolescent bedroom in the songs in this chapter. In 'Astral Weeks' there is the physical image of a room with 'pictures on the wall', posters of musical heroes that hold dreams of the future. In 'Wavelength' and 'On Hyndford Street' the bedroom is an aural space, filled with the sounds of pirate radio and jazz and blues records. The physical and the aural spaces together connect and move across temporal boundaries. Posters and recorded music of blues and jazz heroes are about the legacies and inspirations of the past, the immediacy of present daydreams about what might become, and signposts to future decisions and actions. In this way these spaces provide a framing of home that embraces past memories and locates them within compulsions about being away from home. This is a deep impressive space, and there is resonance with Croft (2006), who draws on Bachelard (1964) in her conceptualisation of the adolescent bedroom as a location for the negotiation of identity. Her argument is that there are two different 'connotations' of 'interiority' in these rooms - 'the 'inwardness' of adolescent subjectivity and the interior space of the bedroom' (p. 209). She conceptualises these bedrooms, *inter alia*, as places of play, writing and daydreaming. Thought about this way, Croft contends that play does not necessarily disappear from the adolescent world, but rather can take different forms (for example, daydreaming, writing) that work towards a 'newly configured *inner self*' (p. 212). It follows then that the bedroom can be a place of investigation and creativity, where expressions of the private self might be discerned, and where an imaginative depth might be explored. In 'Astral Weeks' and 'Wavelength', inner

subjective expressions surrounding creativity and imagination are symbolically displayed through the physical and aural spaces of the songwriter's adolescent bedroom. In 'Astral Weeks' this space picks out tensions surrounding transformative processes and between staying and leaving. In 'Wavelength' it carries reminders of conduits between home and away places that are as much emotional and aspirational, as they are geographical and physical.

Temporal spaces between past memories and future dreams. Among the many home images in 'Astral Weeks' (the viaduct, the ditch in the back road, the railway tracks), the adolescent bedroom of the third verse stands out as a particularly arresting symbol, with the layering of memories economically depicted in the physical spaces (music posters) and social and discursive spaces (real and imagined conversations - 'the look of avarice', 'standing in your sad arrest').

There you go standing with the look of avarice
Talking to Huddie Leadbelly,
Showing pictures on the wall
Whispering in the hall
And pointing a finger at me

In a song that measures spaces between past memories and future dreams, the bedroom serves as a tenuous in-between anchor - an expression of identity hovering between a home upbringing, and daydreams about what might be. The musical dreams ('talking to Huddie Ledbetter') and the parental unease are both suspended in the physical place, youthful intention and the need to get away momentarily trapped within parental concerns. Here, spaces between away and home are tangible and troubling. Wheels are put 'in motion', perhaps memories, perhaps going through the motions of a new life, and the sense of activity lies in apposition to the earlier 'immobile steel rims'. New doors are being pushed, though tentatively - 'with my arms behind me'. Earlier pleas are repeated, uncertain, questioning - 'Could you find me? Would you kiss my eyes?/To lay me down in silence easy/To be born again'. The songwriter is away, but memories

of home are foremost in his mind. At the next verse there is a heightened vocal intensity - the singer stretches over the first word and then the pace of the instrumentation quickens, the flutes become more insistent (Mills, 2010, p. 285). Adolescent memories are layered, and the Hyndford Street bedroom with its pictures of blues legends is depicted through the sounds of conversation.

There you go, there you go standing in the sun darling
With your arms behind you and your eyes before
There you go taking care of your boy
Seeing that he's got clean clothes putting on his little red shoes
Seeing that he's got clean clothes putting on his little red shoes
Pointing a finger at me

'There you go,' he sings, and it is a statement that compresses time and place, in a memory caught in the now of the present tense. The judgmental 'look of avarice' highlights clashes between ambition and reluctance, between young dreams and parental concern. Conversations merge, from the imagined 'chat' with or about Huddie Ledbetter about what to do (Marcus, 2010, p. 55), to the sounds of parents 'whispering in the hall'. The focus of attention continually moves, the dialogue switches between parental unease and the songwriter's intentions. At the next 'there you go' we are back further in time. Counterpoints of the 'darling' of 'standing in the sun darling', and the later, 'looking straight at you and coming through, darling', suggests this third of the mid verses from 2.07 to 3.34 has become an imagined conversation, the emotion heightened in vocals and backing instrumentation. There is now a symmetry between the freeze of 'sad arrest' and the song's opening lines. The young boy in that period of time is forever departed, but the sense of caring both in the present and in the future ('your eyes before' 'could you find me?') is caught in the detail of 'clean clothes' - less a literal memory than the poetic expression of parental thoughtfulness. Then the denouement.

And here I am standing in your sad arrest
Trying to do my very best

Looking straight at you and coming through, darling

A spotlight is held to the songwriter laid bare, a persona caught in memory across time. ‘And here I am standing in your sad arrest’ - blended emotions of admission, confession, honesty, entreaty. ‘Trying to do my very best’, suggests a resigned finality to the words, and matched by a resigned calmness in the singing. The one last honest, ‘looking straight at you and coming through,’ provides a metaphor for the memory of home, but now from the distance of age and place. The boy and the youth and the home of those times are gone, as is the place in that period of time, and the final elongated, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah ... yeah, yeah, yeah,’ marks the departure and the freedom from ‘previous constraints and expectations’ (Hage, 2009, p. 42). The opening verse returns, vocals more measured and softening, backing guitars less insistent. As the coda winds down it settles on an imaginative and emotional release.

In another world, darling
In another world, in another time
Got a home on high

Ain’t nothing but a stranger in this world
I’m nothing but a stranger in this world
I got a home on high
In another land so far away

Way up in the heaven
In another time, in another place
And another face

The vocals lower, at times as they linger over the phrase ‘way up in heaven’ they conjure feelings of ‘weightlessness’ (Mills, 2010, p. 286), with the last of these phrases stretching over 15 seconds (5.31-5.44). At 6.31 there is laughter, then at 6.39 the voice becomes barely a whisper as the strings cry out behind. The release is to ‘another time, in another place,’ and earthly places and spiritual homes are entreated to come together, as in ‘the gospel hymns of his youth’ (O’Hagan, 2008, online). And it is finished, and complete, at ‘and another face’. The guitar picks up for the final 18 seconds before the

song is punctuated by the final resolute, 'yeah.' Resolution is caught between the finality of leaving and the situated moment when it seems possible to realise that the songwriter accepts 'that he can never truly go home again' (O'Hagan, 2008, online). Such an acceptance is predicated on the fact that the act of leaving forever renders home as a place of an earlier time, and the spirit of home can now only be revisited and brought back imaginatively. Note how this differs from many of the home songs in popular music in which a physical return is foremost. There is also a later reminder that the spirit and wavelength might also be found in the aural transformative spaces between home and away. Again, we see the songwriter taking time to locate himself in these spaces, and detail how they represent connections between past, present and future.

Transformative spaces between home and away. The synthesizer opening to 'Wavelength' is an aural capture of an experience, a textural representation (see, Moore, 1993, pp. 121-126) of the sounds and associated experiences from the bedroom. This is as much about home as the depictions of streetscapes and landscapes in other Van Morrison songs. It replicates the crackle and fizz of a radio tuning in to Radio Luxembourg and the 'Voice of America'. The call of America is through the sounds of its music heard in his bedroom. The songwriter is not being immediately summoned to a physical location, but rather compelled to 'tune in' and get on a specific wavelength. Wavelength denotes both the transmission place of the radio station on the radio dial, *and* being 'in tune' with the music being played. Radio mediates transformative spaces between the bedroom and the locations of certain genres of American (notably Black blues and jazz) music. This is also mediation across time, the radio opening up possibilities of tuning in to earlier moments in musical history. The song begins slowly from the synthesizer's crackle, its measured opening heralded by the guitar chords, simultaneously referencing the delay in becoming connected to the station and the

gradual awakening of the young musician's inspirations.⁸

This is a song about your wavelength
And my wavelength, baby
You turn me on
When you get me on your wavelength now
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah
With your wavelength
Oh with your wavelength
With your wavelength
With your wavelength
Oh mama, oh mama, oh mama,
Oh mama, oh mama, oh mama, oh mama

The delay is deliberate, the high head voice wandering over and recycling the words, echoing a radio dial grappling with the sought-after wavelength. This is an emotional and reciprocal connection, introduced in the sharing of second and first person pronouns in the first two lines ('This is a song about *your* wavelength/And *my* wavelength'), before being emphasised in the energies between listener, radio and the outside world, that become personified in the calling in of the signal - 'You turn me on/ When you get me on your wavelength now.' A metaphorical merging of radio and personal relationships is picked out in these lyrics, closeness caught in the metaphor of radio as lover.⁹ The seven 'oh mamas' at the end of this opening verse mark out a gradual realisation, a summarising bridge between the slow awakening of a musical 'wavelength' and the radio signal being locked into. The musical inspiration and the sounds of the radio come together, and the song takes flight as a radio coming to life

⁸ Various reports from listeners to these radio stations report the inconsistency of radio signal, the playing with the dial to lock in the signal, and then how music would drop in and out (see, for example, Mills, 2010, p. 124, drawing on Foster, 2000, p. 152). Van Morrison listeners would be well aware of the depiction of the trials, and perhaps insider pleasure of music fans trying to find a signal in the first verse of 'In The Days Before Rock 'N' Roll' (1990): 'I am down on my knees/At those wireless knobs .../And I'm searching for/Luxembourg, Luxembourg'.

⁹ In this metaphor there seems a clear reference to Joni Mitchell's, 'You Turn Me On, I'm A Radio' (1972). See also, Mills (2010) where he sees this reference as a 'light pun' (p. 126).

when the station is found. The exuberance when the synthesizer starts to make way for rhythm and lead guitars is substantial. As the vocals drive in at 'Wavelength', it is a tangible expression of unbridled joy - emotional and personal connections hinted at in the awakening introduction coming forcefully into focus.

Wavelength
Oh my, my
Wavelength
You never let me down, no, no
You never let me down, no, no

When I'm down you always comfort me
When I'm lonely, child, you see about me
You are everywhere you're supposed to be
And I can get your station
When I need rejuvenation

This emotionality is found across many relational spheres, as radio becomes a source of comfort ('When I'm down you always comfort me'), a tonic for loneliness ('When I'm lonely, child, you see about me'), a revitalising force ('And I can get your station/When I need rejuvenation') - a succinct summary in five lines of Van Morrison's utilisation of the motif of radio 'as an agent of communication, of information and of deliverance' (Mills, 2010, p. 124). The radio becomes a transcendental conduit between home and an expanded world, increasingly the siren call for the musician to follow his musical dream. In this way radio, as a conduit, encourages both an emotional and physical location away from home, and an ensuing diasporic 'dichotomy of having to leave, yet not being able to stay gone' (Sørensen, 2005, p. 160). Two songs are referenced in the last verses that speak to this dichotomy.

I heard the Voice of America
Callin' on my wavelength
Tellin' me to tune in on my radio
I heard the Voice of America
Callin' on my wavelength
Singin' 'Come back, baby,
Come back,

Come back, baby
Come back'

Won't you sing that song again for me
About my lover, my lover in the grass?
You have told me 'bout my destiny
Singin' 'Come back, baby,
Come back,
Come back, baby,
Come back'

The first reference is to a Ray Charles song, one of Van Morrison's childhood heroes. The words 'come back, baby' bring to mind the version Charles recorded in 1954 of the Walter Davis blues song (Hinton, 2000, p. 211). The lines play out economically across themes of away and home. Intersecting meanings of 'wavelength' (signal and simpatico) tease out a sense of compulsion, the idea that a radio station ('Voice of America') is calling out even while it is sitting silently ('Callin' on my wavelength/Tellin' me to tune in on my radio'). It is a signal that cannot be ignored, and temporal and locational spaces between bedroom and America are simultaneously shortened and lengthened. Then a pithy conceit - the song that he is hearing from 'Brother Ray' when he tunes in and that is calling him away, is about emotional and physical distance. Its words are a desperate call back home: 'Oh come back baby/Oh mama please don't go ... Child you've been gone too long'. Tensions between the 'come back' (away) and 'please don't go' (home) in this song blur distinctions between emotional and physical distances. The second reference is to 'Brown Eyed Girl' - 'Won't you sing that song again for me/About my lover, my lover in the grass?' The songwriter is now the one calling out to the radio in a turnaround of the previous verse, and this calling out brings the future, the past and the present together and the destiny that was for him in the music. This is more than a plea for the song to be played. It is also a refrain for the memory of earlier times, and the lyric is an important marker about the 'home place' of music in his life, and the way that music has caught him in the

struggle between his home birthplace and the home place of his music. Here are early signs of the exile ‘ground rules’ that will become a recurring theme in the Van Morrison canon. And critically, his exiled longing is inextricably bound with memories of his childhood and youth in the locations around his East Belfast home. The coda, for once, does not so much wind down but plays through strongly to the end in an affirmation of the strength of the ‘tune in.’

When you get me on
When you get me on your wavelength
When you get me
Oh, yeah, Lord
You get me on your wavelength

You got yourself a boy
When you get me on
Get me on your wavelength
Ya radio, ya radio, ya radio
Ya radio, ya radio, ya radio
Ya radio, ya radio, ya radio
Ya radio, ya radio, ya radio

The final 12 ‘Ya radios’ draw down on these feelings, and stand as a clear contrast to the awakening sounds at the start of the song. Awakening and imaginative release then become another step in the refashioning of Van Morrison’s concept of home, away from a set of experiences within specific local places, towards a sense that home might also be heard and then re-imagined within the sounds that rang out from the radio in his bedroom.

Home as a place of return and contemplation

This chapter led off with the proposal that Van Morrison’s conceptualisation of home is able to be determined across the intersecting frames around place, experience and meaning. In this conceptualisation, home is viewed through the prism of being away,

and is recalled and re-imagined from childhood and teenage perspectives. Van Morrison's poetic recapturing of home perhaps had its most complete expression in 'On Hyndford Street'. Indeed, although it is said that Van Morrison's 'long journey home' (Mills, 2010, p. 54) reached a high point with the 1988 *Irish Heartbeat* album (recorded with the Chieftains),¹⁰ there are good reasons also to suggest that this spoken song represents a critical summative statement of this journey. 'On Hyndford Street' offers a perspective of home from a distance. This distance is at the cusp of the long journey home and the exploration of spiritual themes (described by Hage, 2009, as 'the path to enlightenment', pp. 97-111), and at the flowering of the quest for a more simple life in the *Hymns To The Silence* album. Two interacting motifs are threaded throughout the song's catalogue of memories, and together, they speak to this latter career perspective of home.

The first is the sense of 'nowness', signalled early in the song, its opening words working as an invocation: 'Take me back, take me way, way, way back, on Hyndford Street'. This is much more than a 'remember when', but an entreaty for the recreation of a precise place and time that might never be the same, yet nonetheless are preserved through memory. The 'take me back' wills this preservation, an appeal to be transported back emotionally and imaginatively to an earlier time and to experience it again 'in the present'. Later lines, 'And it's always being now, and it's always being now/It's always now', reinforce the preservation of experience, and coincides well with Hall's conceptualisation of cultural identity and belonging as a synchronous incorporation of the past and the present (quoted in, Sørensen, 2005, p. 176, see Chapter 2). Van Morrison explains it this way:

Well, I go back to childhood and beyond, and I go back to what it is now,

¹⁰ See, Chapter 10, where Van Morrison's expression of exile and the 'long journey home' are discussed.

because it's all in present time. You've got the past, the present, and that's it, because you don't know what the future is ... It's all happening now. It's like the poem I wrote ... I wrote a poem called 'On Hyndford Street'. It's all in that' (Burke, 2013, p. 29).

The second motif is silence, used here six times in association with either 'emotion' ('you could feel the silence') or a sense of repose ('we sank into restful slumber in the silence'). Silence in this song brings forward sensations of contemplation and serenity, almost a suspension of time through which 'harmony is achieved through the apparent cross-currents of sound, meaning and feeling' (Mills 2010, p. 135).¹¹ This brings to mind an earlier rehearsal of this concept of 'suspension of time' in exalted moments where sound and relational feelings are caught in filled 'spaces': 'And Sam Cooke is on the radio/And the night is filled with space/And your fingertips touch my face' ('Real Gone', *Enlightenment*, 1990).

There are four ways that 'On Hyndford Street' rejoins and overlays Van Morrison's idea of home. The first is that awakening at a physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual level is inextricably connected to the songwriter's depictions of home. Second, home is a place that moves across space and time - symbolised as forever suspended between the past and the present. Third, home is a place of simple pursuits across a wide range of boyhood and adolescent experiences, as well as a place of repose and meditation. Fourth, the concept of home is imagined through physical and imaginative distances between home and away. If being away is always countenanced through memories of home, then outside experiences are always contemplated and treasured from the succour of home as an imaginative haven. There are four interrelated

¹¹ This analysis of silence offered here and elsewhere in this thesis fully acknowledges the contribution by Mills (2010, pp. 129-136) to an understanding of Van Morrison's utilisation of 'silence' in his songs.

movements in 'On Hyndford Street', and each picks up on the four ways that the songwriter thinks about home.

Awakening. The first movement (to 0.50) is an entreaty to be taken back through memories that move across home places (Hyndford Street, Beechie River) and critical sounds associated with those places.

Take me back, take me way, way, way back, on Hyndford Street
Where you could feel the silence at half past eleven on long summer nights
As the wireless played Radio Luxembourg and the voices whispered across
Beechie River
In the quietness as we sank into restful slumber in the silence and carried on
dreaming in God

The connection between the sounds of the music on the radio, and the whispered voices (only 'heard' in imagination) in the nearby river, symbolises transformative experiences - the first sound explored in 'Wavelength', and the second in 'Brown Eyed Girl'. These sounds sit against a sense of quietness – the 'felt' silence of contemplation and the 'restful slumber' and spiritual awareness. These sounds and silences bring together memories that are aural and tactile, and invoke this local home patch as a place that is, simultaneously, profane (tuning in to music, coming-of-age experiences) and sacred ('dreaming in God'). It is a reverence attached to what would elsewhere be seen as a home in an unremarkable working-class East Belfast street, and nearby open spaces and rivers. As noted throughout this chapter, Van Morrison's 'imaginative encounters' with his East Belfast home (see, also, Hughes, 2014, p. xx) have an expansive quality. In this case the expansiveness that attaches a reverence to the everyday is entirely supported by the texture of the musical palette, the spoken and accented local voice moving in front of the synthesizer at a measured pace, capturing moments in time and place as peaceful and meditative. There is an inversion here. While it has been observed that in the songwriter's 'long journey home' the Irishness is expressed more through the reference

to places and connection with Irish themes than through the music (see, Mills, 2010, p. 57), this works differently in ‘On Hyndford Street’. As Onkey notes, ‘The pipes give it a recognisable Irish sound, but that is clearly mixed with the black music celebrated in the lyrics (Onkey, 2006, p. 267). Both the sense of home through the sounds of the song and the reference to the importance of Black music are important identity markers for Morrison.

Between the past and present. The second movement (0.50-2.07) harkens back to earlier times, ‘in the days before rock ‘n’ roll’. The songwriter uses this phrase in a number of songs (‘See Me Through’, 1990, ‘In The Days Before Rock ‘N’ Roll’, 1990, ‘See Me Through Part II [Just A Closer Walk With Thee]’, 1991) to denote more innocent times, boyhood days when music was being consumed and musical dreams were still aspirational. And as this movement shows, these days were filled with active boyhood pleasures that stand in contrast to representations of home as a place of repose and meditation in the first movement.

And walks up Cherryvalley from North Road Bridge railway line on sunny
summer afternoons
Picking apples from the side of the tracks that spilled over from the gardens of
the houses on Cyprus Avenue
Watching the moth catcher work the floodlights in the evenings and meeting
down by the pylons
Playing round Mrs Kelly’s lamp, going out to Hollywood on the bus
And walking from the end of the lines to the seaside, stopping at Fusco’s for ice
cream
In the days before rock ‘n’ roll
Hyndford Street, Abetta Parade, Orangefield, St Donard’s Church
Sunday six-bells, and in between the silence there was conversation
And laughter and music and singing and shivers up the back of the neck

Listeners are thus reminded that home is also a place of simple pursuits, those to be treasured for the pure enjoyment of being out and about in local haunts. Verbs in the present participle build the images of young kids freely on the move – ‘picking apples’, ‘watching the moth catcher’, ‘playing round Mrs Kelly’s lamp’, ‘walking from the end

of the lines to the seaside', 'stopping at Fusco's for ice cream'. This is the kind of thematic territory explored in parts of 'Cleaning Windows' (see, Chapter 6), where lines between boyhood fun and adolescent activities are blurred. Within these first two movements the echoes of earlier days are caught both in recollections and references to earlier times in song. So 'voices whispered across the Beechie River' hark to the innocence and experience of 'Brown Eyed Girl' and 'You Know What They're Writing About'. 'Picking apples' on Cyprus Avenue recaptures the social dislocation and the youthful temptations achingly documented in the *Astral Weeks* song. The places around Hyndford Street (Abetta Parade, Orangefield, St Donard's Church) work across intersections of passages of time, and recall lines from 'Beside You' (1968 - 'Sunday six-bells) and 'In The Garden' (1986 - 'And we heard the bells within the church we loved so much') where experience and understanding are brought together. That Van Morrison frequently revisits these sounds shows that they are as indelibly part of his memory of home as are the smells from the local bakery, the music in the bedroom and the outside places of the Hollow. These are poignant reminders that these memories of home are more than a catalogue of events, but they also stand for a poetic construction of particular places where social and cultural meanings are made and remade.

Alexander and Cooper observe that is a defining feature of the poetics of place (2013, p. 5). The places detailed in 'On Hyndford Street' are both inside and outside spaces, and this reinforces the expansive nature of Van Morrison's vision of home held across a wide set of boyhood and adolescent experiences. It is also associated with urban and rural locales, places that could be reached easily on foot ('And walks up Cherryvalley from North Road Bridge railway line on sunny summer afternoons') or by public transport ('going out to Holywood on the bus'). Importantly, however, as wide-ranging as these experiences may be, it is the ultimate home 'closeness' that counts. In the last lines of these movements we are brought back home in the simple listing of the streets

and landmarks ('Hyndford Street, Abetta Parade, Orangefield, St Donard's Church'). It is on the return, where the silences, the conversation, the 'laughter, and music and singing' bring 'shivers up the back of the neck'.

Inspiration and meditation. This suggestion of meaning produced across both outside and inside and away and home perspectives is reinforced in the third movement (2.07-2.49).

And tuning in to Luxembourg late at night and jazz and blues records during the day
Also Debussy on the Third Programme, early mornings when contemplation was best
Going up the Castlereagh hills and the Cregagh Glens in summer and coming back
To Hyndford Street, feeling wondrous and lit up inside, with a sense of everlasting life
And reading *Mr. Jelly Roll* and Big Bill Broonzy and *Really The Blues* by Mezz Mezzrow
And *Dharma Bums* by Jack Kerouac, over and over again

Listening to late night radio, playing jazz and blues records, reading widely across music ('*Mr Jelly Roll* and Big Bill Broonzy and *Really The Blues* by Mezz Mezzrow') and consciousness-probing ('*Dharma Bums* by Jack Kerouac) texts are inside intellectual pastimes. Dunne (2000, p. 18) points out that in this song references to Jelly Roll Morton and Mezz Mezzrow are both invoked in books, thus reinforcing the idea that the young songwriter was a serious student of music. These references are placed alongside of outside physical adventures ('Going up the Castlereagh hills and the Cregagh Glens in summer'). Again, this succession of intertextual memories provides an extensive template of critical formative processes. And once more, these processes assume heightened significance from the vantage point of home. 'Coming back' counts, *and* in physical, imaginative and spiritual ways - Hyndford Street is where the songwriter feels 'wondrous and lit up inside, with a sense of everlasting life'.

Distances between home and away. From here, the final movement (2.49-3.11) reprises the opening lines. The first sounds heard are ‘voices echoing late at night across the Beechie River’, allusions of former memories, liaisons, secrets, closeness - perhaps other lives playing out close by, perhaps remnants of former times.

And voices echoing late at night over Beechie River
And it's always being now, and it's always being now
It's always now. Can you feel the silence?
On Hyndford Street where you could feel the silence
At half past eleven on long summer nights
As the wireless played Radio Luxembourg and the voices whispered across
Beechie River
And in the quietness we sank into restful slumber in silence
And carried on dreaming in God

The two motifs coalesce in the pivotal lines: ‘And it's always being now, and it's always being now/It's always now. Can you feel the silence?’ The voice deliberates over the words, and the suspension of time is palpable, the invitation to ‘feel the silence’ hangs again in the pauses. The centralised pronunciation of the ‘now’ is recognisably ‘local’, ‘both related to, and the endpoint of, the idea of feeling of silence’ (Mills, 2010, p. 136).¹² The ‘now’ talks about the ways memory challenges the workings of time, the ‘silence’ explores the contemplative spaces between memory, reality and spirituality. The rest is reverie. There is a subtle but discernible difference in the phrasing of the words from the opening movement - softer and more deliberate, and this carries the reverence as the voice passes over to the synthesizer and plays out to a final silence.

The four movements of ‘On Hyndford Street’ gather together the remnants and leftovers from the memories of a ‘past home’, and fashion them into a concept of home

¹² Critics have pointed to the ways Van Morrison localises his accent to stress notions of ‘localness’. For example, Marcus writes about the final verse of ‘Tupelo Honey’ (1971): ‘Morrison has all but been kissing his words, lolling over them; then his clearwater tone breaks, and he takes a breath ... “You can take ... all the tea in Chiney” – and with “Chiney” ... the scene shifts from the Woodstock hills and the open seas of the seven oceans to a Belfast wharf ... “Drop it, smack dab, in the middle of the deep blue sea” (Marcus, 2010, p. 21).

that is mobilised around local images and sounds, childhood and adolescent exploits, and investigations and contemplations. In the hands of the songwriter, these memories, what elsewhere might be seen as merely a series of childhood and adolescent memories, are detailed in ways that become important places where other worlds of meaning are explored.

The chapter opened with a consideration of the ways that Van Morrison's conceptualisation of home might be understood through a framework of an expansive outside and inside view of home, and the interplay of local places and experiences. This framework drew on the theoretical ideas around the poetics of place. This framework around place, experience and meaning is a template that will be deployed throughout the rest of the thesis. With this framework in mind, the chapter looked at songs that are examples of the ways that the songwriter takes listeners into home places - alongside of streams and secluded green patches, across bridges, past decaying relics of the past, within view of local landmarks, and into the sights and sounds of the bedroom. Along the way the idea is explored that home is a temporal space of childhood and adolescent reminiscences, a place of simple pursuits and serious contemplations, a metaphorical imaginative haven to be forever taken way, way, back to, along a professional and personal journey.

5. Rooms

He said, 'Man, you gotta go out there and do something for yourself
You gotta go out and make
Or else you're gonna be sitting around here like, nothing'
I said, 'You're right.' I said, 'You're so right' ... ('The Back Room')

The Room: Textual Spaces Between Home and Away

The casual and colloquial chat between two people in 'The Back Room' (1967) might initially seem of little significance. The exchanges appear desultory, meanings almost lost in their own argot. However, these lines can alternatively be read against the wider movement of themes across the Van Morrison catalogue. So, ideas around the need to get away ('Man, you gotta go out there') and the certainty of these thoughts ('You're so right'), offer insights into the mindset expressed by the young songwriter at the time of his physical and emotional separation from his boyhood Belfast. The teenage slang, awkward and self-conscious, demarcates a temporal distance between boyhood and adolescence and a cultural distance between home and away. This chapter, then, takes up key Van Morrison themes around leaving home, and considers how they assume importance in a group of early career songs where the room is the critical physical and social space for their enactment. It builds on the songwriter's conceptualisation of home (discussed in the previous chapter) as both a privileged place and a site of contemplation, born out of memories of local haunts and formative influences. While Chapter 4 talked about songs that focused on specific home places of bedrooms, streets, streams, bridges and ditches, this chapter concerns a small number of songs in which the spatial boundedness of the room activates a related, yet tangential, set of codes and

ideas. These include the process of leaving home, and the forging of new personal and professional pathways in faraway places.

Crucially, in these songs, rooms are not depicted as specific or recognisable places. Rather they represent spaces, set apart from the memories of streetscapes and landscapes that are held as home. This distinction marks out lines between the past and the future, part of the songwriter's imaginative separation between his old and new worlds. Under terms proposed by Heidegger (1962), the room signifies a conscious space between the imaginative haven of home and the deliberations around stepping away from that loaded notion. In this sense, Van Morrison's room songs, if we can call them that, are less concerned with the built space of the room, than the complexity of experience that plays out within its four walls. If, as Astor contends (2010, p. 147), the textual nature of songs is closer to a play than a poem, Van Morrison's rooms become highly dramatic spaces in which the tensions between staying and leaving are rehearsed and re-enacted. To this end, it is the boundedness of the room, enclosed and partially cut off from the outside that symbolises restriction and inaction, and the spaces outside its boundaries that speak to the artist's preoccupation with movement and new beginnings. The critical concerns of a young man and musician contemplating the personal and professional impacts of a life transported across the Atlantic are explored in the focused location of different kinds of rooms. Importantly, this exploration takes Van Morrison's songwriting beyond the mere recollection of childhood experiences and local places, to a wider exploration of emotions and vulnerabilities associated with change.

The Room: An Elemental Human Space

Van Morrison frequently locates his songwriting in the physical, psychological and social spaces of the room, and this space is where wider questions around the human

condition are caught within the intensity of interpersonal relationships. The poetic use of the room as an elemental human space is signalled early in 'Gloria' (1965), where a movement from the outside street to the inner, private place of the room traces an adolescent anticipation of intimacy. As a physical space, the room is contained, a symbol of both individual privacy and intimacy. The room is where rites of passage are performed, in this case, adolescent courtship and lovemaking. In 'Gloria' the room is not a specific place, as are the adolescent bedrooms of 'Astral Weeks' (1968) and 'Wavelength' (1978), where concrete memories of music, posters and conversations are located. Rather, it is abstract and aspirational in nature, a popular music symbol of teenage coming-of-age experiences - 'And then she comes to my room, /She make me feel alright'. It is the overlaying of the experiences to the physical space that moves the room beyond its four contained walls to wider rites-of-passage meanings.

This overlaying of experience on the everyday space of the house is of interest across the literary and popular music worlds. The previous chapter drew on literature (Smyth & Croft, 2006) that picked up on the ideas of both Bachelard (1964) and Heidegger (1962) to propose that the house, and by reduction here, rooms within the house, is a fundamental and elemental human space (p. 25), a privileged location for the enactment of the human drama (p. 16). Smyth and Croft draw attention to the Heideggerian concept of 'dwelling' and the impact of the house on the human experience (2006, p. 13). While they note a general lack of critical attention to the ordinariness of the house, they offer the example of Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861), observing how that novel is underscored by the main character's search for a

‘home’ across multiple houses (pp. 16-17).¹ A similar sense of restlessness is apparent in Van Morrison’s songwriting as he moves away from his home. Other rooms away from the home symbolise the emotional strain of being away, and so are bound within the need to find new sanctuaries within a host of personal, philosophical and ontological domains. Furthermore, differences between the physical and recognisable locations of home and the unspecified generic descriptor of the room highlight an important distinction in the way that the songwriter utilises the poetics of place. In this regard, he is not alone. Other songs of the late 1960s and early 1970s deploy rooms to express inner feelings. The Beach Boys’ ‘In My Room’ (1964), for example, talks about the room as a space to retreat to, a place for connecting with past dreams and future schemes. ‘In My Room’ (1966) by The Walker Brothers positions photos, furniture and dying flowers as symbols of lost love and overwhelming loneliness. ‘White Room’ (1968) by Cream uses the bounded space of a room as a symbol of internal consciousness that is drawn by feelings of isolation (see, Herb Bowie, online). These, and similar songs, are salient examples of what Croft (2005, pp. 209-210) refers to as different connotations of ‘interiority’, that is, the internal consciousness of adolescent and post-adolescent subjectivity and the interior space of the room (see, Chapter 4, and the discussion of ‘Astral Weeks’ and ‘Wavelength’). It is the argument of this chapter that in a number of early career songs Van Morrison situates his poetic world in the private and intimate space that is the room. What sets these songs apart from the other 1960s examples, above, and songs like ‘Gloria’, ‘Astral Weeks’ and ‘Wavelength’, is

¹ This is from the opening chapter on their edited book on the representation of domestic space in modern culture. Elsewhere in the edition, Brewster (pp. 141- 159) writes about how the house is an overlooked space in more recent Irish culture, where the focus has often been on landscape over built environments, and the sense of home is invariably about territory and exclusion (p. 143). He goes on to consider the work of Seamus Heaney and Tom Paulin, and how each picks up on competing ideas surrounding safety and vulnerability.

the textual positioning of the room as a temporal space that sits uneasily between familiar home places and the uncertainties of future personal and professional contexts.

Staying and Leaving

Five early career songs are the focus for this chapter. They are all from a five-year period when Morrison is either thinking about moving away from home or is looking back on that decision. This chapter highlights the different ways that themes around staying or leaving are revisited in different kinds of songs – from a ‘talking blues’ song eavesdropping onto adolescent chat, to a stream of consciousness montage of coming-of-age memories, to a lament on loneliness and dislocation, to a disturbing song about the extreme of human life, to a love song of risk and anticipation. Three focus specifically on ideas about leaving the familiar and the known - ‘The Back Room’, ‘Madame George’ (1968) and ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ (1972). The other two, ‘T.B.Sheets’ (1967) and ‘Ballerina’(1968), take a different tack, positioning staying and leaving within interpersonal dramas. In these two songs wider themes about staying and leaving sit beside observations about the intensity of personal relationships, and they clearly speak to human emotions around loneliness and vulnerability often associated with moving away from home. There is a general agreement among critics that each of the five songs explores tensions between staying and leaving. For Heylin (2002) and Dawe (2009), this theme is in play in ‘The Back Room’ and ‘Madame George’. Indeed, both see close connections between these songs. As noted below, Dawe concludes that the leaving Belfast ideas explored in *Astral Weeks* (1968) had their beginnings in ‘The Back Room’. Heylin takes this further, suggesting that ‘The Back Room’ is a coda to

the previous night's happenings at 'Ford and Fitzroy' in 'Madame George' (p. 162).² Marcus (2009) writes about how the coda of 'Madame George' represents a turning of the back and walking away from the scene in the room (pp. 150-151). About 'Saint Dominic's Preview', Burke (2013) notes the sense of rootlessness and distances between home and away (p. 95), and Mills (2010) senses the nostalgia and homesickness that play out in the positioning of home and away places. In these three songs, tensions between staying and leaving are specifically laid out. Van Morrison sings in 'The Back Room', 'Yeah, ya know I can't stay here all the time/As much as I'd like to'. Here personal and professional decisions are deliberated from within back room talk. Similarly, 'Madame George' farewells Belfast with lines about saying goodbye, 'and you know you gotta go.' And, in 'Saint Dominic's Preview', 'It's a long way to Belfast city, too', comes across as both heart-felt and deeply emotive. In the final two songs, tensions are caught within more generalised ideas around the competing forces of staying and leaving. In 'T.B.Sheets', 'gotta go', appears throughout, words seemingly frozen within the hesitation to leave. 'Fly it, sigh it, c'mon, die it', exhorts the narrator in 'Ballerina', encouraging a break away from existing confined places. Critics invariably concentrate on the narrative of the trapped characters in 'T.B.Sheets' (see, for example, Hinton, 2000, p. 81, and Hage, 2009, p. 32), yet it is also possible to recognise the same staying and leaving thematic territory being played out (see, Heylin, 2002, and below). Similarly, 'Ballerina', as will be argued later, catches the imperative to move away from Belfast that is found across the *Astral Weeks* album.

While critics do not explicitly attend to the resonances of these 'room' songs

² Heylin (2002) writes that 'The Back Room' and 'Madame Joy' (the precursor to 'Madame George') were both recorded at the same time for Bang Records (p. 162). When he reads 'The Back Room' as a coda to what he interpreted as the happenings at 'Ford and Fitzroy' the previous evening, he makes an assumption that 'Ford and Fitzroy' refers to a specific place, and the events of 'Madame George' occur in a single evening. Both of these assumptions are not supported in interpretations about 'Madame George' offered in this chapter (see below).

with respect these themes, this chapter offers a different context for reading Van Morrison and the vulnerabilities on display in his songwriting as he moved away from his Belfast home. Furthermore, the songs offer a counterpoint to many of the later albums and songs where the ‘perpetual motion’ and ‘surging outwards’, that both Mills (2010) and Hughes (2013) observe, become dominant thematic concerns for the songwriter. On this point, songs like these provide insights into the significance that Van Morrison held for drilling back through memory into the origins and sources that marked out nostalgic resting points on the long songwriting journey away from home. Thus, they both anticipate and heighten the gravity of later Van Morrison songs that specifically concern themselves with themes of nostalgia and exile.

Inside the Rooms

The rooms in the songs in this chapter are settings that are devoid of physical objects. Their physical emptiness heightens the symbolism around enclosure and openness. The inside spaces speak to staying, those outside about the compulsion to leave. Moreover, each of these songs frames the room as a place that sits apart, positioned across social and cultural distances. In ‘The Back Room’, the space is identifiably an adolescent hang out. It might well be a band room, in its self-conscious cant, and focus on listening to and talking about music. The outside falling rain and references to ‘Cyprus Avenue’ (drinking ‘cherry wine’ and ‘little girls coming home from school’) provide a wider location, and also indicate a time in the young songwriter’s life. But it is a space in the hometown that might be anywhere, its significance lying in its symbolic inner space that feels cut-off from the world, even as there is a constant awareness of the rhythms outside the door. The room of ‘Madame George’ (1968) is similarly caught between an awareness of inside and outside space - the montage of memories and new experiences

detailed in the enclosed room offer seclusion from external restrictions and surveillances. The room of the lonely, isolated story block in ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ sits high above the street below, its height seemingly removed from the street action below. Its physical distance from home, and the social distances from high-flying up-market New York apartments both accentuate feelings of dislocation. The room of ‘T.B.Sheets’ (1967) reeks of entrapment and isolation. Players in the drama are trapped physically and psychologically, neither able to escape. The intimacy of the relationship works its way around polarised needs that are fundamental and unrequited - on one hand, the need for comfort, and on the other, guilt when worthwhile comfort is unable to be offered. The room is stark, dark and cool, as is the narrative. ‘Ballerina’ (1968) similarly explores notions of freedom and intimacy, and with vulnerability and risk-taking at its centre. The room in the song is, at first, also an individual and lonely space, though there is a potentiality for closeness and taking-off always close at hand. Potentiality and anticipation quietly infiltrate the lines. Uncertainties dominate in both of these songs. In ‘Ballerina’ there is a sense that these can be positively addressed, and this is in contrast to the finality that hangs over ‘T.B.Sheets’.

Characters and Conversation

Whereas the physical emptiness and social detachment of the rooms provide symbolic contexts for the themes around staying and leaving, they also allow space for personal dramas to play out. Here, character and conversation are significant. There are questions about who is talking, and how the conversation contributes to the ideas of each song. In ‘The Back Room’ we encounter the adolescent musician, throwing around ideas about ‘getting out’ and away from Belfast as a professional move. ‘Madame George’ draws on a montage of personal memories across childhood and adolescence, with the singer

inhabiting spaces between innocence and experience, and its symbolism moves the song closer to that of a *fictional* persona, and one that straddles both protagonist and observer (Moore, 2012, p. 182, drawing on Auslander, 2009). In this way, the songwriter, though using the second person, is both alluding to a personal involvement and standing back as an observer of the situation. In ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’, the character takes up the position of the lonely artist in the garret, away from home and caught within doubts and misgivings about what that move means both personally and professionally. When these songs are thought about together, they provide a composite picture of a young songwriter inhabiting a series of complex identities - the aspiring musician, the coming-of-age adolescent, the struggling artist. These characters, if we might call them such, contribute to an understanding of what it means for the songwriter to be caught between affection for home and the need to leave. This is a situation that Moore (2012) describes as *realistic*, that is, the songwriter appears to be *personally* involved and singing from reputed experience (p. 182, emphases in original). When these songs are read as autobiographical, they offer important insights into different ways that Morrison feels as first he contemplates moving, and then the isolation and loneliness he feels after he has made that move. These are different than those that may be found in ‘T.B.Sheets’ and ‘Ballerina’, where there are distinctions between the characteristics of the performer and that of the songs’ protagonists.³ That is, lines are blurred between realistic and fictional personae, as the songwriter deploys intense relational dramas around sickness and intimacy to detail apprehensions around staying and leaving. Across all these songs, there are thematic connections with a personal and professional narrative that is situated between home and away.

³ Moore (2012) contends that the influence of psychedelia in mid 1960s, popular music began to move to alternative positions from what he terms the ‘bedrock’ position of the persona (realistic, everyday situation, involved stance, present time, exploration of the moment). He cites The Kinks’ ‘Waterloo Sunset’ as an example of where the experience is reported from the outside by the songwriter (Ray Davies), and so he is uninvolved, yet clearly positive (p. 183).

The intimacy of the room as an enclosed physical space also lends itself to the sharing of confidences. From the adolescent brashness of ‘Gloria’, to the small talk of ‘The Back Room’, the composite conversations that range across lost innocence, risk-taking and spiritual awareness in ‘Madame George’, and the exchanges that underline personal, social and cultural negotiations in ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’, conversation gives emphasis to the nature of the relationship, whether close and personal, or distant and strained, and these reinforce the tensions between staying and leaving as symbolised in the inside and outside spaces of the songs. Conversation forms the dramatic centrepiece of both ‘T.B.Sheets’ and ‘Ballerina’, each concerned with the expression of inner feelings that are caught within uncertainty and indecision. Conversations in these songs are closely aligned with what Elliott (2016) refers to as the ‘inner and outer dialogues’ that characterise much of Van Morrison’s songwriting.⁴ Elliott observes that it is the coalescence of poetry and the song’s vocal performance in Van Morrison’s recordings that can get listeners to his inner feelings (p. 61). Inner feelings that are torn between the familiar and the unknown sit centrally in the songs discussed in this chapter.

Leaving the Familiar

In the opening of this chapter it was suggested that ‘The Back Room’ could be read within the wider thematic movements in many of Van Morrison’s early career songs. The song’s importance resides in its relationship to songs about farewelling Belfast that would find their way onto the *Astral Weeks* album. Dawe (2009) discusses the song in relation to Van Morrison’s physical and spiritual separation from his boyhood Belfast

⁴ Noteworthy, also, is that across the Van Morrison catalogue conversation is quite regularly employed (see, for example, ‘Fair Play’, 1975, ‘Angeliou’, 1979, ‘And The Healing Has Begun’, 1979, ‘Stepping Out Queen’, 1979, ‘Foreign Window’, 1986, ‘Magic Time’, 2005).

and draws attention to the ways that ‘the world that is left behind is depicted in emotional, physical and (at times) ironic detail’ (pp. 160-161). As noted above, he further notes that the leaving behind of Belfast that is on show so vividly in *Astral Weeks* (and, in ‘The Story Of Them’. See, Chapter 7) had its beginnings in ‘The Back Room’ - ‘The sense of leaving the familiar and known, the home place, to find a sustaining artistic life elsewhere, is scored throughout Morrison’s work from the beginning’. Immediately noticeable is the way that the room is used to illustrate this movement. The everydayness and repetition of the conversation and the interplay of the inside and outside environments heighten the feelings of ‘you gotta go out there’, and the compulsion to leave the familiar works its way towards emotional forces surrounding deliberation and anticipation. The room provides a symbolic location for these forces. In picking up on the everyday actions and words of young musicians, the interiority of the space is marked out by idleness and chitchat, and stands for inaction and indecision. Its lyrical feel is both autobiographical and conversational, and its setting in the back room is behind the scenes, and away from public spaces. But it also has a sense of friendship and community. The openness of the conversation and the detailing is placed against the privacy of the room, and, in concert, this heightens feelings of being taken into a confidence.

The rain came down, pitter-pat
Said, ‘What, you think it’s raining outside?’
Said, ‘So what, turn the record player on’
Had a smoke, stood up, walked across to the john
In a cloud of mist, couldn’t resist
Katie stepped in the hall, she grabbed the door
Found the key in the letter box, she turned the door
Walked into the room, said, ‘What’s going on?’

‘I just got back from down the road,
I got a couple of bottles of wine, something to turn you on’
What’d you think about that?’
I said, ‘Sit down, child
Pull up a seat, you’re soaking wet
Take off your coat and hat, wipe your feet on the mat’
In the back room, in the back room

I waited for you, you waited for me

I said, 'What time is it, Johnny, where did we go all day?
Seem to get nowhere and do nothing
But sit looking at each other'
He said, 'I know, I've been doin' the same thing for weeks'
I look at the clock and all of a sudden
I'm hypnotized and it speaks to me
And it goes tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock

And Katie said, 'I don't know what you gotta do
But I been working so hard, lately
That I get home and just fall asleep in bed'
So he played some more sounds and grooved a while
Somebody brought some cherry wine, cherry wine
And we talked about what was going on in the music world
And other things
Rain outside came down like it came never before
Down it came, down it came, rain rain rain
And I said, 'Baby what time is it, what time is it
Tell me, what time is it?'

'Four-thirty'

So I peep round the corner of the blinds and there you go
There's the little girls coming home from school
Looking so cool
Just learned their As to Zs
I said, 'Hey, man, don't that look funny, all those girls Coming home from
school
And us sitting, talking and drinking
And all them other funny things?'

No apparent secrets here, the observations and exchanges are both mundane and humdrum. With vocal intonations akin to mid 1960s Bob Dylan (think, 'Subterranean Homesick Blues'),⁵ the song is a semi-spoken set of lyrics along the lines of 'The Story Of Them'. 'The Back Room' is first held together within the minutiae of small talk about the weather, the slowness of time, the repetitive rhythms of the day. References to the images of girls coming home from school foreshadow the concerns of 'Cyprus

⁵ Bob Dylan's 'Subterranean Homesick Blues', and others like, 'Talkin' World War III Blues' (*The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, 1963), are forms of 'talking-blues' that emerged in the 1920s (Levy, 2018, p. 19). It is reasonable to conclude that Van Morrison is also drawing on this musical tradition.

Avenue', and thus talk to that song's theme of social dislocation. As it progresses, the final lines dwell on the importance of artistic integrity and the need to move on (see quoted lines from the beginning of the chapter). So the need to leave the room, and, by association, the specific set of actions and circumstances, and 'go out there' symbolises a movement away - the inside standing for routine and predictability, and the outside representing a break from those routines. This realisation sits at the heart of the future exiled experience, the tension between wanting to stay, but having to leave.⁶ It is a realisation from within the intimacy and apparent safety of the room that compels an ultimate escape from what the back room stands for - the shared daily comings and goings and small talk associated with those. Closeness and openness pull each other apart in these lines, the close frank conversation working against the figurative opening of the door, the stepping outside, and the leaving. This is an inversion of the movement from outside (the street) to inside (the bedroom) in 'Gloria'.

While the 'Back Room' anticipates the necessity of a farewell to Belfast as a professional decision, 'Madame George' situates leaving across a wider set of coming-of-age experiences, and the room holds a critical significance for its inside-outside tensions. In complete contrast to the seeming ordinariness of the room in the earlier song, this room is marked by extraordinary goings-on, and the listener is never made fully aware of what these are. What can be known is that the room is the place where the trance settles, where 'snapshots of claustrophobic interiors' (Mills, 2010, p. 297) throw up scenes of 'drinking wine' and 'sweet perfume' that trace allegorical movements from boyhood to adulthood. It is the room where images of lost innocence, risky dealings and a spiritual feeling are seen in the 'games of chance' and the spaces

⁶ See, McLoone, 2008, p. 167, on the paradox between rootedness and transcendence.

filled with 'laughing and dancing music'.⁷

And outside they're making all the stops
The kids out in the street collecting bottle tops
Gone for cigarettes and matches in the shops
Happy taking Madame George
Oh that's when you fall
Oh, that's when you fall
Yeah, that's when you fall

When you fall into a trance
Sitting on a sofa playing games of chance
With your folded arms and history books you glance
Into the eyes of Madame George

And you think you've found the bag
You're getting weaker and your knees begin to sag
In the corner playing dominoes in drag
The one and only Madame George

And tup from outside the frosty window raps
She jumps up and says, 'Lord, have mercy,
I think that it's the cops
And immediately drops everything she got
Down into the street below

But this room has no elements of familiarity, and while the band room of 'The Back Room' has an air of predictability and an awareness of the world outside, here the space is, for the most part, cut off and secretive. The room is where 'moments of heightened experience' and on-the-edge actions ('Lord, have mercy /I think that it's the cops') are contrasted with the everyday stuff of a remembered childhood - collecting bottle tops and going for 'cigarettes and matches in the shops' (McLoone, 2008, p. 171). Leaving in 'Madame George' becomes conflated with passages of time. It is the journey that the songwriter has already embarked on, and there is a harmonious clash of compound intersecting images - lawlessness, music, experimentation and lost innocence. While

⁷ Van Morrison has over the years talked about the spiritual themes at the heart of the song, and how it is a composite picture of remembered experiences and other fictional scenes. He told Yorke, 'The song is just a stream of consciousness thing ... just came right out ... the song is basically about a spiritual feeling' (Yorke, 1975, p. 61).

there are snapshots throughout of life on the streets outside, the room provides an essential stage for the ‘micro’ dramas of the song to be enacted. In a song where place is represented ‘on both the micro and macro scale’ (Mills, 2010, p. 300), and where a remembered Belfast across passages of time becomes a metaphor for what has been emotionally and physically left behind (McLoone, 2008, p. 76), the room becomes the lingering symbol of past experiences. It is the place of realisation (‘And you know you gotta go’) and the image of what is being left behind (‘Walking away from it all’).

And you know you gotta go
On that train from Dublin up to Sandy Row
Throwing pennies at the bridges down below
And the rain, hail, sleet, and snow ...

And as you leave, the room is filled with music
Laughing music, dancing music, all around the room
And all the little boys come around
Walking away from it all
So cool ...

Say goodbye

In the wind and the rain in the back street
In the backstreet
In the backstreet
Say goodbye to Madame George
In the backstreet
In the backstreet
In the backstreet
Well, down home
Down home in the back street
Gotta go
Say goodbye, goodbye, goodbye

Dry your eye, your eye, your eye
Your eye, your eye, your eye
Say goodbye to Madame George

In its complex exploration of the intersecting themes of lost innocence and starting out on a new life, ‘Madame George’ depicts the allegorical movement from youth to adulthood, and the room stands as one of the central images of a song. As with the earlier song on the album, ‘Astral Weeks’, it contributes to an expression of

moments in time in between experience, awareness, and a farewell to Belfast.

Moreover, when we think back to ‘The Back Room’ and the way these two songs explore the same tensions in different ways, there is a sense that the room is a useful symbol for the enactment of these ideas. In the hands of the songwriter its boundedness can either promote feelings of the need to escape, or suggest that there are points in time that now need to be left behind. Both ideas are held in the movements from the inside to outside spaces of the room in each song.

If ‘The Back Room’ steers a course around the anticipation of leaving, and ‘Madame George’ stands for memories of experiences in passages of time leading up to leaving, ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ is situated in the aftermath of the leaving. Recorded in 1972 when Van Morrison was living in Marin County in the San Francisco Bay area, it brings together three interrelated themes. As we have seen before, it is first heavily influenced by his childhood in Belfast, and, second, by the escalation of the Troubles. He confided to a *Rolling Stone* reporter that he had concerns ‘about the scene going down in Belfast’ (Heylin, 2002, p. 256). Third, it offers early insights into the songwriter’s growing dissatisfaction with the pressures and demands of the music industry. ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ ranges restlessly across a number of different places. And, as with ‘The Back Room’ and ‘Madame George’, the room takes on a special weight. In this case it is a marker of social and cultural dislocation rather than a symbol of earlier times. The first room in the ‘jagged apartment block’ stands as an image of distance and loneliness, its isolation stark in comparison to the rooms of the concluding verses in restaurants and upmarket apartments, with their celebratory and party scenes of the ‘wino few’ and the hip. In all these rooms the physical spaces combine with subjectivities around loneliness and alienation to produce increasingly heightened social spaces. While these rooms in ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ are but a part of the landscapes and streetscapes that constitute the tapestry of the song, they are

arguably central to the investigation of the concentrated emotions around an existential exile that sit at the song's central concerns. As such, they provide further examples of the ways that the songwriter takes up the physical space of the room, and then overlays the physical in ways that become very much representative of wider issues within the songwriter's personal experiences.

Rooms: Tensions and Vulnerabilities

The two songs that conclude this chapter work their way around themes of staying and leaving, but in a way that explores the vulnerabilities of these decisions within the spaces of personal relationships. While these songs do not share the same detail of leaving a specific place, they nevertheless offer an important thematic counterpoint in their observations about generalised issues around staying and leaving. There is support in the literature that these issues were explored at this point in Van Morrison's songwriting career. Heylin (2002) writes that many of the songs from around the *Astral Weeks* period are about escape or the dream of escaping (p. 187), and clearly these are central to the concerns of both 'T.B.Sheets' and 'Ballerina'. This needs some explanation. First, the position taken in this chapter is that 'T.B.Sheets' is a song for the times when Van Morrison was considering the impact of moving away from his Belfast home, and its themes of leaving and staying are clearly aligned with others written and recorded in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is not at all to suggest that this song should necessarily be read definitively as an analogy for a physical moving away from familiar places.⁸ Rather it is to argue that it stands as an example of a song through which ideas around setting out for unexplored wide-open places might be located in the

⁸ About 'T.B.Sheets', interviews seem to confirm that the song came about as a result of a dream. Van Morrison's mother recalls that it was a nightmare: 'That's a dream he had, a nightmare ... He felt so strongly that he couldn't eat breakfast the next morning. He started to tell me about it and he ended up singing about it' (Rogan, 2006, p. 205).

enclosed physical and psychological spaces of a room. The songwriter in interview has regularly spoken about composite pictures of events and scenes, and visions and dreams as the basis for his work (see, Rogan, 2005), and it seems reasonable to conclude that these pictures and visions would be influenced by his thoughts around staying and leaving at a critical period in his career. Second, there are persuasive suggestions in the literature that indicate that 'Ballerina', with its themes around escape and risk-taking, represents movements across temporal and geographical distances that are aligned with the artist's relocation across the Atlantic. This will be taken up in more detail below.

As with the other songs discussed in this chapter, the movements across these distances are symbolised through boundaries between inner and outer spaces with the room as the stage for the drama. Furthermore, these songs align physical and anticipated movements with intense emotions associated with deliberations and decisions. Before going inside the rooms of these songs, it might be worthwhile to pause and think about the ways that the room can be such a useful symbol for illustrating tensions and vulnerabilities around staying and leaving. In the three songs discussed to this point the room is a remembered place, and the psychological tensions are caught in the spaces between the inside and outside worlds. So, the room might bring up feelings of familiarity, intimacy and community, but can equally be small, confined and claustrophobic. The inside world of the room may well ring with conversation and experiences that seem contained for the moment, yet the outside world is ever present and the songwriter continually reminds listeners of this. Voices can be heard, windows are opened to the streets below, confined and isolating spaces encourage memories of earlier times. Within these tensions between both inside and outside worlds and between old and new places, the act of leaving is bound within notions of inevitability. And to return to the thoughts of Bachelard and Heidegger and their notions of how dwelling is associated with connectedness – if we link these notions with associated ideas about

the room as an elemental human space and a stage for the enactment of human drama, we can see how Van Morrison utilises rooms in these songs to evince a sense of place that is invariably weighted with emotion and a search for a belonging. Taking these ideas into the markedly different rooms and dramas of 'T.B.Sheets' and 'Ballerina', we are confronted with inner emotions that are graphically on show through the coming together of lyrics and performance. Again, both are good examples of the 'inner and outer dialogues' in Van Morrison songs that Elliott observes (2016, p. 61, see above). These are dialogues that are intensified within the constricted spaces of the rooms.

The Cool Room. The Fool's Room.

The room of 'T.B.Sheets' is described as a 'cool room' and a 'fool's room'. There is no hint given about the physical nature of the room, beyond the confined space and a window to the outside.⁹ It's a 'cool room', the darkness and coldness signify an end through which both actors will be set free. It also symbolises the coldness at the centre of the exchanges. It is also a 'fool's room', the placement of the apostrophe pointing to a singular failing on both sides of the relationship to act rationally when release is not possible in the here-and-now. Mills (2010) describes the tension that permeates the lyrics and performance of 'T.B.Sheets' as 'an eternal moment of paralysis between staying and leaving' (p. 161). It is a paralysis that is dramatically held in the inner and outer spaces of the room. The sick room is stifling and threatening, being trapped in its space presents a physical and psychological drama. Risks are high for contagion, and the risk of leaving is fraught with feelings of guilt. As with other songs in this chapter,

⁹ The reality for children and adolescents suffering from tuberculosis in Northern Ireland during the 1960s was that they would be treated in sanatoria. Kelly (2011) writes that before the development of an appropriate treatment drug in the 1940s, doctors would only recommend fresh air, rest and good food. She adds that their institutional experience often had a psychologically traumatic impact due to separation from family and the vulnerability of youth (p. 80).

the boundeness of the room forces conversational contact, always turning on competing tensions between staying and leaving: 'I gotta go, I gotta go/And she said, 'Please stay ...'. It is interesting to think about the way the space in this song is radically different to other room songs, and indeed, other popular music songs that feature rooms. This is a song where the listener is caught and held in the middle of the drama, as though trapped in the very room in which the scenes play out. With other room songs there is always a sense that the scene is being witnessed as an interested observer. Not here. In other songs there is a sense that the room can and will be left. In this room, escape seems never part of the equation. The emotional tug is felt throughout, and if a side has to be taken, it seems to be against the narrator. This is not a room where friendly banter fills the space, nor where the conversation moves across different experiences and times. It is a cold and menacing backdrop, and the lyrics and musical palette sets this up texturally from the outset. The introductory minute of 'T.B.Sheets', while not particularly symbolic at first listen, takes on heightened significance when re-approached from within the drama of the song. A persistent loop of drums and organ settle into the first 30 seconds of introduction, and this promotes a sense of relentless foreboding. Then the almost breathless and high shriek of the harmonica, three times piercing and intruding, overlays feelings of menace, until the vocals force their way in at 60 seconds. Mills (2010) talks about how the dominant musical palette echoes with sensations of entrapment, and the harmonica squalls replicate the struggle for breath (p. 161). In this way the instrumental backdrop increasingly heightens the intensity of the conversation that is to follow. The loop continues throughout the song, occasionally broken into by the threat of a guitar, and the vocals become more incessant and the words more babbling, always searching for excuses and looking for ways out of the sick and 'cool room'. Entrapment dominates both sides of the conversational exchanges.

Now listen, Julie baby,
It ain't natural for you to cry in the midnight

It ain't natural for you to cry way into midnight through
Until the wee small hours long 'fore the break of dawn Oh Lord

Now Julie an' there ain't nothin' on my mind
More further 'way than what you're lookin' for
I see the way you jumped at me, Lord, from behind the door
And looked into my eyes
Your little star-struck innuendoes
Inadequacies and foreign bodies

The sick woman is bodily trapped by the disease, and physically confined to the isolating spaces of the room. The narrator is emotionally trapped, caught between being in the room to offer support, between an inability to know what that support should be, and between a reluctance to stay, even while he seems compelled to do so. This emotional entrapment first surfaces as an air of admonishment. The opening line ('Now listen, Julie baby') seems distant and detached, the pause between 'listen' and 'Julie baby' suggestive of a hesitation over the words to follow. There is a clumsiness of expression in the opening verses, and this rings with an apparent lack of compassion. 'It ain't natural', he admonishes, in itself a wry observation about the distress of the body reflected in the pain of her crying 'way into the midnight through'. Admonishment gives way to perfunctory denial, the narrator turning the woman's need for comfort into his own personalised feelings. This seems a cruel inversion, the intrusiveness of her disease now an intrusion on his own psychological space, a space he seems to want to clear - 'there ain't nothin' on my mind'. Inner dependence and need are conflated with the physical condition, in ways that the figurative expressions of hope, 'jumping', looking 'into my eyes' and 'star-struck', become almost an affront to the narrator. The alliterative linking of 'innuendoes' and 'foreign bodies' with 'inadequacies' across the lines catches this conflation. It might be easy to read heartlessness in these words, and listeners may well make that conclusion. Equally, it might indicate helplessness in the face of the severity of the situation he finds himself in - a young person contemplating mortality in the stark one-on-one space of the room, before he is emotionally ready to

do so. Helplessness then becomes internalised, her physical suffering in the lonely and stricken room parallels his conflicted thoughts. He is constantly torn between trying to console her and wanting to get away. Trapped, the slightest reminders of spaces outside ('sunlight shining through the crack in the window pane') are disturbing and 'numbing'. His physical inaction is entangled by psychological confusion, and there can be no escape.

And the sunlight shining through the crack in the windowpane
Numbs my brain
And the sunlight shining through the crack in the windowpane
Numbs my brain, oh Lord.

Ha, so open up the window and let me breathe
I said open up the window and let me breathe

I'm looking down to the street below, Lord, I cried for you
I cried, I cried for you

Oh Lord

The cool room, Lord, is a fool's room,
The cool room, Lord, is a fool's room,
And I can almost smell your T.B. sheets
And I can almost smell your T.B. sheets
On your sick bed

I gotta go, I gotta go
And she said, 'Please stay, I wanna, I wanna,
I want a drink of water, I want a drink of water
Go into the kitchen get me a drink of water'
I said, 'I gotta go, I gotta go, baby'
I said, 'I'll send, I'll send somebody around later
You know we got Janet comin' around later
With a bottle of wine for you, baby, but I gotta go'

The cool room, Lord, is a fool's room
The cool room, Lord, Lord, is a fool's room, a fool's room
And I can almost smell your T.B. sheets
I can almost smell your T.B. sheets, T.B.

I gotta go, I gotta go
I'll send around, send around one that grumbles later on, baby
We'll see what I can pick up for you, you know
Yeah, I got a few things going on too
Don't worry about it, don't worry about it, don't worry, Huh uh, go go go, I've
gotta go, gotta go, gotta go, gotta go
Gotta go, gotta go, huh uh, alright, alright

I turned on the radio
If you wanna hear a few tunes, I'll turn on the radio for you
There you go, there you go, there you go, baby, there you go

You'll be alright too
I know it ain't funny, it funny at all, baby
To land in the cool room, man, laying in the cool room
In the cool room, in the cool room

The vocal performance of the recording throughout carries highs and lows of these conflicted feelings. The agitation in the voice is palpable and disturbing, his expressive claustrophobia inextricably bound within the cold, dark room (see, Mills, 2010, pp. 161-162). Listeners are asked to confront feelings about life and death, as they too are caught within the confinement of the room. They are witnessing exchanges between two players, and are compelled to stay on, even as they too need to escape the menace within the words and music. This is intense and demanding human drama at its most elemental, and the singer wrings emotion from the interplay of words and sounds, as does an actor on a stage. The voice drops (hear, for example, 'foreign bodies' at 2.27, 'I gotta go, I gotta go, baby' at 5.19) and soars (among others, 'I cried, I cried for you' at 3.48, 'I've gotta go, gotta go, gotta go, gotta go' at 7.45, 'I'll turn the radio on for you' at 8.10), and there are emotive asides that seem to catch the indecision in the words around (for example, 1.35, 3.06, 7.41). When the narrator opens the window for fresh air ('so open up the window and let me breathe') there are direct connections between the lyrics and the act of attempting to catch his breath (3.15). This is a noteworthy instance of what Elliott has described as a conflation 'of singer and protagonist in a moment of heightened vocal presence' (2016, p. 72, drawing on, Marcus, 2009, pp. 88-89). Later in the song, at the second set of lyrics about the stench of the disease ('And I can almost smell your T.B. sheets'), there is a barely detectable, but dramatic, sound of sniffing (6.37), a tangible depiction of the revulsion that accompanies the trapped presence in the room. As can be seen, the vocal performances

throughout 'T.B.Sheets' give every indication that the singer was completely immersed in the expression of its many dramatic moments; a 'reflection on the relationship between the performing voice as producer of sound, noise, and music and the poetic voice that provides the words and visions upon which the performing voice goes to work' (Elliott, 2016, p. 53). This is borne out by accounts from the recording session. Heylin (2002) gives this picture: 'He was just torn apart. He was sitting on the floor in a heap like a wrung-out dishcloth' (p. 153).

It is worth noting that while the overriding theme of entrapment dominates 'T.B.Sheets', the physical space is never completely abandoned. A dozen times 'gotta go' is thrown out, at times in lines that are rambling and repetitive. But the character remains, fixed between excuse and support, his words increasingly marked by a bleak and rambling uncertainty about what to do. The suspension between thoughts about leaving and physical inaction is emphasised by tensions between inner spaces (the room) and the outside world. Contrasts between these are blunt and depicted across all human senses and sounds. The crying 'until the wee small hours long', the lonely desperation of reaching out and pleading, the need for water, the perceived smell of the sheets, the darkness and coldness - all these stand against the outside liveliness of sunlight, fresh air, the street below, friends, wine, tunes on the radio. These also represent distances and parallels across the respective imperatives within the relationship. Basic requests for 'a drink of water' are seemingly ignored and deflected, the physical inaction in the room constantly positioned against talked about actions and solutions. Consider, for example, the narrator's need for breathing fresh outside air, contrasting with the struggle for breath of the patient suffering from tuberculosis. Elsewhere, earthly trappings of wine, supplies ('We'll see what I can pick up for you') and music ('If you wanna hear a few tunes, I'll turn the radio on for you'), not only interplay with the constant imploring of 'Lord' and its religious undertones, but carry

reminders that these are extraneous to the real needs of the woman. The offerings, increasingly random and desperate, are interspersed with both excuses to leave, and vague words of consolation: 'Don't worry about it, don't worry about it, don't worry' 'There you go, there you go, there you go, baby, there you go'. 'T.B.Sheets' fades in the end, the vocals trailing off as the backing instruments loosen their intensity. 'It ain't funny, baby,' he intones softly, his words looking back at the opening, 'it ain't natural', in an apparent demonstration of a now more compassionate response to their stand-off. The one-act, one-set drama concludes with both players stranded within their own physical and emotional spaces.

Rooms As Thresholds

Just as 'T.B.Sheets' explores the themes around staying and leaving within a drama of two people caught in the isolated space of a room, 'Ballerina' picks them up within a drama that unfolds in a personal and enclosed room. Whereas the isolation of the former speaks to a quarantined confinement, in the latter it signifies loneliness and hesitation. In both, the narrative is fashioned around crossing thresholds between the inner and outer spaces, that are, in themselves, symbols of emotional indecisions.

There are two perspectives of 'Ballerina' that both speak to themes around staying and leaving. 'Ballerina' is, at face value, a narrative that portrays the hopes and anticipations associated with the beginnings of a relationship, and the individual vulnerabilities that work around these beginnings. It might also be read as a much wider analogy of leaving home and negotiating new sets of boundaries. If read in a way that holds both these ideas together, the song shows again how pervasive and all consuming these ideas are for the artist during the period when he was saying farewell to Belfast. It also shows how he is able to take a different narrative and a different framing of the

room to explore these ideas. Can 'Ballerina' be interpreted this way? As discussed above in this chapter, other songs from this period of Van Morrison's songwriting career have located these negotiations within the intensity of relationships playing out in enclosed physical spaces. There are two contextual lines that support reading and listening to 'Ballerina' at both surface and allegorical levels. First, there is context around 'Ballerina'. Drawing attention to its placement on the second side of the *Astral Weeks* album, after 'Madame George', Mills (2010) suggests this is a deliberate creative move by the songwriter as part of his technique of 'through composition'.¹⁰ By 'through composition' Mills (2010, p. 275) means a musical or thematic unity of a collection of songs, and he argues that 'Ballerina' (following 'Madame George') 'traces a shift from the Old World to the New World' (p. 302). He goes on to imply that the 'spreading of wings' in the opening lines is caught up within Van Morrison's imperative to move away from Belfast. The time and place for the writing of the song supports this argument, and is the second contextual line that justifies a wider reading of 'Ballerina'. As with most of the other *Astral Weeks* songs, 'Ballerina' was written around two years before the album's release (when he was 21) and his musical career was increasingly taking him away from his childhood home (Hage, 2009, p. 43). When 'Ballerina' is read from these two perspectives, it first utilises the hesitations and exchanges between two people to symbolise notions of endings, new beginnings and freedom. Second, it is also a song that glances backwards to Belfast within the wider thematic framing of *Astral Weeks*, even as it is also looking outwards to new horizons.

The room in 'Ballerina' is an isolated and isolating space, its loneliness is both physical (high, and so well above and distanced from the streets and activity below) and personal (solitary: 'you know you only'). Its inner space has to be breached in order to

¹⁰ A caveat needs to be entered here that Van Morrison may not have made the final decision about the order of the songs on *Astral Weeks*.

break free. The threshold of the room can then stand for moments around deliberation and decision, a line to cross that can open up outer spaces of freedom towards new horizons. In this way the room strongly symbolises the constraints on freedom that the narrator urges the woman to resist, and to break free from.

Spread your wings, come on fly awhile
Straight to my arms, little angel child
You know you only
Lonely twenty-two story block
And if somebody, not just anybody
Wanted to get close to you
For instance, me, baby
All you gotta do is ring a bell

Step right up, step right up
And step right up, ballerina
Crowd will catch you
Fly it, sigh it, try it

Well, I may be wrong
But something deep in my heart
Tells me I'm right and I don't think so
You know I saw the writing on the wall
When you came up to me
Child, you were heading for a fall

But if it gets to you
And you feel like you just can't go on
All you gotta do is ring a bell
Step right up and step right up
And step right up, just like a ballerina
Stepping lightly, all right

These constraints are circumscribed by implications of intimacy (physical and emotional). Indeed, intimacy (in a physical and bodily sense) seems stamped all over 'Ballerina', albeit, lightly. Think of lines across all verses like, 'straight to my arms', 'get close to you/For instance, me, baby', 'Well it's getting late ... and I'm standing in your doorway', 'slip into your slumber', 'get on up', 'keep on pushing', 'take off your shoes'. Consider again, as with 'T.B.Sheets', how listeners are invited into a textual space that is most elemental. Intimacy here is closely aligned with the notions of

vulnerability. That is, when the opening lines are persuasive around escape and risk-taking, as measured by the words, ‘Spread your wings, come on fly awhile’, they are connected both to the appeal to closeness (‘straight to my arms’) and the vulnerabilities associated with isolation and emotional entrapment (see above). Conceits around the opening image of the lonely, upper-storey room bring these together. If height accentuates the risks of falling, then flying away overcomes that risk. ‘Fly it, sigh it, try it’, encourages the narrator, the assonance adding force to the suggestion. Unlike the room of the previous song, the possibilities of escape are written throughout ‘Ballerina’. The image of the ballerina here becomes powerful. The success of a ballerina’s dance moves is almost always reliant on her physical risk-taking (‘flying’, as in a ballet like *Swan Lake*) being supported in the grasp and support of her partner. The coming together of these two images turns on the taking of risks - an ‘angel child’, ‘spreading wings’ and ‘flying awhile’ from the loneliness of the room in the apartment, and the ‘stepping up’ and daring of a ballerina. In tandem, they provide a tapestry against which the potentiality of a compelling intrapersonal drama can unfold. The passion of this drama, as Hinton (2000, p. 98) observes, is displayed across lyrics and performance.

The interplay of encouragement and desire at this level moves strongly across all of these feelings. ‘Step right up’. The invitation is repeated throughout ‘Ballerina’, and as they build to a persistent exhortation, they speak of moving out and moving on, taking risks, exposing and confronting vulnerabilities. Vulnerabilities are expressed in loneliness and not feelings of not being able to cope within the physical and emotional spaces (‘you were heading for a fall’, ‘But if it gets to you/And you feel like you just can’t go on’). So ‘fly awhile’ and ‘Fly it, sigh it, try it’ speak to chances of freedom, ‘ring a bell’, ‘step right up’ and ‘step lightly’ talk about making a move, and ‘crowd will catch you’ suggests support when a move is taken. Thoughts around desire and anticipation (see, Hinton, above) then are held in the suspended action of the room.

Again, the enclosed, private space becomes a privileged location for the human drama of two people on the verge of intimacy. 'Well, it's getting late', he offers, an admission that here is a threshold that might be crossed.

Yes it is, yes it is
And this time I forget to slip into your slumber
The light is on the left side of your head
And I'm standing in your doorway
And I'm mumbling and I can't remember
The last thing that ran through my head

Here come the man and he say
He say the show must go on
So all you gotta do is ring the bell
And step right up and step right up
And step right up
Just like a ballerina, yeah, yeah
Crowd will catch you
Fly it, sight it, c'mon, die it, yeah
Just like a ballerina
Just like a, just like a, just like a ballerina

Get on up, get on up
Keep a-moving on, little bit higher, baby
You know, you know, you know, get up baby
Alright, a-keep on, a-keep on, a-keep on
A-keep on pushing stepping lightly

Just like a ballerina
Ooo-we baby, take off your shoes
Working on just like a ballerina

This is a physical and personal threshold. Can I enter the room? Do I have permission? Might we become more intimate? Hesitations and uncertainties for the moment take over, and these interact with the earlier self-assurance. 'Yes it is, yes it is', he checks himself, before the vocals soar again through the call to not lose the moment in sleep (3.45-3.52), and then they deliberate through the next line (3.53-4.02), as he dwells and takes in the bedroom scene from the doorway. He is momentarily trapped, mumbling, forgetful, unsure. Then, assured again, he picks up the earlier exhortations with the lines, 'Here come the man and he say/He say the show must go on'. Note now the show

business and theatre parlance evoking feelings of ‘we’ve come this far and we need to begin the performance’. They also connect to the personal show business narrative of the songwriter. The verbs move hereafter to the present tense, and these imply decision and action: ‘Keep a-moving on’, ‘A-keep on pushing stepping lightly’, ‘Working on just like a ballerina’.

The purpose here was not to over-read the leaving Belfast analogy in ‘Ballerina’. In effect, themes around closeness and intimacy are dotted throughout *Astral Weeks* (think, ‘Beside You’, ‘Sweet Thing’ and ‘The Way Young Lovers Do’), and so ‘Ballerina’ takes its place on the album as a song that offers a particular and engaging take on the personal fragilities around young love. Nevertheless, it does also carry within its narrative echoes of the tenuous nature of seeking freedom, moving on and taking chances. Lyrics around freedom and taking a chance can clearly be associated with decisions to geographically seek a new life. Equally, the exhortations that, at one level, are expressed as encouragement by one person to another, might also be seen as an ‘inner dialogue’ that Elliott (2016) alerts us to - in this case a dialogue weighing up the pros and cons of staying or leaving. Certainly the hesitations and uncertainties in lines like, ‘Fly it, sigh it, try it’ in the first verse, and the later, ‘Fly it, sigh it, c’mon, die[do] it’ of the fifth verse speak to such an internal ‘debate’,¹¹ and the dramatic action in the room picks up these ideas.

This chapter has featured a group of room songs in which that place is the specific and essential ‘human space’, and where conversations and private dealings play out in ways

¹¹ ‘Die’ is generally written for this line in lyrics websites. It is worth noting that since there were no lyric sheets issues for *Astral Weeks*, and ‘Ballerina’ is not featured on *Selected Lyrics* (Morrison, 2014), this interpretation of the lyrics and this line is reliant on listening to the song. A heavily accented Belfast singing of ‘do’ might possibly be heard as ‘die’, and this would still fit the rhyming pattern. At this point in the song ‘do’ seems to make sense within the movement of the song.

that throw a particular light on Van Morrison's use of place in his song writing. The room in each of these songs, though all markedly different, are textual spaces that are temporally positioned in the songwriter's adolescent and early adulthood between home and away. In this way, the songs offer a different spatial take to the Van Morrison songs about home, while at the same time navigating ideas about tensions between the call of home and the need to go out into the world. In highlighting these songs, the chapter has argued that they constitute a small but significant number of early career works where intense personal interactions across a breadth of human emotions had a particular resonance with themes surrounding staying and leaving. These themes would later assume central importance in the Van Morrison songwriting catalogue.

6. Streets

The street is significant in both popular music and literature. Popular music and city streets are closely aligned, and, as Jones (2010) argues, popular music is as intrigued by streets almost as much as it is by the highs and lows of love and personal relationships (Jones, 2010, p. 73). Similarly, in Northern Irish literature, the street and Belfast came more strongly into focus at a time when Van Morrison was first setting out as a songwriter (McDonald, 2002, p. 89). The street is a critical place where the energies and complexities of life are so often on show, whether in the physical symbols of a divided city in the narratives of Ciaran Carson's *Belfast Confetti* (Alexander, 2010, p. 190), the exuberance of Martha and the Vandellas' 1964 song, 'Dancing In the Street' (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 74), or the social realism of Ray Davies' 'Dead End Street' (The Kinks, 1964), documenting the daily struggles of the urban poor (Gildart, 2012, p. 279).

Van Morrison's street songs show again the importance that an imaginative return to his origins holds for the songwriter. Each of the streets can be located directly or indirectly in familiar childhood and adolescent haunts, whether they are lined with terrace houses, are communal street corners, or are hidden-away back lanes. In this respect their themes are drawn from realistic persona and situations (see, Auslander, 2009, & Moore, 2012), though not all might be read as strictly autobiographical. Early Van Morrison albums ring with the sights and sounds of the East Belfast streets of upbringing through the juxtaposition of the urban-generic ('I will stroll the merry way' – 'Sweet Thing', 1968) and the loco-specific (I'm caught one more time, up on Cyprus Avenue – 'Cyprus Avenue', 1968). This is what Barry (2006) observes in poetry as the intertextual creation of atmospheric effects (quoted in Alexander & Cooper, 2010, pp.

7-8). Thus there is a connection with writers who feature streets in either generic or loco-specific ways as a way of getting closer to the social geographies of people. This is often achieved through an evocation of different settings, like the hot streets of the Loving Spoonful's 'Summer In The City' (1966), or the specific Liverpoolian characteristics and action in the Beatles' 'Penny Lane' (1967). Similarly, across the Atlantic, Bruce Springsteen consciously traced local New Jersey linkages in early songs, 'The E Street Shuffle' and 'Incident On 57th Street' (both, 1973). Indeed, Springsteen's New Jersey songs emphasise the relationship between place, identity and community, and their focus on working class issues (poverty, the impacts of crime) bring forward ideas of community and identity (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 42). In Chapter 5, Heidegger's work was used to conceptualise the room as a conscious space. Here, his ideas about dwelling and identity are again useful, as the street is thought of as a 'local' place where identity is defined by a sense of belonging. This idea sees the importance of identity as it is mediated through a local community, and where dwelling (making home) opens up spaces for meaning and a basis for that identity (quoted in Alexander, 2010, p. 12).

There are connections with these issues of identity and place across both the worlds of literature and popular music. Within the Northern Irish context, poets like Ciaran Carson will always be associated with the streets of Belfast. As with Van Morrison, Carson's identity as a citizen and writer is inextricably bound with the place of his making. Carson is as much a participant in the city as an observer, and Hughes (1996) concludes that his art offers 'as intense exploration of city life, as it is experienced in Belfast, as one could hope for' (p. 143). There is a propensity for wandering and straying here - the deviation from the planned or beaten path connects Carson's art with that of Walter Benjamin and his interest in the seedy side streets of the city. Alexander writes about the fascination Carson shares with Benjamin, both

interested in ‘the politics of the everyday and the desire to probe the shifting textures of the urban experience’ (2010, p. 89).¹ This fascination for the experience of the city as a spectator and depicter of modern life resonates with the concept of the *flâneur*, commonly associated with the writing of Benjamin (Jenks, 1995, p. 146). The *flâneur* is the detached observer, taking in the scenes of the city streets as a series of scenes. While the conceptualisation of the *flâneur* is not so often seen in discussions about popular music, Jones (2010) makes a case for it in Wilco’s ‘I Am Trying To Break Your Heart’ (2002). Her argument, drawing on Thibaud (2003), is that singer and songwriter, Jeff Tweedy, delivers the song with the detachment of the *flâneur*, though his journey differs from the traditional concept, in that his journey is that of the ‘musicalized passer-by’, ‘negotiating the urban environment through sound and music’ (2010, p. 109). In this way Tweedy takes listeners through a sonic ‘diorama’, and so it is possible to hear the song as a kind of ‘aural equivalent of the *flâneur*’ (2010, p. 107). There might also be good reasons to consider the *flâneur* concept this way in songs like Ralph McTell’s ‘Streets Of London’ (1969), Gerry Rafferty’s ‘Baker Street’ (1978), the Pogues’ ‘Dark Streets Of London’ (1984), and, in the Belfast context, Stiff Little Fingers’ ‘Alternative Ulster’ (1979). However, in all of these cases it is important to keep in mind that while there may be something of the features and peripatetic tendencies of the *flâneur*, there are greater levels of attachment to the urban experiences being witnessed. That is, the songwriters are both ‘in’ and ‘of’ the crowd, and listeners sense their emotional connection to the scenes they describe. This sense of attachment is also found in the poetry of Carson, and Alexander (2010) notes as such. Alexander writes that Carson recasts Benjamin’s original ‘features and trajectory of the *flâneur*’ so that he locates

¹ This brings to mind conclusions drawn about the street focus of many Van Morrison songs. In the following chapter Hughes (2014) is quoted as picking up on the important and different ways that the songwriter depicts street life in ‘The Story Of Them’ (1965). Elsewhere Dawe (2007) notes that Van Morrison brings out an ‘imaginatively coherent’ set of images of Belfast streets (p. 72).

himself within the tensions between participant and observer (pp. 91-92, drawing on Kirkland). In a related way, Van Morrison's street songs show that he is very much a participant in his world, and so he too marks a departure from the predominant ways that many critics have sought to make sense of writing about the city and their streets. In these songs Morrison is not seeking to situate himself as the outsider figure, and his colloquialisms and unexplained references to local characters and places can certainly be read as an explicit attempt to say, 'I am of these streets ... I belong here ... these are my streets.'

Van Morrison's Streets: Local, Vibrant, Social

Van Morrison commemorates the textures and working-class energies of his East Belfast streets, immersed in their sights, sounds, discourses and aromas. When 'escape' from the streets of his home is framed as a professional and inevitable decision, streets stand symbolically as places that can be revisited in order to recapture the spirit of earlier and formative years. As with other home places, streets are held in memory and memories become part of a continual process of looking back into what used to be, in order to work on what might become in the future.

The streets in the songs discussed in this chapter carry images and symbols of local, vibrant and open 'social places', where the intimacies of companionship and collaborations play out. These intimacies are expressed through nostalgic explorations catching the energies of youthful exuberance, and later in perspectives that hold streets and laneways in reminiscent contemplation, where earlier places take on significance as sites of spiritual healing. Each of the streets can be traced, directly or indirectly, to childhood and adolescent haunts, whether they be lined with terrace houses, communal street corners, or hidden away back lanes. The four songs examined in this chapter

return to the street across a long span of the songwriter's catalogue, and so offer some insights into the different ways that these places trace contextual times and thematic movements in this career.

'The Street Only Knew Your Name' (1975)² was recorded at a time when Van Morrison was suffering from the pressures of writing, recording and performing (Heylin, 2000, p. 299), and so there are clear connections with its sense of nostalgia for earlier times and his own lived experience. It paints a nostalgic picture of an earlier street life focused on kids playing music in the street, while simultaneously implying that the innocence and simplicity of earlier days has now been irrevocably lost.

'Cleaning Windows' (1982) also has nostalgia front and centre - memories of a young working life at a time where, as Sørensen suggests, metaphorical homecomings emerge through contemplation of earlier times (2005, p. 159). 'The Healing Game' (1997) explores a reconciliation ('the healing') of the two opposing trans-Atlantic forces that lay at the centre of his exiled condition - the longing for home and the remembrances of what took him from that home. The *Healing Game* album reflects what Hage (2009) refers to as a 'long, sustained search for something "real" and earthbound' (p. 125), and such a grounded reality culminates in the symbolism of the street corner - a place that stands for a realisation that he has rediscovered, what Mills terms as 'his way of belonging' (2010, p. 117). 'Behind The Ritual' (2008) explores a message that feelings of dislocation, though almost always the cultural baggage of the away-from-home traveller, can be lessened through contemplations of earlier, less complicated times. Considered separately, the songs delineate vantage points along a songwriting journey that move first through homesickness, then to an awareness that the longing of exile is

² The version discussed in this chapter is the one featured on the 1998 album, *The Philosopher's Stone*. The liner notes for the album show that it was recorded in 1975 at Record Plant, Sausalito (California). As well, this is the set of lyrics featured in *Lit Up Inside* (Morrison, 2013, pp. 175-176). The song was also released on *Inarticulate Speech Of The Heart* (1983).

located within memories of formative local experiences, and finally to a search for healing in the symbolic memories of earlier times. Taken together, they speak to the Van Morrison themes about looking back, and holding on to moments in less complicated times - those that 'keep it simple'.

'The Street Only Knew Your Name'

When the opening lines of 'The Street Only Knew Your Name' talk about completeness, they refer to a conceptualisation of authenticity that relies on local acceptance. Street *cred* is the game here, authenticity in the choice of songs and performance are the play sheets. The song celebrates the adolescent importance of being locally 'known'. In this respect, 'complete', 'known' and 'precious name' carry connotations of being recognised and valued, and 'the street' becomes a particular site in which a sense of communal identity is outlined and affirmed. Yet there are competing questions surrounding age and loss. Can completeness be achieved at an early age? Is completeness not confounded when regrets for the loss of earlier times are implicit? For Van Morrison, an early developing homesickness is born from these regrets, expressed as a yearning for less complicated times, and a sense of rootedness inextricably bound within his own musical histories as a consumer, writer and performer. The musical journey (outlined in Chapter 2) that saw Morrison first playing in bands before moving on to a solo career as a performer and songwriter, saw him finding affinity with other artists and songwriters, and this can be read as an artistic extension of this sense of belonging that first took hold on the city streets where he grew up. When he sings, 'never been away' in 'The Healing Game' he is revisiting in memory this sense of belonging, and in this way, is showing how music helps to maintain cultural continuity as symbols and systems of social meaning are reproduced across time and space. This

happens as the street is depicted as a place of belonging, a place where audience is for those in the know, and as a place where the local connects with wider shared experiences.

The street is also a site where memories are revisited. At first, it is a particular cultural location, and the interactions across community bring a sense of belonging and solidarity.

Your street, rich street or poor
You should always be sure of your street
There's a place in your heart, when you know from the start
And you can't be complete without a street

The first line cuts straight to this chase. The opening second person pronoun, accentuated in the vocals, immediately places the listener on notice that the song is stretching its thoughts across different streets - 'consider your street as I write about my street'. These ideas seem to be the antithesis of the detached observer that is conceptualised as the *flaneur*. There is also a familiarity with the listener in this direct address. Morrison seems to be creating the same sense of community between songwriter and audience that he extols and lauds in his own bonds with the people and streets of his upbringing. A position is established early, that regardless of background (another emphasis on the first word of 'rich street or poor'), concepts of belonging are central. The atmosphere is quietly persuasive, though there is stridency in the singing as the first verse proceeds. Consider the emphasis again on, 'There's a place in your heart' as the idea of 'know where you came from to know where you're going' is reinforced. The chord progression has a stepwise descending bass line with an anticipation on the third beat of each bar, and the melody emphasises words and anticipates these in similar ways, and so certain words are emphasised that are critical to the song's meaning – 'your street', 'place in your heart', 'know from the start', 'complete'. Thus, the song has

a musical palette that allows feelings of sombre reflection. It also makes connections with soul music with the emotional vocal delivery and its nod towards pride in identity. It is ‘powerful soul gospel’, as Hage (2009, p. 127) observes, and the gospel harmonies that move in at the start of the second verse reinforce these connections.

Keep movin’ on, just like a train
Sometimes you got to look back to the street again
Would you prefer all those castles in Spain
Or the view of your street from your window pane?

These lines speak to the dominant theme of ‘perpetual motion’ in many of Morrison’s songs, as well as the enduring motif of ‘looking back through memory’. The rhetorical question (‘Would you prefer ...’) begs a straightforward response, one that dismisses the exotic and advantaged view (‘castles in Spain’), in favour of the everyday and common comings-and-goings in the streets that are seen through the home ‘window pane’. If fame and fortune offer the former, Morrison seems to suggest the latter might be preferred, yet symbolically out of reach.

As the song progresses, the three choruses adopt a lighter musical phrasing as the ‘so very, very, very young’ ideas are picked up and underlined through building repetitions, and these are placed against the key thoughts held in the song’s title.

When you were young, so young
So very, very young
When you were young, so young
So very, very, very young
And the street only knew your name
And the street only knew your name
And the street only knew your name, oh your precious name, precious name

Emphasis of these key feelings is promoted through the vocal performance of the choruses. For example, in the first chorus, as the saxophone wanders behind the first four lines, the singing forces itself around central phrases (such as, the raised high

register phrasing in the ‘So very, very, young’ of the second line of the first chorus). And then, against the backdrop of the chorus, the voice drops and lingers softly (almost achingly) over, ‘oh your precious name, precious name’, until the final word is almost lost - the gravity secured between the words and the trailing voice. Patterns of interplay between lyrical and vocal emphasis continue throughout the song. The use of repetition and heightened vocal expression is a trope of soul music, and is certainly one of Morrison’s signature styles. It is clearly a badge of his immersion in African-American singing styles, and here it helps to accentuate the lyrics being sung. What now emerges through these lyrics is the contrast between being locally ‘famous’ with the kind of international fame of the popular music artist with all its trappings of success. Local fame means being known by friends and community, while international fame brings about recognition without actually being known in any meaningful way. In this way, these local streets are acting as a cipher for this broader dynamic with Van Morrison’s career - that is the double-edged sword of his movement towards his becoming a renowned musician. Later songs, ‘Ordinary Life’ (1991), ‘Some Peace Of Mind’ (1991) and ‘Fame’ (2003) pick up on this dynamic.

From the third verse on, the song takes on a more parochial meaning.

There was Walter and John, Katie and Ron
They all hung around the corner lamplight
Get together, sing some songs
Like ‘Boppin’ the Blues’
‘You Make Me Feel Alright’

It is *the* street, *the* corner, *the* lamplight - a local hangout for kids sharing their love of music. The street offers them a place to meet. The corner brings them together. The light provides illumination, an opportunity for new discoveries, and a chance to keep playing after sundown. The songwriter lists names of those who were in this specific place, as if to say, ‘Remember these kids’. Again, these remembered experiences that

are tinged with both happiness and sadness, are nothing like those of the *flaneur*, whose detached staring sees many faces, but recognises no-one, nor knows any names. The street as a collective concept is narrowly defined. It is a place for those in the ‘know’, with the street as the audience, and music locally shared with street ‘members’. These are memories of early musical experiences playing music, and the ‘street corner’ also symbolises other performance places. The emphasis on, ‘very, very, very, very young’, and references to songs of 1950s’ rockabilly, rock and soul artists both locate the song at a particular time, and, taken together, connect with the age when the songwriter was having his first group musical experience as a member of a skiffle band.³ The central concerns of the song certainly fit within the period of the early beat and skiffle movements. Moreover, the grassroots phenomenon of skiffle had strong street associations (Mitchell, 2012), with an image that any street kid could be a player (Rogan, 2006, p. 23), and in its seeming capacity of making something out of nothing (Mills, 2010, p. 32). The kids in the songs are all involved, and this meant ‘that game’ has to be played with ‘no pretence’.

That was long before fortune and fame
No such thing as a star when you played that game
Everyone knew who everyone was
There was no pretence in the street, no, no

The street as *the* audience, is then a democratic space with ‘no such thing as a star’, its shared experiences are valued, with hindsight, above the later trappings of ‘fame and fortune’. What counts is to participate and to be known. The importance of ‘Everyone knew who everyone was’ is firmly established, and the local streets are a place and a time where what really counts is now held in memory. There is something of the melancholic wistfulness of the last line of ‘Coney Island’ (1989) here (‘Wouldn’t it be

³ See, Chapter 2. Van Morrison formed a makeshift skiffle group, The Sputniks, with neighbours and friends from around his Hyndford Street home as a twelve year old in 1957.

great if it was like this all the time?’). The scene of communal harmony also stands in marked contrast to the streets of songs like ‘Cyprus Avenue’ (1968) or ‘Memory Lane’ (2016), where social distance, unfamiliarity and lack of recognition are foremost. This analogy was picked up in Chapter 4, where social distance was measured between the close proximity of the worker streets around Hyndford Street to the lofty avenue of the well-healed avenue not far up the road. When the street is thought of as a stage, there seems to be a greater understanding of why Van Morrison has continued to perform even though he eschews the fame that accompanies his position in the musical world. This aspect of his career might well be read as a constant attempt to recapture that feeling of the street corner, where to gig with his friends was to be part of a special kind of belonging.

The final verse acts as a bridge and subtly broadens the perspective. The scene now shifts to other places and other streets.

And you walked around in the heart of town
Listening for that sound
And you walked around in the heart of town
Listening for that sound
‘Blue Suede Shoes’, it was the ‘Blue Suede Shoes’

It is the ‘heart of town’, and so both location (the centre) and essence (lifeblood) are brought forward. An emotional connection between the local and the wider shared experiences through music is suggested. The singer is now away from the street corner, walking around and listening for other signs of ‘that sound’. In a spiritual moment, with the gospel sounds swelling in behind and their ‘call and response’ urging him onward, the sounds of ‘Blue Suede Shoes’ ring out. ‘It was blue suede shoes,’ he confirms, the final chorus pounds in, the vocals ring with increased intensity and a last line of, ‘Talking ‘bout the street now, baby,’ before the coda brings us back to the street corner under the lamplight. The final roll call of shared songs, and the inclusivity of ‘we were

singing' (first person used for the first time), brings us back home to that time and place. This shift in person quite possibly signifies Morrison imagining he is back on the corner with his original band.

We were singing 'Be-Bop-A-Lula'
We were singing 'Blue Suede Shoes'
We were singing 'Good Golly Miss Molly'
We were singing 'Tutti Frutti'
We were singing 'What'd I Say'
We were singing 'Boppin' The Blues' and 'Who Slapped John?'
When the street only knew your name
Talkin' about a funky street now, baby

And the street only knew your name

This final rhapsody celebrates the importance of the street as a place where shared musical interests and being locally known are the markers of belonging. It positions the street as a collective, open and democratic space, locally defined, but still connected culturally through music across geographical distances.

Crucially, this song arrives in the mid 1970s when early signs of homesickness and Van Morrison's frustrations with the music industry were starting to take hold. Indeed, after the 1974 *Veedon Fleece* album, the songwriter took a three-year break from recording before releasing *A Period Of Transition* (1977). At that time he remarked in a press release, 'I want to get back to the roots, back to where I started off' (Rogan, 2006, p. 307). As we have seen, 'The Street Only Knew Your Name' demonstrates a highly suggestive working out of both this tension and its accompanying energy.

‘Cleaning Windows’

In ‘Cleaning Windows’ of 1982, Van Morrison returns again to the streets of his youth. This time, the streets are filled with the aromas, sights and sounds of a young man shaping his early working days around a deepening curiosity about music and books. While the song does not carry the sense of loss that underpins ‘The Street Only Knew Your Name’, it explores the spaces between a nostalgic longing for home and the need to escape artistically, a preoccupation that would increasingly come to characterise much of Van Morrison’s later output

As a song with nostalgia at its centre, ‘Cleaning Windows’ is located within the body of Van Morrison’s works that adhere to a particular notion of rootedness. This is not aligned with traditional views surrounding continuity and tradition, but rather involves looking back to past times and places that are integral to ongoing narratives of cultural identity. The nostalgia of ‘Cleaning Windows’ differs from the coming-of-age farewell to Belfast that marked much of *Astral Weeks*, most notable perhaps in the way that it celebrates the processes operating between the temporal spaces of childhood and adulthood, with the local streets the stage where these processes play out. Keightley and Pickering’s concept of the mnemonic imagination is in play here, with processes around memory and imagination exploring interstitial spaces between the past and the future (2012, p. 43). Caught here are processes of change and hybridity, the framing of identity that moves between fond memories of early days spent around the Belfast home (see, Chapter 4), and those in the music and literature that both spoke of wider and more distant worlds. Set within this framing is Van Morrison’s exiled experience, what Kennedy-Andrews describes as an existentialist project where the material place is subsumed within the textual place (2007, p. 19). Taken on its own, ‘Cleaning Windows’ does not, nor in truth could not completely describe the complexities around exile that

can be found when the songwriter's songs on home, nostalgia and exile are considered together (see, Chapter 10). Nonetheless, its metaphorical homecoming through the contemplation of earlier times highlights critical points of deep and significant temporal and spatial differences, where identity involves ways individuals may be positioned by, and in turn, position themselves within narratives of the past. Sørensen draws on Stuart Hall's notion of culture to define Van Morrison's homecoming project in this way, and this is evident in this song (2005, p. 160). Furthermore, 'Cleaning Windows' arrives on an album (*Beautiful Vision*), that Mills suggests is the start of the songwriter's 'long journey home' (2010, p. 54), and is arguably one of a series of romanticised images of home. It also illustrates another expression of the paradoxical forces of 'rootedness and transcendence', where memories of home are inevitably bound within details of the very musical and literary influences that would take the artist away and out into the world (McLoone, 2008, p. 166). The spontaneity of the street scenes, the sounds of the chat, the fondness for the 'localness' are all critical components of Morrison's sense of 'rootedness'. They take their place alongside what had now become an essential component of Van Morrison's artistic vision - his interest in Black music heard in his home and out on the streets. It is no surprise that in this, and other songs (such as, 'On Hyndford Street') also marked by lyrical spontaneity and wider themes of movement, that Jack Kerouac should be name-checked. These interplaying tensions around then and now are emphasised by the sounds of the song, its funk phrasing illustrative of the blending of soul, jazz and rhythm and blues developed by African-American artists from the 1960s onwards. In this way the lyrics celebrate localness, while the broader international palette speaks to the music that would encourage him to leave these cherished local places.

Whereas the street corner scenes of 'The Street Only Knew Your Name' focus on the performance and appreciation of music, those of 'Cleaning Windows' are

sketched more widely. Furthermore, its musical palette picks out youthful energies of young working-men in the flush of their youth. The bounce of the instrumental opening speaks to a sense of jauntiness and swagger. Its first-beat dominant funk riff, with lightly syncopated phrasing, establishes a sense of cheerfulness and energy. In a song that depicts the experiences of boys caught between youthful pleasures and adolescent exploration – and has them wholeheartedly embracing both with vitality and humour – it sets up a mood of vitality and joy. The first line breaks in with an urgency that works to promote feelings of being immediately ‘in’ the song and imaginatively ‘involved’ in the place.

Oh the smell of the bakery from across the street
Got in my nose
As we carried our ladders down the street
With the wrought-iron gate rows
I went home and listened to Jimmie Rodgers in my lunch-break
Bought five Woodbine at the shop on the corner
And went straight back to work

This is an involvement across all the senses, and interestingly and unusually, the initial impression is more olfactic than visual - listeners are invited to stand back and catch the smells from the bakery shop up the street. Although this might not be everyone’s youthful pleasure, it certainly brings up ideas of simple and affordable delights. As it proceeds through a series of cascading local images, ‘Cleaning Windows’ abounds with sights (‘wrought-iron gate rows’, ‘fanlights’, house numbers), tastes (‘lemonade and Paris buns’, ‘Woodbines’), sounds (‘Jimmie Rodgers’ ‘Leadbelly’, ‘Blind Lemon’, ‘I was blowing saxophone’), and references to consuming ideas from a variety of printed sources (‘Zen’ and ‘Kerouac’).

Oh Sam was up on top
And I was on the bottom with the V
We went for lemonade and Paris buns
At the shop and broke for tea
I collected from the lady

And I cleaned the fanlight inside out
I was blowing saxophone on the weekend
In a Down joint

I heard Leadbelly and Blind Lemon
On the street where I was born
Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee and
Muddy Waters singin' 'I'm A Rolling Stone'
I went home and read my Christmas Humphreys book on Zen
Curiosity Killed the Cat
Kerouac's *Dharma Bums* and *On The Road*

Life on the street is writ large, and the emotions and vibrancies are compelling.

Possibly the suggestion by Hinton (2002) that the lyrics are like 'a Keatsian exercise in nostalgia, with taste and smell and sound' (p. 235) is a stretch here, but nevertheless the song certainly is carried strongly along at sensory and emotional levels. If we pause to think about how the street as an imaginative space is drawn differently across this song and 'The Street Only Knew Your Name', a number of key ideas come to mind. Whereas the previous song carries feelings of loss and the yearning to belong once more, 'Cleaning Windows' is more celebratory in mood. Both talk about the importance of friends and music, but the sensuality of smells, sights and sounds in this song recaptures a place in time in ways that preserve the way things used to be.

Local knowledge points to the fact that the songwriter is setting out a visual sketch of his home streets. He gives this away early with reference to slipping home for his lunch break, and hearing the music of blues artists 'on the street where I was born'. Adding to this, it is only about 150 metres from the family home to Stewart's Bakery on Greenville Road (*Mystic Of The East*, 2014), and the smells from the bakery would arguably be strongly associated with a sense of home for the young Van Morrison. The song is indelibly 'East Belfast' in the area around Hyndford Street - the 'wrought-iron gate rows', the familiar (for those in the know) house numbers, the music drifting from open doors and windows. Moreover, the spoken asides in the chorus ('Number 36!') and in the interrupting words of the coda ('Aye, we'll be round tomorrow/I just found a

tanner and a 3d bit on the windowsill here’) ring with the sounds and argot of East Belfast working-class life - what Dawe (2007) refers to when he talks about the songwriter ‘writing out of a vibrant local idiom’ (p. 64). The underlying irony and humour in boastful lines (‘I’m a working man in my prime’) add to this feeling of ‘localness’, where wit among workers is very often heard as an essential element of the daily spoken business. In many ways Van Morrison here musically recreates the sounds of these streets, and so brings back and shares the emotional qualities and feelings that he associates with this place. We might also connect this with the penchant the singer has for slipping into a Belfast accented talking/singing voice in particular songs (for example, ‘Coney Island’, 1989, and ‘On Hyndford Street’, 1991). ‘Cleaning Windows’ also connects lyrically with songs that draw heavily on the songwriter’s Belfast source. The impressionistic and restless collage of images, the quasi stream-of-consciousness and ‘word-cramming’, carry firm reminders of the nostalgic observations in earlier albums like *Astral Weeks* (see also, Hage, 2009, p. 98).

Contrasts between the worlds of kids and emerging pursuits of young adults unfold through the lines. There are distinct then (the ebb and flow of local street life) and now (future professional concerns) qualities to the song. It is about being home and away, and between a coming-of-age then and a tentative now. Mills (2010) comments on the way ‘Cleaning Windows’ sits across ‘the twin impulses of living contentedly in the real world and imagining the world beyond the physical and metaphysical horizons of that world’ (p. 255). Contentment resides in a feeling of happily ‘biding time’,⁴ and imagination takes flight through music and literature that beckon from other places and times. Nowhere is this picked up more succinctly than in the chorus and the coda.

What’s my line?
I’m happy cleaning windows

⁴ See, Burke, 2013, p. 50)

Take my time, I'll see you when my love grows
Baby, don't let it slide, I'm a working man in my prime
Cleaning windows
Number 36!

Cleaning, what you sayin', number, number 126
Aye, we'll be round tomorrow
I just found a tanner and a 3d bit on the windowsill here
C'mon Sammy, hurry up
If we don't get finished we'll have to go down to the dole
Cleaning windows

The chorus works across moments in time, first where contentment is felt through this is what I do now ('I'm happy cleaning windows'), and later to a future where the past is rejoined in song ('I'll see you when my love grows'). Here, 'take my time' ironically challenges the impatience of youth, suggesting the 'prime' of the 'working man' will, in the end, be readily dispatched. The coda interrupts the 'cleaning windows' refrain with the light-hearted chat of these 'working men' – still mere boys hustling for 'tanners' as they chase up their work. As 'Cleaning Windows' ends, it offers a timely reminder that it holds dear important formative experiences at the same time as it looks well beyond the East Belfast streets to places only imagined by a young 'working man' in his yet to be realised 'prime'. These streets have been used by Morrison as a way of taking both himself and his listeners into the highly energised place in time as reminders that these are critical experiences in the way that he thinks about the spaces between his former and present situations.

Streets As Places Of Healing

'The Street Only Knew Your Name' and 'Cleaning Windows' deploy the street as a local, remembered place where earlier experiences speak to the importance of knowing origins and foundations. Music rings out in these street scenes, whether from the

singing of 50s songs, or listening to music legends. These local streets synchronise feelings of identity, authenticity and community. Yet, as these feelings are fondly remembered, they also represent points of departure. The underlying sense of longing in ‘The Street Only Knew Your Name’, and the celebration of formative influences in ‘Cleaning Windows’ are early expressions of exile. They carry suggestions that exile is very often a project that chips away at the materiality of place. The fading memory of the local (either through distance, time or change) creates feelings of uncertainty and loss, and an impetus towards a symbolical healing through artistic recreation. Connell and Gibson make this point with reference to the success of Bruce Springsteen, and it obviously resonates with much of the writing of Van Morrison (2003, p. 279). It is this dynamic that is caught in ‘The Healing Game’ and ‘Behind The Ritual’, where bridges between ideas of loss and restoration are traversed. In both songs, streets become abstract symbols of earlier times, a metaphysical preoccupation, first with memories of the times when the songwriter was compelled to travel across the Atlantic, and then to how the feelings of these times might be regained.

‘The Healing Game’

In the early 1990s Van Morrison’s ‘exile’ from his Belfast hometown was increasingly a matter of choice.⁵ His exiled condition was trapped in the temporal distances between musical beginnings in the streets of his boyhood and adolescence, and the alienating effects of fame. Although these distances cannot be overcome, the healing is located in the playing of music, and the street corner of ‘The Healing Game’ represents this rediscovery of an earlier sense of belonging. Van Morrison talks about this at the release of *The Healing Game* in 1997: ‘The live thing is more where I’m at now. Maybe I’ve

⁵ He was now living in the wealthy Ballsbridge area of Dublin (Rogan, 2000, p. 406),

always been there and not known it ... (Heylin, 2002, p. 471). These words, 'Where I've always been', ring out in the opening verses of 'The Healing Game'. Performance of music becomes a reconciliation of the opposing trans-Atlantic forces that lie at the centre of his exiled condition - the longing for home and the remembrances of what took him from that home. This is earlier explored in 'Cleaning Windows'. That Irish sensibilities and ideas around exile are explored through North American forms of music (interconnecting genres of blues, soul and gospel) is a counterpoint that is taken up strongly in the song. What Onkey labels Morrison's 'hybrid, urban identity' (2006, p. 164), is on show here, in both the expression of ideas and the musical carriage for those ideas.⁶ The street in 'The Healing Game' becomes a symbol for the earlier times when this music was first heard and played, and the site where memories and feelings of these experiences might be revisited and recaptured.

The first verse opens with a solemn, church-like Hammond organ. The immediate religious feel establishes both the tone for the opening lines and an aural hint of the words to come. As the singer's voice joins, the vocals are restrained and plaintive, and the mood carries the resigned contradictions of the lyrics.

Here I am again
Back on the corner again
Back where I belong
Where I've always been
Everything the same
It don't ever change
I'm back on the corner again
In the healing game

The song's opening sees Morrison symbolically taking us back to a number of street corners. There are those of the early days in Belfast where it began for him (we can think of 'The Street Only Knew Your Name'). These invoke known traditions of street

⁶ Onkey refers to Van Morrison as 'Ray Charles on Hyndford Street' (2006).

corner music-making in cities like New Orleans or Chicago. This is an abstract place, more a form of consciousness, an imaginary site of spiritual healing. Images move across time and place - places are on both sides of the Atlantic and, times are both the past and the present. The suggestion that the songwriter is 'where I've always been' and 'everything [is] the same' distils both the pain of exile and the guarded reassurance that the 'healing game' is within the music of his origins that subsequently took him away from his home, and now remains with him as his ultimate comfort. This is a finely tuned conceit that picks up feelings of nostalgia and hope against a tapestry of the sentiments of exile and the sounds of the music that are physically and professionally situated. All the while it is just the voice, the Hammond and a muted bass guitar playing out this conceit. There is a connection with the singing on the street corners of 'The Street Only Knew Your Name' that is expressed in that earlier song as a critical aspect of identity and authenticity.

These sounds continue into the next verse. The musical intensity is subtly heightened and now matched with a shift in the tone of the vocals.

Down those ancient streets
Down those ancient roads
Where nobody knows
Where nobody goes
I'm back on the corner again
Where I've always been
Never been away
From the healing game

The opening lines of the first verse are paralleled with sensations of enduring cultural connections that are both familiar and passing ('nobody knows nobody goes'). 'Ancient streets' and 'ancient roads' are familiar Morrison motifs, long employed as metaphors for the prolonged cultural and historical journey and struggle for freedom and enlightenment. Thus the metaphor stretches across both the personal and the political.

Now, place is both the street corners of childhood and youth, but caught up in a much wider and sustained sense of culture. The repetition of the lines again picks up the oppositional concepts of being both geographically removed while being culturally and professionally ‘always there’. The interplaying of phrases like ‘back on the corner’ and ‘never been away’ continually act out the symmetry of place and exile and reinforce the ideas of the opening verse.

The first two verses situate the street corners of ‘The Healing Game’ as both localised and enduring, specific and abstract. Streets and corners work then as memories of, and nostalgia for earlier times, while also marking out an allegorical sense of homecoming. In the third and fourth verses boundaries of place are crossed and the music itself becomes a form of healing.

Where the choirboys sing
Where I’ve always been
Sing the song with soul
Baby don’t you know
We can let it roll
On the saxophone
Back street Jelly Roll
In the healing game

Each verse successively takes on a different musical palette. ‘The choirboys’ of the opening line are the back up singers and the soul singers - the lines echo with reminders that the songwriter’s muse had its beginnings in the church halls where gospel and rhythm and blues joined, and thus cross religious and secular borders.⁷ The religious feel of the opening verses is replaced by more strident instrumental sounds and Van

⁷ This is not to say that this process was an uncontested blending of these genres. Many considered the early gospel and blues fusions of Ray Charles blasphemous. Santoro (2004) writes that when Charles took an old spiritual, added a gospel sound and ‘leering lyrics’ and had a hit with ‘I’ve Got A Woman’ that helped launch soul music, lots of the faithful believed that ‘he had blasphemed, as surely as he had sex in Sunday School’ (p. 158). Citing another example, Santoro argues that the Christian gospel world never ‘forgot or forgave Sam Cooke for his treachery’ in turning to pop (p. 164).

Morrison accordingly ramps up the emotion. ‘Choirboy’ backing vocals in this verse work within gospel and soul traditions of ‘call and response’, as place moves between settings that are simultaneously profane and sacred. References to Ray Charles’ blending of styles across gospel and popular music are clear. As the verse concludes he arguably puts his own story back into these places with references to his early saxophone playing, and one of his many musical heroes in New Orleans jazz originator and pianist ‘Jelly Roll’ Morton. Verses three and four are punctuated by a saxophone solo that, in keeping with the lyrical content of the previous three verses, increasingly builds in intensity. Music and voice are now a rock version of earlier Afro-American influences, distilled and located within more modern musical traditions. Place is temporal, situational and tenuous, in keeping with the concepts of ‘being an outsider everywhere’. The street in ‘The Healing Game’ has now been proffered as a sacred place, and this is a new way that Morrison imagines the street. Indeed, this is a fuller working out of the powerful energies that we have experienced in the streets of the two earlier songs where the focus is on local sights and sounds. The images of choirboys, the idea of healing, the references in lyric and sound to soul and gospel music – all these come together to suggest that the street is symbolised as a spiritual and transformative space.

As the saxophone solo reaches its intense peak, it drops and is immediately replaced by the softer sounds of the singer and a backing chorus of the final verse.

Where the homeboys sing
Sing their songs of praise
‘Bout their golden days
In the healing game

This time, the back-up vocals are not the ‘call and response’ of soul and gospel traditions, but the ‘doo-wop’ chorus pioneered in 40s’ and 50s’ Afro-American

communities. The economy of words and music captures a number of connecting ideas. First, 'doo-wop' is a form of music long associated with singers gathering on street corners (Santoro, 2004, p. 229), and so we are taken back metaphorically to the song's beginning. Place is again confounded across locations of the singer's upbringing in music, and the origins of his musical calling, and again the words and the music bring this together. Second, the coming together of Belfast and the blues in the early days of the songwriter and the Maritime Hotel is synthesised in the 'homeboys' and their 'songs of praise'. The Belfast friends of his embryonic band days, as caught in the opening lines of 'The Story of Them' (1965, see Chapter 7), have now become the street brothers of American slang, hanging together in their neighborhood and reminiscing through their music about the 'golden days'. At this point in the song, ideas about beginnings, journey, exile and music come together, and all that is left is the playing out of 'the healing game'.

Sing it out loud
Sing it in your name
Sing it like you're proud
Sing the healing game
Sing it out loud
Sing it in your name
Sing it like you're proud
Sing the healing game

The repeated lines of the coda ('sing it out loud/sing it in your name/sing it like you're proud/sing the healing game') ring out like a gospel church service, and the subdued aural religious imagery of the opening verses is rejoined and contrasted. As the coda plays out, the musical devices of the song are re-gathered in a number of layers. It starts with the repetitions playing out against 'call and response' backing vocals. All the while the singer builds through a number of emotional phrasing of the lines until it is punctuated by the James Brown-like (another soul music connection) crescendo of

voice and band.⁸ And then it drops down to the final ‘sing the healing game’ against the closing and trailing sounds of the saxophone.

The symbolism of the street in this song allows Van Morrison to locate the local streets and their happenings and concerns within a much larger narrative that coalesces the ideas of music and religion as an affiliated experience with the wider cultural history of people performing music on street corners. Clearly the songwriter is aware of the significance of this coming together as he thinks about what the street means in his own musical journey. In a recorded live version of ‘The Healing Game’ from a 1997 concert, at the Waterfront Hotel, Belfast, Van Morrison introduces the song by saying, ‘You probably noticed that most of these songs sound like they were straight out of the 50s. They are ...’.⁹ Recorded in 1997, thinking about the 1950s and everything in between, ‘The Healing Game’ offers a for-the-moment comfort in the place of an allegorical homecoming. Van Morrison is spiritually and culturally back in the places where he started out, where he belongs and has ‘always been’, with the buskers, the rhythm and blues band, ‘the choirboys’ and ‘the homeboys’ in the corners of the ancient streets. In these street corners, singing ‘it out loud’, ‘in your name’, ‘like you’re proud’ is the place of the healing.

‘Behind The Ritual’

Simplicity has been a regular motif in Van Morrison albums since it first appeared on *Hymns To The Silence*. For Hage, this motif reaches its ‘apotheosis’ in ‘Behind The Ritual’ (2009, p. 115). It is a theme that sits comfortably within the songwriter’s search

⁸ Among many examples are ‘Baby You’re Right’ (1961) and songs such as ‘Lost Someone’ from the 1962 *Live At The Apollo* album.

⁹ Quoted in YouTube clip, ‘Van Morrison – Back On The Corner’, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aegDmYtb_jg. Quote at 36:40).

for what Rogan sees as the ‘mystical in the mundane’ (2006, p. 357). Here, everyday conventions and practices assume increasing importance. Heaton (2008, online) writes that, in the hands of Van Morrison, answers may be found through ‘going through the motions to get to the spiritual, using the everyday to illuminate the transcendent’. Along similar lines, Mills (2010) observes that the songwriter would see truth being revealed through rehearsal of the rituals that constitute daily comings and goings (p. 206). In ‘Behind The Ritual’ the quest for simplicity is examined by looking back to the memories of streets that stand for his stepping out as a musician. These are not the streets of kids singing on street corners of the skiffle days, or those of the early cleaning window days. Rather they stand for the imaginings of a young musician about to step out from these streets to a wider world.

‘Behind The Ritual’ is situated in a backstreet and works from the familiarity of this cultural space to a point where words, sounds and actions are stripped away and reveal deeper understandings around what counts in life. The ‘alley’ could be in any city - the word usually has a North American context. However, it is reasonable to imagine the streets of Belfast, and perhaps closer to the centre of the city, where young people and musicians tend to hang out. Marcus (2010) hears Van Morrison leading ‘his old self’ back into this alley’ in an act of communion where memories of things done and seen and heard replace the struggles of life (p. 180). These streets blur location, and crisscross temporal boundaries. Clearly they don’t have the same kind of specificity of songs like ‘The Street Only Knew Your Name’ or ‘Cleaning Windows’. Nor do they share the sense of spiritual transcendence we witnessed in ‘The Healing Game’. Instead, backstreets appear closed and hidden away, places of secret dealings away from the spotlight of main roads. They are places to be revisited by the few in a search for identities forged within past actions and decisions (‘in the days gone by’). This is a common depiction of the street in popular music, a gritty site of uncertainties and

challenges, and holding promises of excitement and difference.¹⁰ However, as the song unfolds, the challenges and excitement are seen in the end as ritualistic, expressions of particular kinds of behaviour. These behaviours are more profane than sacred, though there are subtle sacramental implications in the ‘drinking *that* wine’ of the opening of the song.

The laid-back introduction, a ukulele and drumbeat taking their time for almost twenty seconds, paves the way for the opening image. When the voice drops us into the location, the simplicity of the introductory notes (half-time beat and three chords) gives way to a different kind of place in the Van Morrison catalogue.

Drinking wine in the alley, drinking wine in the alley
Making time, drinking that wine
Out of my mind in the days gone by

Making time with Sally, drinking that wine
In the days gone by, talking all out of my mind
Drinking that wine, talking all out of my mind

The backstreet feel of the scene in the opening words pulls away from the lightness of the music, a tension between image and sound. This is a tension between complexity and simplicity that works within the overriding theme of the *Keep It Simple* album, and speaks to the concerns of the song as it unfolds. The song has a structural movement that builds in a number of layers before slowly taking them away to reveal a spiritual resolution. The first of these layers is in the opening scene and its three elements, ‘drinking wine’, ‘making time’ and ‘out of my mind’. The drinking of wine, either in ceremony, celebration or to ease the pain, symbolises a gap between earlier times and

¹⁰ Connell and Gibson (2003) point out that ‘the “gritty” image of the city’ is a dominant theme in popular music (and also in much popular culture, as seen in the mean streets of crime fiction and cinema), and how divisions in urban spaces are commonly defined by ‘the wrong side of the tracks’, and these play out from ‘the angry evocations of rap to the less threatening urban angst of Tracy Chapman’ (p. 73). There is also a sense that the city is often ‘racialised’ – its negative characteristics in popular music invariably aligned with racial minorities.

later realities. Time is a marker, and it is shortened ('making time') and delayed ('stretching time'). 'Out of my mind' touches on a fine implied line between confusion and excitement, and makes later connections with creative thoughts ('making up rhymes, talking all out of my mind'). The singer circles these words ('drinking wine', 'making time', 'out of my mind') and recycles them at the end of the verses, repeating and re-stressing them until they become mantra-like, 'summoning ... all in the past', as Marcus observes (2010, p. 180). The opening image takes shape, as much pushed along in the slurring of the words (blurring of realities?) as in the leanness of the lyrics. Youthful memories are layered in the alley. We are left to imagine who is talking. Perhaps it's an old man reminiscing? Maybe some old friends recalling what they did 'in the days gone by'? Equally, it could be a recount of youths drinking furtively in an out-of-sight back lane. In the end, the answers are unimportant. As Heaton argues, 'Morrison sings like he's musing to no one in particular' (2008, online). What is determined is that the songwriter imagines these streets as places of adult dealings, and so they represent times and experiences that stand between adolescence and adulthood.

Rituals are layered and build with each verse until there is a picture of 'the days gone by' - chatting to girls, dancing, listening to music, thinking about music.

Spin and turning in the alley, spin and turning in the alley
Like a Whirling Dervish in the alley, drinking that wine
Drinking wine, making time in the days gone by

Boogie woogie child in the alley
Drinking that wine, making time, talking all out of my mind
Drinking wine in the days gone by, behind the ritual

Musical allusions to John Lee Hooker's 1948 jive talking song, 'Boogie Chillen'' ('Boogie woogie child in the alley' 'talking that jive') connect with an early blues influence, the kind of music listened to in formative years and shared when kids interested in the Beat movement got together. The message of 'Boogie Chillen' (being

compelled by new sounds heard in the streets - 'When I first came to town, people, I was walkin' down Hastings Street') rings true with the song's narrative of youthful explorations. Moreover, the implicit connection between *this* 'alley' and Hastings Street in Detroit where the John Lee Hooker song is set, again culturally crosses trans-Atlantic distances. The exciting uncertainty of youth plays out in 'the spin and turning', words that capture both the restless energy and the adolescent jive. So there's cant and 'talking all out of the mind'. Music is explored - dancing is uninhibited, and ... different. Markers of breaking from old traditions come at each turn of the 'Whirling Dervish' of the times, the rapid pace of the dance alluding to change, and again the lines between the profane and the sacred are indistinct.

Spin and turn and rhyme in the alley
Spin and turning, making up rhymes, talking all out of my mind
Talking that jive, drinking that wine in the days gone by

Rhymes are written, and they might later have become songs. Here is a chronicle of a journey that starts with memories of the past in the streets of Belfast and builds it into an intense feeling of the here and now. Not for the first time does Van Morrison blur distinctions between past and present, memory and reality.

Just as the memories are layered they start to fade away, and the thesis is left - beyond the material trappings, beyond the rituals of successive passages of time, there is the 'spiritual'.

Behind the ritual, behind the ritual
You find the spiritual, you find the spiritual
Behind the ritual in the days gone by

The word is only mentioned three times, almost hidden, and here is the point. The seemingly endless 'blah, blah, blahs' (more than 60 of them scatted at the end) pave the way for this resolution. Is this the end-point of simplicity, the silence, the absence of

words that brings everything back to the contemplated moment? As Marcus (2010) suggests, ‘as if to free the words from their own bodies, to divest them of any chance to signify, to let the word begin again in sound and find its own way out, Morrison throws away them all’ (pp. 181-182). The ‘behind the ritual’ words come back again, continuously recycled, and at five minutes and ten seconds the tempo changes, and the voice begins to lower. Mills (2010) talks about the vocal performances on *Keep It Simple*, and how the ‘use of grain of the voice is less concerned with concealing, evading and masking’ but strives ‘to keep it simple in how it explores the moment and expresses feeling as much as ideas’. As words on the page, the lyrics in the coda could not ever capture the stripping away of worldly ritual that sits at the heart of the song. The voice spirals down, occasionally lifting before falling again, a lone gospel singer dropping in behind, until at six minutes and forty five seconds it is barely a whisper. ‘Behind the ritual’, he intones, and we are left with no answers, just the realities of what is caught within feelings that fall between memory, imagination and contemplation.

When ‘Behind The Ritual’ is considered as a later career street song, it offers some salient counterpoints to the imagining of the street in the other songs discussed in this chapter. In this song the streets do not present as places of simple boyhood or adolescent pleasures and awakening. Rather, they represent a time when those treasured experiences were being left behind. They also show in their references to symbols that blur lines between the sacred and the profane, that they are seen to be places that would, with hindsight, be held as hallowed grounds. The streets make the same kinds of connections between the local and the international that mark out the corners of ‘The Healing Game’, in the links between the home-grown words and those of gospel and soul music, and what these mean for the exiled experience. Finally, they represent one of the key endpoints in a professional and contemplative journey - when all is stripped away, when the pretensions and the endless searching are dropped, the final healing is

revealed in the spiritual moment of 'keeping it simple'. This revelation holds together the street corners, the local energies, the sacred musical places.

The chapter considered the ways Van Morrison returns in song to the streets of his hometown, and how the framing of identity is mediated through these streets. The four songs highlight moments in a continuing cultural journey. In the first two, the street is a recognisable, local place, and the songs catch the youthful energies of earlier times. They provide a canvas of sights, sounds and smells upon which memories of music and work can be rejoined and examined, and where processes around identity formation and belonging can be interrogated. At the same time as they celebrate the importance of the 'local', they point out temporal spaces between what was once, and what has now become. This is found in the references to musical styles from across the Atlantic, both in lyric and music. It is within these temporal spaces that nostalgia moves towards early expressions of exile. The final two songs were written at times in the songwriter's career where healing can be found in the symbolic return to the spirit of those former places and times. Streets are then seen to be representative and sacred places where connections are held within the musical foundations of performance from way back then, and where the spiritual can be found in what Marcus (2009) sees as the 'deepest nostalgia' for what went before (p. 180).

7. Other Narratives of Belfast

Blues come rollin'
Down all your avenue
Won't stop at the City Hall
Just a few steps away
You can look up at
Maritime Hotel
Just a little bit sad
Gotta walk away
Wish it well

In 1965, the twenty-year old Van Morrison sang these lines in the 'The Story Of Them',¹ about the rise and fall of the band he had joined a year earlier. The central place of the song is Belfast's Maritime Hotel, where Them had taken up residence in 1964. The Maritime was in College Square North, about halfway between the city centre and the bottom of the Falls Road. All that remains of the Maritime Hotel is a plaque on a wall that reads:

THE MARITIME HOTEL
birthplace of Rhythm 'n' Blues in Belfast
April 1964
stood on this site

'The Story Of Them' captures a specific time and place, and a unique moment in both the personal life of Van Morrison and the cultural life of the city of his birth. Just as the building has long gone, no doubt a victim of development, the Belfast depicted in the song, with its vibrant musical scene, was similarly elided from much of the popular imagination by the onset of the Troubles in 1969. The song, then, is a lament for the inevitability of time passing, and, at the same time, a celebration of that particular

¹ In some album releases the song is titled, 'The Story Of Them (Parts 1 & 2)'. This thesis uses the shortened title, as in *Lit Up Inside: Selected Lyrics* (Morrison, 2014).

moment in history. It is also a reminder that Heidegger's notion of the 'local' as a familiar place where identity is defined by a sense belonging might be considered across personal experiences (quoted in Alexander, 2010, p. 12). Written in 1964, 'The Story Of Them' foreshadows Van Morrison's use of place in his future songwriting. Importantly, it is the first song where the lyrics directly and explicitly mention Belfast.² Crucially, the song depicts a different Belfast from many common literary and media representations, as well as much of the songwriter's own created world drawn from his East Belfast 'source'. In much the same way, 'Burning Ground' (1997), the other song treated in detail in this chapter, works against the grain of the dominant ways that Van Morrison reads his city. Taken together, the two songs show that there are other Morrison narratives and images of Belfast, albeit sparingly traced by the artist across the catalogue. The two songs represent different physical, social and cultural maps of Belfast, and different dynamics that play out within their respective psycho-geographies.

'The Story Of Them' explores these geographies and dynamics in a loco-specific way. The Spanish Rooms on the Falls Road, the Maritime Hotel, the City Hall - the song locates the narrative around these places and their specific details, and this brings to mind Barry's description of 'textual moments' that bring those places into imaginative being (2000, quoted in Alexander & Cooper, 2013, p. 7). The song's nostalgic feeling of a place shows how a musical scene bound up within an emerging youth movement briefly eclipsed the sectarian and cultural divisions through which the city has so often been viewed (see, Hughes, 1996, p. 141). The song's physical locations cut across the city in unexpected ways, not dwelling on historical sites of

² 'Joe Harper Saturday Morning', a song released on a number of compilation albums also references the Maritime Hotel in the line, 'And just stood outside the club'. The song was recorded in 1967 in New York in one of the *Blowin' Your Mind* sessions. Joe Harper was the caretaker at the Maritime when Them played there (Heylin, 2002, p. 137).

contestation in Belfast, but rather highlighting alternative points of community and difference generated by the advent of popular music and a burgeoning youth culture. *Insiders and outsiders* feature to be sure, but as Hughes observes (2014, p. xvi), the song highlights an importantly different picture of mid-1960s Belfast from that depicted in literature both before and after the Troubles (see below). Thus, it offers a unique portrait of a particular moment in time in Northern Irish history, a momentary pause for breath before the region would descend into 30 years of sectarian conflict.

In contrast, 'Burning Ground' relies on a generic setting to tell an oblique story about intergenerational violence. In this song, there are no direct references to specific places, but rather the thematic territory it explores - loyalty, violence, recrimination - speak to the impact of sectarian division that marked so much of recent Northern Irish history. It is possible in this song to read one of the few times when Van Morrison's writing worries obliquely about Belfast's sectarian strife. As Barry (2000) argues, texts that rely on an evocation of setting rather than a specific geography might well be read, with the help of the writer's context (biography, history, time of writing), to a specific time and place, even as its 'undifferentiated spaces' open up other interpretative possibilities (Alexander & Cooper, 2013, p. 8). It is also worth keeping in mind that 'a poetics of obliquity' is quite often deployed by Northern Irish poetry to marginalise mainstream political discourses like nationalism and unionism, and the perennial impetus to take sides over events of the Troubles (Patke, 2010, p. 12). When Patke (2010, p. 12) writes about poets who practise an oblique strategy, he argues that the contemporary poetics of obliquity recognises that the political mess can be met with a resistance in the form of aesthetic and ethical choices. Ciaran Carson, Michael Longley, Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon and Paul Muldoon are among those whose writing about the Troubles is an attempt to 'come to grips with destructive energies' and shape them in creative ways' (Ormsby, 2009, paragraph 13). Examples of this can be seen across

the work of these poets. Ciaran Carson's 'Night Out' (*Belfast Confetti*) observes people drinking in a pub and listening to music while gunshots sound from outside - described by Ormsby (2009) as 'a beleaguered kind of normality' (paragraph 33). Michael Longley draws on Greek and Roman poetry in poems like 'The Helmet' to refer to intergenerational loyalties that impact on the violence. Elsewhere, Seamus Heaney, in his *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975) collections, describes tensions and atrocities as parallels with Iron Age practices, and this textual distancing helps to maintain an objective political stance.

In popular music, artists like Jim Morrison and Bob Dylan have had attention drawn to the obliquity of their unfolding narratives. Perone (2012) observes that many Doors' songs (*Doors*, 1967) are 'oblique and open to interpretation' (e-book). Similarly, Hughes (2016) comments about Dylan's early albums (like *Blonde On Blonde*, 1966, and *John Wesley Harding*, 1967), remarking how many songs have the effect of 'someone passing through a song rather than presiding over it', and how this often means 'the songs ultimately resist our desires to understand or decode them, while also appearing on a deeper level to stage the complex search for meaning' (p. 182, see also Frith, 1998, p. 93). Clearly, it is not unusual for some poets and songwriters to explore important social, cultural and political issues through oblique and often self-consciously evasive modes of expression. If this thought is carried through to 'Burning Ground', the reading offered in this chapter locates its wider themes within allusions to a Belfast of the Troubles. Consequently, it offers a strong counterpoint to the vision of Belfast offered 30 years earlier in the 'The Story Of Them'. Whereas the earlier song depicted the area around the Maritime Hotel as a place of acceptance and good times, somewhere for young people to go when barred elsewhere in the city, 'Burning Ground' describes a city now characterised by industry and the violence of the Troubles. Both songs pick up

on aspects of working-class life, yet the contrasts between the youthful exuberance of the former, and the physical danger of the latter, could hardly be more stark.

This chapter does not, in any way, set out to privilege a different Van Morrison representation of Belfast from the one that attracts most attention from critics and listeners. Indeed, other chapters highlight songs that have taken listeners into locally sourced worlds where rooms, streets and streams provide textures and passages within ‘ordinary’ lifestyles that become stepping off points for discovery (Hughes, 2014). The intent here is to show how Van Morrison also represents Belfast as a diverse and complex place where individual stories take shape within a range of local and wider contexts. It is this complex fusion of observation, narrative and imagination that is found in the created worlds of the songwriter. Oft-cited songs like ‘Cyprus Avenue’ (1968) and ‘Madame George’ (1968) provide a particular ‘provocative portrait’ of the Belfast of the songwriter’s youth, and record a different vision of the city in ‘style and tone’ than one of violence and conflict that would dominate much of the media for years to come, a point made by McLaughlin and McLoone (2012, p. 45). Nonetheless, this chapter suggests that Van Morrison draws more widely from his ‘source’ than has previously been accounted for. That is, other songs are able to offer alternative insights into his sense of place, and how he saw and interpreted the changing and changeless spaces of Belfast.

Interruptions, Differences and Acceptances: ‘The Story Of Them’

Downtown we’d walk
And passers by
Would shudder with delight
Mmmmmm
Good times

These observations from the opening verse of ‘The Story Of Them’ pave the way for a

song that has energies around interruptions, differences and acceptances - *interruptions* to a prevailing social order that enforced barriers across social, cultural and religious borders, *differences* surrounding new appearances, and *acceptances* that rely on both symbolic and physical border-crossing. It is clearly a song for its mid-1960s times of social and cultural disruption that was gaining momentum in the popular music world. While it might not have had the same political intent and direction of ‘protest songs’ from both sides of the Atlantic (for example, Barry McGuire’s ‘Eve Of Destruction’, 1965, Sam Cooke’s ‘A Change Is Gonna Come’, 1964, Buffy Saint-Marie’s ‘Universal Soldier’, 1964), it indirectly addresses issues of difference and acceptance that many of those songs express (Lynskey, 2011, e-book). That is, these songs all centrally position interruptions to existing social and cultural orders. As such, important ‘cultural literacy’ background for the analysis of ‘The Story Of Them’ might be thought of along both literary and youth subcultural lines.

It almost certainly would be a stretch to position ‘The Story Of Them’ too closely within wider literary depictions of Belfast. Nonetheless, it does, in its wide-eyed narrative of young people kicking against the traces of tradition and expectation, pick up on transient moments when Belfast was ‘opening out’ as a city (Dawe, 1998, p. 42). This opening out contested a number of existing ways that the city had previously been viewed. Hughes, citing the poet John Hewitt, writes that up until the 1950s there was a general absence of writing about Belfast over the preceding 150 years (1996, p. 141). He argues that the city had two disadvantages as a fictional location. The first is a history dominated by the Troubles and its associations with danger and violence - a ‘void’ that the writing and the media would step into, often with an ‘ignorance’ about the complexity of the city (Hughes, 1996, pp. 141-142). The second is the general Irish ‘indifference’ and ‘hostility’ to the city, positions borne out of a predominant rural bent in discerning the essentialist Irish sense of place (see also, Kennedy-Andrews, 2007).

On this second point, Dawe (1998) talks about how, in novels such as Brian Moore's *The Emperor of Ice Cream* (1965), Belfast was very often portrayed as a 'dull, dead town' and how this had been a persistent cultural stereotype of the city (p. 49).³ He then adds that contrasts could be found in novels like Sam Hanna Bell's, *The Hollow Ball* (1961), where there was a dramatisation of 'the up and down sides of life in Belfast' and the 'pronounced lyrical feeling of *possibility*' (p. 49, italics in original). Dawe argues it is at this point of possibility that Van Morrison 'comes in, with a vision all of his own conveyed through the exuberance of his voice' (1998, p. 49). There must be caution in seeing this stepping in of Van Morrison into a literary tradition as a calculated move, especially with reference to a song like 'The Story Of Them'. After all, it is just a young songwriter spinning an improvised tale of a brief period in a band's history. And, as mentioned in Chapter 3, Van Morrison has told in interview that he had very little knowledge from his school years of Irish writers. However, he was very much involved in another cultural dynamic around a vital aspect of the artistic life of the city, and 'The Story Of Them' provides some pertinent commentary about this dynamic.

When Van Morrison sang about this brief moment and place in 1965, he was shining some light, notwithstanding a narrowly focused one, on Belfast as a culturally confident and vibrant city (McNaughton & McLoone, 2012, p. 43). This was the 'opening out' that Dawe was referring to in relation to 'The Story Of Them' (1998, see above). There is a view that Belfast's emergence was a result of British post-war reconstruction, the setting up of a welfare state and the expansion of higher education that 'drew into the city a talented new generation of writers, artists and dramatists' (Bardon, 1983, quoted in McNaughton & McLoone, 2012, p. 43). Furthermore, there was a general optimism after the cessation of the IRA border campaign in 1962

³ Another earlier example is Brian Moore's, *The Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955), a novel that depicts Belfast as a stagnant backwater that is slowly waking out of its religious, political and cultural conservatism.

(English, 2003). Within this emergence and optimism was the wider British rhythm and blues movement that had its hometown beginnings in Belfast's Maritime Hotel. The time and the place seemed right for this movement in Belfast. Commentators suggest that the city was 'a bit more rock 'n' roll to begin with' (McNaughton & McLoone, 2012, pp. 43-44), and, moreover, the British rhythm and blues movement of bands playing American (read, Black) music found a welcoming home in a city where 'African-American music was more than a hobby ... it was a passion' (Smyth, 2005, pp. 31-32). While 'The Story Of Them' is a song for its times of social and cultural disruption, there is some qualification that it is not a song *of* its times in the wider British rhythm and blues movement. Indeed it is a very different song in lyric and sound to most recorded by contemporary bands like The Rolling Stones and The Animals, who were strongly focusing on covers of Black American artists.⁴ Furthermore, it was not released on either of the Them albums (*The Angry Young Them*, 1965, *Them Again*, 1966), that also featured blues and rhythm and blues covers and a small number of Van Morrison originals (for example, 'Mystic Eyes', 'Gloria', 'Hey Girl' – see, Appendix, Discography). 'The Story Of Them' was telling a different story, one that was recognised a few years later after the success of 'Brown Eyed Girl'.⁵

The story began with a newspaper advertisement that appeared in the *Belfast Evening Telegraph*⁶ in April 1964 asking bands to apply for a new R&B club starting in the Maritime Hotel, and the nineteen-year old Van Morrison turned up, auditioned, and became a member of an existing band (the Gamblers) which was to change its name to

⁴ However, Rogan (2006, p. 205) suggests that the guitar backing of 'The Story Of Them' echoes The Rolling Stones' 'Little Red Rooster' (1964), and also that its closest contemporary counterpart was The Animals' 'Club A Go Go' (1965).

⁵ Rogan (2006) records that 'The Story Of Them' was first released by former Them manager Phil Solomon on his own label (Major Minor) the same week that *Blowin' Your Mind* came out in the USA (1967).

⁶ The advertisement was placed by 'the three Js' mentioned in 'The Story Of Them' – Gerry McKervey, Jerry McKenna and Jimmy Conlan (Heylin, 2002, p. 66).

Them for the gigs at the Maritime.⁷ Running ads in the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* (14th-17th April, 1964) built intrigue around the band's new name:

WHO ARE? WHAT ARE? THEM
WHEN? AND WHERE? WILL YOU SEE THEM?
RHYTHM and BLUES and THEM – WHEN?
Rhythm & Blues Club, To-night, 8.30: Introducing THEM – Ireland's
Specialists in Rhythm and Blues. Maritime Hotel, College Square North
(Heylin, 2002, p. 68).

This context is useful for a reading of the song. Van Morrison refers to these advertisements in lines from 'The Story Of Them' ('Who are, /Or what are, /Them?' – see below). The band's name, with its connotations of mystery and 'otherness', contributes to the interacting themes around interruptions, differences and acceptances that sit at the heart of the song. This was a time when identity was becoming an increasingly contested issue, and the deliberate ambiguity of 'Them' might be read as a willful and ironic comment on this moment. Dawe (1998) writes that the Maritime club was a focus for Queens University students, a place where they met with groups of working-class kids, and subsequently 'a brief cross-over took place which was to last during the mid-years of the 1960s in Belfast' (p. 44). This cross-over had two fronts. The first was that Belfast clubs 'provided a chance for kids of every religion and none to get together' (Dawe, 1998, p. 44). This gave an idea that it was possible for identity to be shaped along different lines (Onkey, 2012). Critically the band's appearance ('... long hair, wearing whatever came their way ...') seemed to defy the working ethos of the city (Dawe, 1998, p. 45), and clubs like the Maritime became a geographical refuge from those experiencing verbal and physical challenges and confrontations because of the way they looked and behaved. Of course it is acknowledged that this was a counter-cultural movement that was happening in many other cities. Its significance resides

⁷ See, among others, Heylin, 2002, pp. 66-72, and Onkey, 2012, pp. 171-172, for detailed accounts of how Them were formed and began playing at the Maritime.

within the wider narrative of a city historically marked by division and strife. Second, the musical style of bands like Them, known for their raucous energy and physical abandon (Onkey, 2012), were challenging long-held show band traditions, and persistent views surrounding what musicians should look and sound like. As Dawe (1998, p. 46) remarks, ‘They looked like their audiences and did whatever they fancied on stage: smoking and drinking. The Maritime was breaking down the expected notion of musical entertainment ...’

There is another important element that ‘The Story Of Them’ gets at. Onkey (2006, quoting Nairn 1997) observes that Van Morrison’s work evokes years ‘when youngsters on both sides of Ulster’s religious divide discovered a musical liberation culture which could take them away from ... the old parochial grouses of their respective extended families’ (p. 174). She later adds (2012, online), that while the democratic spaces of the Maritime might not have been ‘explicitly identified as anti-sectarian, the hotel was associated with those impulses’. Elsewhere, Heylin (2002, pp. 70-71) quotes a Belfast guitarist at the time saying there was ‘a totally different energy than you had in a parochial hall or an Orange hall or a civic centre. It was a social revolution – a different mentality – people that wanted out of the system.’ Finally, and on balance, it does need to be acknowledged that the context for ‘The Story Of Them’ was but a part of the Belfast scene of the mid-1960s. The burgeoning music scene contested the boundaries of historical struggles for a group of insiders and followers, yet the sectarian divisions and underlying political instability remained beneath the surface, and this ‘new cultural agenda ... and the emerging youth subculture vied with the ancient quarrels for the allegiance of the young (and for space in the media)’ (McNaughton & McLoone, 2012, p. 44). What is captured within the lyrics and music of ‘The Story Of Them’, then, is a specific moment in time when, for some Belfast

youth, at least popular music and culture would tentatively override historical discord and division.

Thus far, this section has located 'The Story Of Them' within the context of literary and youth culture, suggesting it maps out a different picture of Belfast, one that foregrounds rebelliousness, liveliness and possibility for change as the song's central concerns. There are particular notions of authenticity that underline its words and performance. As discussed in Chapter 2, authenticity in popular music is heightened when personal experiences are told through narratives of emotion (Bloomfield, 1993), and when they connect to a sense of place spatially and locationally (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 71). Clearly, the song ticks both these boxes. From a performative perspective, authenticity in popular music can also be found in the liminal spaces between the local and the global (McLaughlin & McLoone, 2012, p. 6). For bands, like Them, at the vanguard of the global British beat and rhythm and blues movement, this notion of authenticity was interpreted as a differentiation from the commerciality of the showbands, first, through drawing on Black American music, and second, by fusing the energy and speed of rock 'n' roll (Smyth, 2005, p. 26). It was this anti-commercial authenticity that Them fed into, and the improvised performance and by-chance recording of 'The Story Of Them' reinforces this attitude. Rogan (2006) picks up the story.

Billy Harrison [Them guitarist] remembers. 'It started off as a guitar riff and we just fell into playing while the engineers were changing tapes or setting something up ... the next thing Van started singing and Tommy Scott [engineer] recorded it' (p. 205).

It can only be a matter of speculation whether Van Morrison completely improvised the words of the song, although Billy Harrison did remember that he was 'shouting words

off the top of his head' (Heylin, 2002, p. 108). What the recorded performance did achieve was an interchange between the lyrics and the music - the singer's Belfast brogue wandering across observations of differences in characters, places and experiences, and these against the searching sounds of the guitar. Mills (2010) talks about its rambling talking blues and how it is 'as powerfully performative of identity as any visual documentary', with its sounds conveying feelings of 'outsiderhood' (p. 205). Dawe (1998) agrees with this sentiment, talking about how the singer's 'searching elaboration of the syllables of his tale is mocked by the quizzing lead guitar', and 'the languor of Morrison's voice is underscored by the band's fugitive and disconsolate backing' (p. 42). Furthermore, the Belfast accent and the use of local places (the Falls Road, the Spanish Rooms, City Hall) in song would almost certainly engender pride among people long used to hearing foreign place names in songs.

Within 'The Story Of Them' is a notion of rebelliousness in which the markers and barriers of difference are porous. This is established early in the song and continues throughout. In the opening scene, up-all-night attitudes and actions ('We'd drink and talk and sing/All through the night') are contrasted with the 'leisurely and bright morning' downtown. A tension is revealed between 'normal' everyday Belfast lifestyles (read, conservative) dictated by routines and patterns of time, and the time-free young friends.

When friends were friends
And company was right
We'd drink and talk and sing
All through the night
Morning came leisurely and bright
Downtown we'd walk
And passers-by
Would shudder with delight
Mmmmm
Good times
At Izzie's, man
All the cats were there
Just dirty enough to say

'We don't care'
But, the management had had complaints
About some cats with long, long hair
'Look, look, look'
And the people'd stare
'Why, you won't be allowed in anywhere!'
Barred from pubs, clubs and dancing halls
Made the scene at the Spanish rooms on the Falls
And, man, four pints of that stuff was enough to have you
Out of your mind
Climbin', climbin' up the walls
Out of your mind
But it was a gas, all the same
Mmmmmm
Good times

Allusions to differences in appearances are also in these early lines, caught in the 'shudder' of the passers by. Yet the differences seem more about curiosity and amusement - the oppositional positioning of the words 'shudder with delight' are suggestive of a measure of acceptance. Further lines pick up on the 'otherness' of the young singers. First there are the rebellious stances: 'Just dirty enough to say/'We don't care''. Note again, the quiet signifier 'enough'. And the 'cats with long, long hair', perhaps consciously designed physical appearance to draw complaints from people in the 'normal' places ('pubs, clubs and dancing halls') associated with nights out. Words and actions constantly emphasise a standing out from the crowd. But equally there are constant cues that such a standing out is measured, and not an overly serious game. The stakes do not seem too high, and the words, 'Mmmmmm/Good times' at the end of each verse punctuate each expression of difference with an air of, 'It was all OK.' That the stakes around division are not too high is a critical point that is made in the song, when Belfast's recent history is marked by the serious implications of social, cultural and political division. Observations about drinking ('And, man, four pints of that stuff was enough to have you/Out of your mind') and fighting ('Boppin' people on the head and knockin' them out') also highlight issues around difference on the streets of Belfast. They might also be considered signs of rebellion, though equally they might work back

the other way to be accepted forms and patterns of entertainment, at a time when macho stances were not uncommon on the weekend streets of Belfast as ‘working life confronted itself with time-off’ (Dawe, 1998, p. 45). Continuously, ‘The Story Of Them’ blurs lines across the junctures of difference and normality.

This blurring occurs across geographical and historical borders. Indeed, when they were ‘barred’ because of their appearances (presumably from conservative and ‘respectable’ places), they found spaces of acceptance where otherwise sectarian barriers might suggest ‘no-go’ areas (‘Made the scene at the Spanish rooms on the Falls’). It is a telling observation. Contrasting images of the Falls Road area throughout time have pointed to division and danger - yet here it is a ‘scene’ (‘it was a gas’) and a place of refuge. As Hughes (2014) notes, it is a version of Belfast not commonly recorded, a city defined and mapped by music. And in the end it is the music that pushed its way through the interruptions and differences towards acceptances. The song documents this transitioning with reference to the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* newspaper advertisements in the verses that pick up on these:

Now people say, ‘Who are,
Or what are,
Them?’

Once more the interchange between band and outsiders looking in (that is cultural insiders and bemused outsiders), inverts the framing around otherness. The song, in quite a self-conscious way, seeks to paint the band members as different, and there is, as Dawe notes, a pervasive mood of self-preoccupation (2017). The lyrics also catch conversations about how they were being viewed, and so imply they wanted acceptance. Of course it seems self-evident that a band would want to be accepted, though if authenticity is a genuine goal, acceptance meant under their own terms of reference. It might be useful here to pause and consider this notion of acceptance within the wider history of the city, where terms of sectarian reference often worked to thwart the ways

individuals and groups were accepted. But in this instance, anticipation is then mingled with perception, with a representation of how the songwriter steps off the stage and takes up the perspective of the audience. This is a device that highlights the importance of looking beyond outward appearances and the symbols of others into a recognition that challenges points of difference. Here is an awareness that is both visual and judgmental, and the song implants the signs of a gradual acceptance. Audiences turned up and reputations grew.

That little one sings and that big one plays the guitar with a
Thimble on his finger, runs it up and down the strings
The bass player don't shave much
I think they're all a little bit touched
But the people came
And that is how we made our name
Too much, it was
Mmmmmm
Yeah, good times

Wild, sweaty, crude, ugly
And mad
And sometimes just, a little bit sad
Yeah, they sneered and all
But up there, we just havin' a ball
It was a gas, you know
Lord
Some good times

We are, Them, take it or leave it
Do you know they took it?
And it kept coming
And we worked for the people
Sweet, sweat
And the misty, misty atmosphere'

In the popular music history of Belfast this is a noteworthy moment, and indeed represents a time and place where the British beat and rhythm and blues movement began to take a hold in the city. It is also important when the wider implications of acceptance are again considered within the Belfast context, where division across sectarian lines was the way of life for many.

In thinking about 'The Story Of Them', Marcus (2010) observes that 'nostalgia

pulls down like quicksand, and it's always had Van Morrison in its grip' (p. 166). He adds that the names and faces stand out clearly, and 'the scene as he looked back was so perfect' (p. 166). The Belfast scene that the young songwriter looked back to, perfect or not, shows a particular place that might only be recaptured through imagination. This is especially the case when the song is thought of in relation to the breakout of the Troubles. He walks away from both the song and the place and the time in the final verse, a reminder that his nostalgia is often bound and defined within the act of his leaving (Dawe, 1998, p. 43). 'Wish it well,' he sings softly at the end, his voice a contrast to the strident acclamation of the opening line of the last verse, 'Blues come rollin'/Down all your avenue'. And the singer and that place in time are gone. For Van Morrison it would be a place that could only be recaptured and preserved through memory and the imaginative expanses of his lyrics.

A few years later when Belfast erupted into the violence of the Troubles, Van Morrison was in New York recording *Astral Weeks*. Between that time in the late 1960s and the turn of the century he regularly 'revisited' his hometown in songs. Revisitation in this sense sits within a wider ontological journey. During this time, mention of the Troubles in Morrison's work is rare, and only alluded to in the lyrics of songs (for example, 'Saint Dominic's Preview', 1972, 'Wonderful Remark', 1973, 'Linden Arden Stole The Highlights', 1974, 'Rough God Goes Riding', 1997). 'Burning Ground' in many ways marks out a different Van Morrison perspective on Belfast. This song is a drama that plays out in an intrapersonal and spiritual dialogue, where the factory lives of working-class men become sites of conflict and struggles.

Extremes of Lived Existence: A Reading of 'Burning Ground'

The opening section of this chapter suggested that the generic setting and thematic territory of 'Burning Ground' might be interpreted as a commentary on a particular period in Belfast's history where sectarian violence overflowed into, and through, the lives of ordinary people caught up in age-old struggles. While such an interpretation is necessarily offered with a degree of caution, there are a number of contextual and textual cues to support this reading.

The cues around the historical context in Belfast at the time of the recording of the song are certainly worth considering. 'Burning Ground' was recorded for *The Healing Game* (1997), at a time when the Northern Ireland Peace Process (1994-1998) was moving towards the Good Friday Agreement. The album opens with 'Rough God Goes Riding', and its references to 'mud splattered victims ... all along the ancient highway', 'fighting back with counter-attack', bring to mind successions of old vendettas. Marcus (2010) interprets the verses as calling 'forth the conflict in Northern Ireland between the UDA and the IRA – and London's war against Catholic Belfast' (p. 111). 'Burning Ground' follows up on these allusions, representing extremes of the lived existence, where everyday sites become unavoidably political, and trapped within profound political implications. Alexander and Cooper, (2013) write about how this was the case with Northern Irish poets, Derek Mahon and Paul Muldoon (among others), noting how the Troubles brought 'grim urgency to longstanding concerns with territory and belonging' (p. 6). If we think about Van Morrison and his continual quest for belonging that is seen in songs about home and streets, it makes sense that Van Morrison might also consider the impact of division and violence on his home town. That is, it is quite feasible that he should devote some songwriting attention to the Troubles and the Peace Process. As Rogan (2006) writes, when 'Brown Eyed Girl' and

'Days Like This' (1995), were both adopted to back a £1.2 million television advertising campaign promoting the ceasefire, 'the apolitical Morrison found himself representing the official soundtrack of the peace process' (p. 437). In 1995 he sang for 80000 people outside Belfast City Hall when US President Bill Clinton was visiting the city to encourage Northern Irish leaders to vote for peace. Interestingly, he chose to open with 'No Religion' from (*Days Like This*, 1995), its lyrics implicitly referencing the religious strife in Belfast.⁸

And they ask what hate is, it's just the other side of love
Some people want to give their enemies
Everything they think that they deserve
Some say, 'Why don't you love your neighbors?
Go ahead, turn the other cheek'
Have you ever met anybody who's ever been that meek?
And it's so cruel to expect the Savior to save the day
And there's no religion, no religion, no religion here today

It does seem reasonable, then, to conclude that the 'apolitical' Van Morrison would make the occasional foray into oblique references to the politics in Northern Ireland and Belfast. Furthermore, as has been noted above in this chapter, he has occasionally, though sparingly, alluded to the political situation at different times in his songwriting career.

Locating the lyrics of 'Burning Ground' in the factories and streets of Belfast is, admittedly, a matter for interpretation. Like many Van Morrison songs, the words are elusive and their meaning is difficult to tie down to a specific situation. Yet we are continually reminded that song words matter most when they are open to interpretation by singers and listeners (Frith, 1998, p. 101). If the opaque words of 'Burning Ground' matter, and clearly they do to the songwriter,⁹ how have they been read by Van

⁸ He followed with 'Days Like This' and 'Have I Told You Lately' (1989).

⁹ Both Mills (2010) and Buzacott and Ford (2005) record that 'Burning Ground' became a regular feature and high point of concert performances in the 1990s.

Morrison critics? Hage (2009) sees that it evokes visions of factories and labouring, and the songwriter is ‘trying to shuck something burdensome, literally and figuratively’ (p. 125). He further suggests that its ‘elemental and unrefined’ mood carries with it an inkling of personal and cultural redemption through which the burdens of history might be shrugged off. Buzacott and Ford (2005) write that the song at last affords the opportunity for Van Morrison to dump a ‘heavy weight’, though they interpret this shedding of weight as a spiritual release, as opposed to an admittance of historical realities. Both Buzacott and Ford (2005) and Heylin (2002) link the metaphor of the burning ground with the writings of Alice Bailey and her conceptualisation of ‘burning ground’ - the threshold into the door of life, energy and spiritual embodiment, that has to be faced before the site of final purification (p. 474).¹⁰ Such critical perspectives evoke ideas of spiritual redemption and purification as they intersect with those of danger and mayhem. Marcus (2009) has no doubts about the danger and mayhem and getting rid of a body as the central action of the song (p. 116). Moving such ideas closer to the Belfast and the Troubles, Hinton (2000) refers to the Belfast source for the song - a common scene in the city, when jute was imported from India and unloaded by workingmen at the docks. Such a scene, he writes, would have been familiar to the young Van Morrison (p. 335). As wide as these readings are, it is possible to distil them to a common set of ideas - the actions and redemption of working lives, the dangers at the heart of interpersonal strife, and the spaces around reaching a final purification. This is one of the few examples in the Van Morrison catalogue where an authentic and realistic experience is reported from the outside by the songwriter, and is different from what Moore (2012) sees as the ‘bedrock position of the persona’ (p. 183. See, Chapter 1). These ideas are consistent with the histories and impact of the Belfast of the

¹⁰ Van Morrison’s 1982 album, *Beautiful Vision* (1982), is influenced by the spiritual writings of Bailey. She was given credit in the album notes, and ‘Dweller On The Threshold’, ‘Aryan Mist’ and ‘Across The Bridge Where Angels Dwell’ directly take on ideas from her writing (Hage, 2009, p. 98).

Troubles, and the subsequent Peace Process, where purification and healing were sought across years of division, mistrust and reprisal. Arguably, the lyrics are as relevant, *and* oblique, except perhaps for the title, to those histories and processes as poems like Michael Longley's 'Ceasefire' (1995), in which Homer's *Iliad* warriors from opposing sides are reconciled through understanding and forgiveness (Padel, 1999, online). It is a salient example, not only of the poetic obliquity discussed above, but also an expression of a dire political situation in which neither side of the conflict is 'taken' textually (Kennedy-Andrews, 2007). The reading of 'Burning Ground' that follows, treads this ground in a similar way, relying on an interpretation that sees the lines of the opening verse referring to walking hand in hand as an analogy for intergenerational cultural production of ideas and actions.¹¹ There are indeed parallels in the ideas about loyalty and the acts of violent fury that underpin both the song and the poem - though the latter carries suggestions of pity and hope, while the song paints a more grim picture. And while Longley draws on classical poetry to bring out analogies to the Northern Irish situation, Morrison brings his narrative closer to home in hints about life in the factories and on the wharves of Belfast.

'Burning Ground': Allusions to Belfast and the Troubles

There are a number of layers to 'Burning Ground', and each can be read as an expression of the sectarian divisions, the intergenerational stoking of loyalties and the

¹¹ Such an interpretation does take into consideration a later live performance of the song where in the coda Van Morrison extemporises with 'Daddy take me down', 'Please daddy' and 'I want to go with you'. These words from a live 2015 concert in Cyprus Avenue to commemorate Van Morrison's 70th birthday are interpreted in this chapter to be wider cultural machinations of the Troubles rather than the recollection of personal experiences (BBC televised recording – *Up On Cyprus Avenue* -improvised words starting at 37.25 minutes - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKKmCBPI98s&t=2036s>).

violence of working men caught up in communal conflict.

The Troubles have very often been reflected in Northern Irish literature as a distressed, disputed and oft-rewritten landscape. Kennedy-Andrews calls this a 'palimpsest', and by this he means its sedimentary layers can be read in different ways (2008, p. 1). This is an apt descriptor when we think of the Belfast alluded to in 'Burning Ground'. The song plays out across subjectivities around right and wrong. Human fragility and instability are plain to see, and, as a song, it falls in line with others that represent place where contradictions and subjectivities abound around historical incidents and movements (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 74. See also, Chapter 2). In doing this 'Burning Ground' does not take sides, but rather, with an intense scrutiny, lays out the consequences and pathos of sides being taken. It is the shape of a divided Belfast that is caught in serious sectarian arguments that 'Burning Ground' hints at. A harsh working-class landscape is presented in the opening scenes, as the layers of the drama are relentlessly built - 'wind and rain', 'the midday sun' and 'the crimson sun' provide a setting in which natural elements are harshly in play.

And I take you down to the burning ground
And you change me up and you turn it around
In the wind and rain I'm gonna see you again
In the morning sun and when the day is done
And you take my hand and you walk with me
Sometimes it feels like eternity
And I turn the tide, I get back my pride
And I make you proud when you say it out loud
When I take you down to the burning ground

And I take you down by the factory
And I show you like it has to be
And you understand how the work is done
And I pick up the sack in the midday sun
And I pull you through by the skin of your teeth
And I lift the veil to see what's underneath
And you return to me and you sit on your throne
And you make me feel that I'm not alone
And I take you down to the burning ground
To the burning ground, to the burning ground

And you make me think what it's all about
Sometimes I know, gonna work it out
And I watch you run in the crimson sun
Tear my shirt apart, open up my heart
And I watch you run down on your bended knees
By the burnt-out well, can you tell me please?
Between heaven and hell won't you take me down
To the burning ground, to the burning ground

There is a good argument to suggest that the high level of abstraction in this song is similar to the way that the 'street' is treated in 'The Healing Game' - both on the same album. In the 'Healing Game' the lyrics and musical references take what, on the face of it, seems to be the scene of singing on a Belfast street corner, into a sacred and transcendental place. Here the places of work begin to form a picture of proud working-men caught in violent experiences that render these places into tensions between life and death, and heaven and hell. Opposing forces of fire and rain work themselves around the scenes, as portents of future dangers. Later, 'burning ground' and 'burial mound' interchange as feelings of waste and death force their way into the words. Throughout, religious imagery is interspersed, an indication of the religious beliefs at the heart of the Northern Ireland conflict - 'eternity', 'heaven and hell', 'you fall and pray', 'you get down on your knees and pray'. The driving rhythm and blues sounds reinforce the backdrop against which the events unfold. Reinforcing the religious imagery, the feeling of the song is fiercely evangelical - as noted by Hinton, the performance is that of 'a hellfire preacher' (2000, p. 335). Marcus agrees, seeing the song lyrically going further 'into the dark' as it proceeds (2010, p. 115). Hage (2009, p. 125) highlights the way the 'ominous groove' drives the song to its termination when the body is dumped on the 'burning ground' ('burial mound'). The song has a relentless energy, catalysed as much by the musical performance, as the building of each layer of the tragedy, through the repetition of coordinating words.

The opening word to the song's lines, 'And', is common throughout, and

happens almost exclusively in the second and third verses, where the parallels between factory life and deadly dealings are most marked. Dialogue carries each layer of the drama, its intergenerational focus established early, where the abstracted notions of guidance, sharing and culturally produced thoughts and actions are teased out - ‘And I take you down to the burning ground’, ‘And you take my hand and you walk with me’, ‘And I make you proud won’t you say it out loud’. Childhood memories and adult realities sit side by side here. The metaphor of a long cultural and spiritual walk (‘Sometimes it feels like eternity’) is held through feelings of revenge (‘And I turn the tide, I get back my pride’). These abstracted ideas take shape in the second verse, where guidance and cultural practices are located on the factory floor. This is how the *work* is done, tensions between what is plain to see (‘And I show you like it has to be/And you understand how the work is done’) and what secrets lie beneath the everyday practices are caught in the mysteries of the ‘sack’ and the ‘veil’. Openness and evasiveness fight with each other, as do positions of judgment (‘you return to me and you sit on your throne’) and loyalty (‘you make me feel that I’m not alone’).

These conflicts lead into the spoken ‘play’ that bridges the opening two verses about labour, loyalties and pride, and the latter two where their consequences are graphically on show.

Hey man, who’s that you’re carrying?

Feels like lead

It weighs a ton - let’s see if we can dump it by the side of the hill

Hey wait up, why don’t you dump it on the burning ground?

Dump it down there

Yeah, man, dump the jute

Hey, man, dump the jute on the burning ground

Dump the jute?

Yeah, you know, dump the jute

Dump the jute!

The spoken exchange between workers over a load that is being carried symbolises the weight of violence, a weight borne out of the apparent ordinariness of the jute sack. The mention of jute takes on symbolic significance in its focus on local production.¹² Its use as a rough all-purpose working sack, or in rope (both of which represent the toil of heavy labour) can locate the song in the working lives of Belfast men - lives emphasised through the extolling of life in the factories and the admiration of hard physical work in demanding weather conditions. Even as the jute represents the toil of working-men, it symbolises a sense of commitment to sectarian violence as a kind of 'work'. In this song, the jute bag stands as an image of concealment, perhaps a rough, makeshift body bag, while 'burning' brings forward interplaying thoughts of the extremes of nature, the means of disposal of what is unwanted, and the fires that rage between heaven and hell. So, as the title suggests, 'Burning Ground' is much more than a song about the virtues of working-class life. Its central conceit is the dire and seemingly unavoidable connection between working lives and violence - read here as the violence of the Troubles. This is not very far away thematically from the concerns of Sam Thompson's play, *Over The Bridge* (1960) about sectarianism and death on Belfast's dockyards. Similarly, in 'Burning Ground', violence is pervasive, everyday, ordinary. Tellingly, the game is given up early with the first line, 'Hey man, *who's* that you're carrying?'

¹² The Belfast Ropework Factory was, for many years, the largest in the world, with local demand for rope growing because of the Harland and Wolff shipyards. Jute, sisal and coir were all imported through the Belfast docks, and mills operated on the docks near the Connswater River (Mulvihill, 2002, p. 157). Furthermore, spinning mills had been an important West Belfast industry, and James Mackie & Sons (munitions manufacture and machinery for jute preparation and spinning) at one time was one of the biggest employers of men and women in Belfast (<http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/features/heritage/industrial-heritage-west-belfast>, 2006).

(emphasis added). A body or a sack of jute? In the delay of the words the two become the same, and both become disposable loads in a moment of tacit recognition: '*Dump the jute?/Yeah, you know, dump the jute*'. It is a moment in which meaning is grasped - a 'gotcha' when the worth of a life is reduced almost beyond measure. The song has now reached a point of realisation, and there is a detachment of the characters in the dialogue taken up in the third verse. It is as if the younger protagonist is sitting back, taking it in, working it out, torn apart in the picking of a position:

And you make me think what it's all about
Sometimes I know, gonna work it out
And I watch you run in the crimson sun
Tear my shirt apart, open up my heart

Caught between the heaven of belief and the hell of action, and amid the 'burnt-out well' of suffering, decisions are made. What remains is the final 'solution' in the last verse of the song.

And you fall and pray, when you hear that sound
As we're walking back to the burial mound
And you shake your head and you turn it around
And you see the flames from the burning ground
And you get down on your knees and pray
And I catch my breath as we're running away
And I take the jute and I throw him down
On the burning ground, on the burning ground

It is worth noting now that the 'I' and 'you' of the earlier verses become the 'we' of collaboration. Involvement and collusion pointedly hint at entrapments around loyalty and indoctrination: 'As *we're* walking back to the burial mound', 'And I catch my breath as *we're* running away' (emphasis added). Dirty deeds all the while are accompanied by religious entreaties (falling, kneeling, praying), until the conclusive individual action, 'And I take the jute and I throw him down/On the burning ground, on the burning ground'. The first person, 'I', now brings the curtain down. It is a neat

inversion of the song's opening lines, as the watcher and the learner has become the doer. He has been 'changed up' and 'turned around'.

In summary, this reading of 'Burning Ground' gathers a number of contextual and lyrical cues that allude to a particular period in Belfast's history where sectarian violence overflowed into and through the lives of ordinary people caught up in age-old struggles. The song's themes support this reading - the ways intergenerational loyalties are implicated in acts of violence, and how there can be latent darkneses woven into the fabric of everydayness. This interpretation certainly falls in line with literary depictions of Belfast, where division has been a regular theme in Northern Irish literature from the Troubles onwards. As Hughes (1996, drawing on Jarman, 1993) writes about Belfast, it has become a 'Troubles city', with divisions and borders through which 'ideological divisions have increasingly become a concrete part of the physical landscape' (p. 149). While acknowledging that the songs of Van Morrison are generally not associated with a political commentary, it is nonetheless suggested here and elsewhere in this thesis, that occasionally he alludes to the divisions and violence that have torn apart his hometown. If this is accepted with respect to 'Burning Ground', it is a powerful later career commentary on the shape of the city in troubled times.

Morrison's utilisation of Belfast as a site for imagination has, at times, become part of a wider cultural and philosophical narrative. 'The Story Of Them' offers a loco-specific observation of a brief moment when different social and cultural boundaries were being traversed. 'Burning Ground' dwells on a generic working-class landscape. Its evocation of its setting is read as a generalised depiction of a place where boundaries are fortified within enduring and pervasive social differences, and where there are dire consequences when 'ordinary' people become caught within these boundaries. Its undifferentiated

space is then interpretatively mapped onto a specific time and place in Belfast's history. The two songs pick up on different aspects of Belfast as they were impacted by different times, both in the city's history, and within the songwriter's own personal and professional journey.

8. Nature

‘... Everything was really quiet, and I was in this ‘other dimension’ (Van Morrison, quoted in Turner, 1993, p. 102)

Van Morrison is talking about ‘And It Stoned Me’ (1970), and the feeling of reaching an out-of-body and dream-like state that the song details (Hinton, 2000, p. 106). In what otherwise might be a simple tale of young boys out fishing, the responses to the weather, the terrain and the encounters with other people, elevate the song’s description of everyday experience, rendering it transcendent and otherworldly. Here, Van Morrison is acutely attuned to the features, rhythms and caprices of the natural world, and it is this particular wavelength that offers opportunities for wider questions about the human experience to be considered. This is a useful starting point for considering Van Morrison’s relationship to nature, as we witness the impact that nature and weather had on the songwriter from very early times. ‘And It Stoned Me’ draws attention to how the often overlooked rhythms and features of the natural world can be spiritually elevating. That is, for a songwriter like Van Morrison, the ‘everyday’ and the ‘commonplace’ of nature become ‘a continuously flowing source of something marvellous’ (Mills 2010, p. 320). Thus, one might argue that this relationship with nature, of being out-and-about in the countryside, is one of the most important places within Van Morrison’s songwriting. Rankin (2014, p. xi) refers to both a ‘personal straining towards the universal’, and a ‘search for the spiritual in the commonplace’ in

many of Van Morrison's songs. As we shall see, this straining has a particular significance in songs that focus on encounters with the natural world.

The interplay of nature, weather, seasonal cycles and the human experience, is an enduring theme in the Van Morrison catalogue. The early 1970s albums built on songs (for example, 'Brown Eyed Girl', 1967, and 'And It Stoned Me', 1970) where personal narratives played out against a backdrop of nature, paving the way for a recurring theme – that the natural world is a significant space to be interrogated and interpreted through song. Albums from the early 1970s frequently visit this theme. *Tupelo Honey* (1971) has American country sounds and songs about a bucolic lifestyle. *Hard Nose The Highway* (1973) paints a number of sketches of personal interactions with landscape. *Veedon Fleece* (1974) has a dominant theme of nature to be embraced as a restorative, mystical and spiritual force. *Common One* (1980) picks up on this theme in earnest with its introspective contemplation of nature, particularly in songs like 'Haunts Of Ancient Peace' and 'Satisfied'. Throughout the 1980s and beyond, Van Morrison regularly returns to this theme - 'A Sense Of Wonder' (1985), 'Alan Watts Blues' (1987), 'Coney Island' (1989), 'I'm Tired Joey Boy' (1989), 'Hymns To The Silence' (1991), 'In The Forest' (1993), 'Steal My Heart Away' (2002) and 'Pagan Heart' (2012). In this chapter, the songs show an early flowering of this theme in the 1970s – 'And It Stoned Me', 1970, 'Snow In San Anselmo', 1973, 'Autumn Song', 1973 and 'Country Fair', 1974. These are placed against later career highlights from the 1980s and late 1990s – 'Coney Island', 1989, and 'When The Leaves Come Falling Down', 1999.

How can we unravel the mystery of why a young person from a terrace house in East Belfast is so deeply influenced by the natural world in his songwriting?¹ It is a significant question. Perhaps it is because Belfast is different from other industrial cities like Glasgow and Manchester. The terrace streets around his home are urban places, yet within a stone's throw of the cranes of the industrialised shipyards. And, because of its relatively small size, people are never really more than a 20-minute walk from the countryside. Indeed, from East Belfast, the Castlereagh Hills are not far away, and once they are crested and the sight of the city is lost, you can feel as though you are anywhere in Ireland. Hughes (2014) reminds us of this proximity, when he cites Louis MacNeice's famous definition of Belfast – its location between the 'mountains and the gantries' (p. xv). Van Morrison is similarly aware of the closeness of nature in his world, and how walks as a child away from the city streets engendered heightened emotional responses:

Going up the Castlereagh hills and the Cregagh Glens in summer and coming back
To Hyndford Street, feeling wondrous and lit up inside, with a sense of everlasting life ('On Hyndford Street' (1991):

There might also be an explanation for Morrison's fascination with nature in his interest in folk and blues music, with their keenness to focus on the natural world and places away from the city. Perhaps it is about his eye for detail that extends into all aspects of his world. This eye for detail connects with earlier observations about Van Morrison where we find that he is not alienated or separate from the worlds he encounters. Van Morrison's finely attuned attention to detail extends to the interaction between the personal and the natural, and there are noteworthy parallels with the wider utilisation of

¹ We might also wonder if this influence is indeed a 'mystery'. The thesis has shown the different ways that Morrison draws on his own experiences in places and then imaginatively and creatively steps out of these places in his songwriting.

place and the natural world in Irish literature, as well as movements in popular music. These are the critical contexts that are used in the chapter to help make sense of Van Morrison's relationship to nature.

Critical Contexts: Irish Literature and Popular Music

As noted earlier, Van Morrison had little knowledge of Irish literary traditions from his school years, and was more likely to be influenced by the writing of the beat poets and books about philosophers and early jazz and blues musicians. He also talks about how he was strongly influenced by the urban and rural places he frequented as a child. This is important when considering the context of his songwriting. Nonetheless, there are resonances with other Irish writers in his poetic interest in nature. The centrality of place and the natural world in the poetry of postwar Ireland has been one of the central mechanisms through which a range of writers have sought to chart personal and social transformation. Thurston and Alderman (2013) contend that such approaches to place that work within phenomenological responses are involved with ways that a 'perceiving consciousness understands and incorporates the outside world' (p. 131). Examples of this are found in the works of poets like Patrick Kavanagh, Seamus Heaney and John Hewitt. For Kavanagh, such an approach to place is displayed, especially in the early Monaghan poems, through a strong physical presence in the landscape, and a concentration on the immediate and local as a structure of consciousness. A case in point is 'March', where Kavanagh displays a locally experienced sensitivity to seasonal changes, and in turn a connectedness across natural and human worlds (Shokouhi, 2019, p. 151). In volumes like *Wintering Out*, Seamus Heaney emphasises the importance of place through the relationship to place names and a linking of land, language and history (Thurston & Alderman, 2013, pp. 139-140). When Heaney writes about the

place where he grew up in ‘Anahorish’, as ‘the first hill of the world’, he is thinking about the significance of the place beyond its biographical importance to a wider history of habitation where local workers are connected to the earlier ‘mound dwellers’ (Thurston & Alderman, 2013, p. 140). John Hewitt’s conscious search for identity is facilitated through the natural world of the Antrim Glens, and it is this place that enables ‘a universal conception of his world to be more fully realised, one which was inherently gauged in terms of the natural world (Liam Heaney, 2005, p. 350). We can see his deep affection for and belonging with the natural world in poems like ‘Those Swans Remember: A Poem’, with lines, ‘... from the ancient legendary I share/simply by breathing in the drifting air/near the swift waters of a mountain glen’. While the songs in this chapter may not always have the same level of loco-specificity as these examples, they speak to personal transformations and ways that encounters with the natural world point to important questions around the human condition. These questions investigate issues about the interdependence of the human and the natural worlds, and the fragility and transience of life.

Similar to this literary context, the history of British and American music in this period is replete with artists interested in using the natural world as a springboard for their songwriting. There was an increasing thematic focus on the natural world in British music, and this had its beginnings in folk music traditions, before spreading across the worlds of folk-rock and psychedelic rock. Young (2010, p. 6) writes about waves of folk revivalism in Britain, from songwriters like Ewan McColl in the 1950s, to their younger successors in the 1960s. He suggests the conditions for ‘folk-rock’s golden age’ of late 1960s to early 1970s were propelled by the lyrical freedoms of Bob Dylan and ‘the unchained melodies of psychedelia’ (p. 6). For Young, circumstances in Britain in the late 1960s (fear of destruction, technological progress, a vision of alternative societies filtered through popular and underground cultures) conspired to

promote the ideal of ‘getting back to the garden’ and struck a chord in folk music (2010, p. 7). Both the influence of Dylan and the interest in folk music are worth considering. As noted in Chapter 2, the young Van Morrison was taken in by the lyrical exploration of Bob Dylan. Furthermore, his interest in the natural world parallels folk music’s propensity to see that world as a privileged site of interrogation. The ‘getting back to the garden’ movement in Britain, while resonating at its earliest folk music reaches (for example, in the songs of Nick Drake) with the Romantic poets’ ‘yearning for an intense communion with nature and a desire to reclaim a stolen innocence’ (Young, 2010, p. 7), increasingly drew in artists across the folk and psychedelic rock genres. Nostalgia for the innocent vision of the child was the context for the English pop-pastoral mood explored alongside of psychedelia in the late 1960s (McDonald, 2008, p. 216).

Musicians as diverse as The Beatles (‘Mother Nature’s Son’, *The Beatles*, 1968), to Pink Floyd (‘Scarecrow’ - *The Piper At The Gates of Dawn*, 1967), The Incredible String Band (*Wee Tam And The Big Hugs*, 1968) and Traffic (‘Berkshire Poppies’ - *Mr Fantasy*, 1967) blended ideas around a bucolic existence with representations of a psychedelic culture that focused on altered states of consciousness. Furthermore, towards the end of the 1960s, a group of British artists sought out countryside peace, caught within ‘nostalgia for a golden, bucolic, pre-technological age’ (Young, 2010, p. 44). This movement reconfigured musical energies away from the traditional city locations (for example, London and Liverpool), and found musicians like Paul and Linda McCartney, Nick Drake, Donovan, Fairport Convention, The Incredible String Band and Traffic both living in the countryside and drawing on natural locations as inspiration for their music. It is also worth noting that Van Morrison moved to Woodstock (New York) where he was a neighbour of Bob Dylan and The Band in 1969, and lived in the early 1970s in Marin County in the San Francisco Bay area (Rogan, 2006). He would have been well aware of the music and ideas of those seeking

rural inspiration for their music, and albums from the early 1970s reflected this awareness. This dynamic is certainly apparent in *Tupelo Honey* (1971) and *Hard Nose The Highway* (1973), and is on show in songs discussed in this chapter – ‘Snow In San Anselmo’ and ‘Autumn Song’.

Across the Atlantic, both the ‘back to the garden’ and pop-pastoral-psychedelia movements were aligned with the counterculture of the 1960s. The musicians of this period had a serious engagement with music as a mechanism for metaphorically taking them ‘back to the land’, rejecting what they saw as ‘the establishment’, and embracing the urge to live communally (Ingram, 2010, p. 119). Van Morrison would have been quite familiar with the music and ideas of the counterculture. He visited San Francisco when it was the centre of the counterculture with Them in 1966, and performed at venues (Fillmore East and Fillmore West) associated with prominent countercultural acts like the Grateful Dead (Rogan, 2006, p. 255). In its ‘flower power’ guise, this ‘back-to-nature spirit’ (MacDonald, 1995, p. 244) connected with a Romantic desire to return to a ‘simpler, more natural form of social life’ (Ingram, 2010, p. 119). The back to the land engagement and Romantic desires of counterculture music connected with a history of American folk that had been developing ecocritical perspectives. Long traditions of musical advocacy, stretching from the activism of Joe Hill, to the songs of Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, strongly influenced environmental protest music of the 1960s - a coalescence of folk and rock music (Pedelty, 2012, p. 58). Pete Seeger’s *God Bless The Grass* (1966) had been the first album in any genre of music to completely focus on environmental issues (Ingram, 2008), and the song, ‘My Dirty Stream (The Hudson River Song)’, evokes a pastoral ideal that brought together a ‘late Romantic nostalgic yearning’ with a future-oriented environmental focus (Ingram, 2008, p. 28). Artists like The Byrds (mid 60s albums blending pastoral views of nature with futuristic ideas), Graham Nash and ex-Byrd David Crosby (extending love of nature into activist,

environmental concerns), Captain Beefheart (lyrics that spoke of a reconnection with wild nature), Joni Mitchell ('Big Yellow Taxi', 1970, highlighting issues around overdevelopment), were prominent artists who embraced this new environmentalism. These movements provide a salient context for the 1970s songs discussed in this chapter, although it can only be a matter of speculation whether they directly impacted on the songwriting of Van Morrison. For sure, his poetic ventures in the natural world do have 'back to the garden' orientations. And as Smyth (2019) contends, the songwriter does align with a 'pastoral aesthetic tradition' that goes back to Wordsworth (IV, paragraph 6).

The connections and contexts across both literary and popular music provide insights into the times when Van Morrison first set out as a songwriter, and his early poetic forays into the natural world. From the 1980s, these preoccupations would open out through the artist's wider reading of poetry and philosophy. This element is discussed with reference to the songs in the next chapter, *City-Country*. For the time being, our current concern is with a group of songs that reflect a series of transcendental and contemplative encounters between Van Morrison and the natural world.

Van Morrison in Nature

In this chapter, songs represent responses to interactions with natural landscapes, elements and conditions. Attention is thus drawn to notably different expressions of place than those previously described, where memories of earlier places and times are often loco-specific (for example, the Hollow, Hyndford Street, the Maritime Hotel). Even when place is represented through generic settings in the songs from these earlier chapters (streets, rooms, apartment blocks), they are invariably bound up with coming-of-age episodes and nostalgia for earlier times, as well as tensions around farewells and

returns to home. While there are autobiographical elements of nostalgia in the songs in this chapter, place is deployed as a way of exploring the interplay of the natural world and everyday experience. Settings include country roads, swimming holes, riverbeds, the rural outdoors and beaches. For the most part, these sites privilege the generic (that is, the setting) over the geographic and the toponymic (that is, specifically named places). Sites are concerned with what Alexander and Cooper detect in Irish poetry as the intertextual creation of ‘atmospheric effects’ (2013, p. 7). In Van Morrison’s hands, responses to the natural world stand as important markers of his poetic world – his interest in the finer details and rhythms of nature, and how these alert him to think about his own place in the world. These markers may be thought of first in the way they highlight important Morrison motifs, and second in the way he responds to the features and rhythms of nature.

Water and Falling Leaves

One of the central ways that Van Morrison responds to the natural world is through the deployment of two recognisable motifs - water and falling leaves. Both feature in the songs discussed in this chapter. Rain and unseasonal snow both alert the songwriter’s senses. Natural settings heighten sensitivities to the rhythms of the world. Leaves drop to the ground and provide both a contemplative moment and an image where the wider dynamics of self-awareness and transformation open out.

As either weather (rain, snow) or topographical feature (waterholes, rivers, beaches), water holds special significance for the songwriter. While water is a part of the scene in many songs, it takes on a secondary meaning and significance through its symbolic value. Consider, for example, how the motif works across the lyrics of well-known and well-considered Van Morrison songs. The rain in ‘Brown Eyed Girl’ carries

feelings of fertility and the awakening of youthful spirit and energy. The misty wet gardens in 'Sweet Thing' (*Astral Weeks*, 1968) and 'In The Garden' (*No Guru, No Method, No Teacher*, 1986) bring up thoughts about idyllic, intimate and private home spaces, where anticipation of being spiritually uplifted and contemplation of earlier times merge. The fog and the associated sound of the foghorns in 'Into The Mystic' (*Moondance*, 1970) are both evocative of the return to home and the idea of a safe haven. Clearly, water as either a weather phenomenon or a topographical feature, provides an energy against which connections between the topography and personal meaning making can be explored by the songwriter.

Equally, the motif of falling autumn leaves is especially sensitive to the interplay of the rhythms and cycles of the natural world. For example, the falling leaves in 'Cyprus Avenue' (*Astral Weeks*) seem to mock the narrator's social alienation. In 'Moondance' (*Moondance*, 1970) the October skies and falling leaves provide a tapestry against which romance plays out. Leaves in 'A Sense Of Wonder' (*A Sense Of Wonder*, 1985) become both a physical and metaphorical pathway towards a spiritual understanding. Falling leaves are also, as Mills (2010) reminds us, both a long tradition in popular music and an enduring poetic motif (pp. 112-113).² He goes on to suggest that this is one of the ways that Van Morrison connects to both the traditions of popular music and Romantic poetry.

Responses to Nature: Transcendence

Van Morrison's responses to the natural world intersect across transcendental and contemplative lines. At this intersection they offer understandings about what it means

² Among many popular music examples are 60s songs by Simon and Garfunkel, 'Leaves That Are Green' (1966), and The Kinks, 'Autumn Almanac' (1967).

for the songwriter to be aware of the interdependence of the human and natural worlds, and in turn, how this sharpens his views on the complexities of the human experience, about passages in time, and about the fragility of life.

There is a finely attuned attention to the interaction between the personal, the natural and the transcendental through which the seemingly ‘everydayness’ of encounters with people (along country roads, in swimming holes, at the edge of a riverbed) are heightened by the rhythm and caprice of nature - falling rain, unexpected snowfall, the unfolding energy of the natural world. These are phenomenological experiences of ‘being-in-the-world’, and Heidegger’s concept of *dasein* has currency in their poetic framing. *Dasein* is, as Ingold (2010) argues in relation to Patrick Kavanagh, a dynamic that sees the human interconnectedness with the ecology of the natural world in which we dwell (quoted in Shokouhi, 2019). Thus, experiences embrace not only a sense of dwelling and rootedness, but also a reaching out to different places. Cooper writes about this reaching out as a movement across ‘landscapes and regions of existence’ (2008, p. 808). From a temporal and developmental perspective, these movements and negotiations have, every now and then for the songwriter, brought about a sense of ‘existential *ecstasis*’ - moments in time when new insights and experiences have the potential to transfigure pre-existing views about the human condition. Deranty (2014) writes about this in relation to popular music, using the example of British-Irish musician, Morrissey (p. 91). He talks about how popular music has the capacity to disclose aspects of the human experience through moments of heightened awareness. This is the ‘other dimension’ caught in the lines of ‘And It Stoned Me’.

One of the best-known examples of transcendent responses to nature is ‘Coney Island’ (1989), a song that captures sublime moments in trips across the Down countryside, south of Belfast. These moments echo with the need to find solace and

reward in simple shared pleasures - bird watching, feeling the weather, taking in the scenery, snapping photos, grabbing local food. The song is also aware of seasonal rhythms and infused with strong feelings of nostalgia for a place in time that might never be recaptured.³

Coney Island
Coming back from Downpatrick
Stopping off at St. John's Point
Out all day birdwatching
And the *craic* was good

Stopped off at Strangford Lough
Early in the morning
Drove through Shrigley taking pictures
And on to Killyleagh
Stopping for Sunday papers at the
Lecale District just before Coney Island

On and on, over the hill to Ardglass in the jam jar Autumn sunshine,
magnificent and all shining through
Stop off at Ardglass for a couple of jars of
Mussels and some potted herrings in case
We get famished before dinner

On and on, over the hill and the *craic* is good
Heading towards Coney Island
I look at the side of your face
As the sunlight comes streaming through the window
In the autumn sunshine
And all the time going to Coney Island I'm thinking,
'Wouldn't it be great if it was like this all the time?'

Mills (2010) refers to the song as 'the happily jumbled road map of one man's memories' (p. 274). This is a pertinent point. The songwriter's autobiographical expression of place here is not about recollections in a literal or linear sense, but rather the regathering of intersecting memories of locations and people. It is a good example of Van Morrison's songs that express a hybridity across realistic persona and situations

³ In an interview with Ian Rankin, Van Morrison talked about the significance of the song. He told how, as a boy (1959 – age 14 years), he helped deliver bread in the van for Stewart's Bakery, and he would have to get up early to make deliveries to Coney Island. Clearly, the places around Coney Island hold strong memories for the songwriter.

discussed in Chapter 1 (drawing on Auslander, 2009). ‘Coney Island’ is bound up with a realisation that these simple shared moments are there for the transformative taking, as the ‘openness’ and ‘naturalness’ of the topography catalyse imaginative possibilities. Thus, everyday pleasures (pastime, enjoyment and location) work their way through the lyrics towards a final epiphany. We might justifiably think of the pastoral qualities of the song in its lyrical and musical memories of times spent in the countryside. It pushes itself away from the noises of the city, as clearly as it distances itself from many of the norms of popular music.⁴ ‘Coney Island’ captures the continuous and enduring spirit of the place - a spirit that dwells on and celebrates the commonplace of the natural countryside, and the simple interactions around the sights of the towns, hills and waterways, the tastes of the herrings and the mussels, the touch of the sunshine, the emotional arrest of a glance across the front seat of the car. The Coney Island of the song then becomes, in its final image, a place of the imagination, where the possibilities for holding on to what once was ‘great’ might be realised.

Van Morrison’s shared poetic excursions in the countryside may not have the same sense of solitude as Wordsworth’s lonely traveller, or the critiques of colonisation and modernisation of a line of Irish poets from Oliver Goldsmith onwards (Potts, 2013, p. 3). Nonetheless, in songs like ‘Coney Island’ he imaginatively creates a romanticised picture of times spent in the country where spirits are lifted through the arresting everydayness of the natural world. The two songs that now follow in this chapter further illustrate these transcendental responses. The three scenes in ‘And It Stoned Me’ are brought together through an accord between human interactions and natural elements,

⁴ It is worth noting that recitation as a vocal strategy is a common feature in popular music. Indeed, Hank William (a Van Morrison inspiration) deployed it in his ‘Luke the Drifter’ pieces. Leppert and Lipsitz (1990) observe that these recitations rely on an understanding of the workings of memory as it connects to history, and that Williams recognised that songs are not so much social constructions but that ‘society itself is constructed by the songs we sing, the stories we tell and the *sounds* (emphasis in original) we voice in the narration’ (p. 271). This is interesting in the context of ‘Coney Island’, and other Van Morrison songs that use recitation (for example, ‘Angeliou’ [1979 – see, Chapter 10] and ‘When The Healing Has Begun’ [1979]).

between the basic need for companionship, support and refreshment, and the opportune ways that these needs are accommodated. It is this phenomenological self-awareness that characterises the song. Similarly, 'Autumn Song' (*Hard Nose The Highway*, 1973) paints a number of episodes against an autumnal background in which observations and emotions are sharpened and heightened by interactions with people and nature.

The initial chord of 'And It stoned Me' creates an immediate sense of vigour and youthful enthusiasm. The country soul energy (Hage, 2009), the neatly framed three verses and choruses building on each uplifting episode, the bucolic landscape of country roads, swimming holes and mountain streams, the humour and adventure and harmony - all these features of the song seem well-aligned. The responses to weather, terrain and human encounters elevate this everyday experience to the 'other dimension'.

Half a mile from the county fair
And the rain keep pourin' down
Me and Billy standin' there
With a silver half a crown
Hands are full of a fishin' rod
And the tackle on our backs
We just stood there gettin' wet
With our backs against the fence

Oh, the water
Oh, the water
Oh, the water
Hope it don't rain all day

[Chorus]
And it stoned me to my soul
Stoned me just like Jelly Roll
And it stoned me
And it stoned me to my soul
Stoned me just like goin' home
And it stoned me

Then the rain let up and the sun came up
And we were gettin' dry
Almost let a pick-up truck nearly pass us by
So we jumped right in and the driver grinned
And he dropped us up the road
We looked at the swim and we jumped right in
Not to mention fishing poles

Oh, the water
Oh, the water
Oh, the water
Let it run all over me

[Chorus]

On the way back home we sang a song
But our throats were getting dry
Then we saw the man from across the road
With the sunshine in his eyes
Well he lived all alone in his own little home
With a great big gallon jar
There were bottles too, one for me and you
And he said Hey! There you are

Oh, the water
Oh, the water
Oh, the water
Get it myself from the mountain stream

The ‘stoned’ of the song’s title and chorus might seem to be a nod to the dope taking aspects of 1960s counterculture. Alternatively, the natural high in the idyllic landscape might well be seen as an echo of certain elements of nineteenth century Romanticism - a celebration of the relationship between the natural world and the human imagination. It is also useful to think of this as a spontaneous experience. Van Morrison’s own words are helpful here: ‘It’s just about being stoned off nature. You know, remembering how it was when you were a kid and just got stoned from nature and you didn’t need anything else’ (Yorke, 1975, p. 72).⁵ The songwriter takes the adjective ‘stoned’ and uses it as a verb, alluding to how the wider force of the experiences takes him unawares. This was not about choosing the experience, but rather seizing the transcendental moment as it happens. This is a critical element of Van Morrison’s relationship with nature. Something stronger and unforeseen takes place, and this heightens the

⁵ Interestingly, given Van Morrison’s attraction to the writing style of the ‘beat poets’ (see, Chapter 3), one of the first (if not the first) uses of the term in literature is in Kerouac’s *On The Road* (1957) when he described an incident in the town of Sabinal where he got ‘proper stoned’ from drinking wine.

experience. And the force of the experience? It is 'just like Jelly Roll', it is 'just like goin' home'. The two similes merge and locate the uplifting experience within images of recaptured innocence - the enlightenment of discovering jazz as a boy and the comfort of returning home.⁶ There is an important balance to these images, one that speaks of the grounded dimension to this, so called, natural high.

Each verse is connected through narrative, setting and motif. The bucolic locations of the country road, the waterhole and the mountain stream, are alive with water, and so each image moves beyond the literal into the realm of the symbolic, the commonplace becoming an invigorated and spiritual site ('Oh the water'). The bridges between each verse and chorus bring the three episodes back to the elemental. The final lines ('Hope it don't rain all day', 'Let it run all over me', 'Get it myself from the mountain stream') offer different responses to, and synergies with, water. Rain is accepted in a spirit of being in sync with the outdoors and an associated attitude of, 'let it happen'. The image of the boys being washed by the rain is compelling. Down the road, the waterhole is embraced with alacrity. Even as they are getting dry, they leap in without hesitation. The bottles of water from the old man are ready and available.

Harmony and serendipity sit side by side here (see also, Mills, 2010). Harmony moves between the environment and the characters. Serendipity reinforces the alignment. Outsiders 'turn up' and contribute to the exalted feelings - the grinning pick

⁶ The interpretation offered here is that 'Jelly Roll' in this instance refers to the early 1900s jazz pioneer, Jelly Roll Morton. The words are capitalised in the published song lyrics issued by Warner Brothers. Van Morrison references the person Jelly Roll Morton in other songs: 'On Hyndford Street', 1991, 'The Healing Game', 1997, 'Philosopher's Stone', 1999, and 'Whinin Boy Moan', 2003, commonly as he connects with listening to music at home in his childhood and adolescence. He does use the blues slang term, 'jellyroll' (lower case) in two other songs: 'He Ain't Give You None', 1967, and 'And The Healing Has Begun', 1979. In these songs they certainly appear to refer to the sexual act. American blues singers employed the term as a euphemism for female genitals, and it is invariably associated with sexual intercourse (DeSalvo, 2006, p. 93).

up driver, the old man with the glint of sunshine in his eye. This is reminiscent of the trope of encounter, found in Romantic poets like Wordsworth, where unexpected encounters with other people or objects help figuratively to bridge gaps between outsiders and the natural places being visited (Thurston & Alderman, 2013, pp. 136-137). Thus, in Wordsworth's 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', the encounter with the old man from the past brings about questions about the worth of life. In 'Tintern Abbey', the natural features of the landscape evoke contemplations about a spiritual relationship with nature. In 'And It Stoned Me', Van Morrison similarly thinks about water in each location as spiritually uplifting, and the chance encounters with the driver and the old man as opportunities to think about human generosity. Mills writes about how the song has the 'atmosphere of harmoniousness and correspondence between desire and experience' (p. 320), and it is, indeed, a harmony of topography, natural force and human spirit. This is underscored by the intrinsic 'craic' that sits within the song's lyrics. From the picture of the boys almost missing the ride, the doubly emphasised adverbs pulling against each other: '*Almost* let a pick-up truck *nearly* pass us by' (emphasis added) - to the image of jumping aboard the truck and 'the driver grinned' - and then the enthusiasm of the jumping into the 'swim' - 'not to mention fishing poles'. Finally, of course, there is the poignant last scene and the generosity of the solitary old man, 'the sunshine in his eyes' - a reflection not only of his harmony with the purity of the waters he gathers from the mountain stream, but also for the needs of others who might chance by. The purity of the water is balanced with the purity of his human spirit. 'Hey! There you are', he offers, and harmony sits astride the mountain steam setting, the pure, clean water, and the chance meeting between a couple of boys with dry throats from singing, and a sparkling old man who has what they need at that moment.

In the same way as 'And It Stoned Me' works its way across different natural settings to describe a natural high, 'Autumn Song' takes the songwriter from a series of

shared observations about autumn scenes in a village in the countryside to an internal feeling of peacefulness. It clearly does not have the same autobiographical narrative of 'Stoned', although it seems fair to argue that the ideas and situations are realistic given Van Morrison's focus on the natural world. In comparison with the economical narrative of the previous song, 'Autumn Song' stretches itself across almost eleven minutes, and the transformative processes proceed through impressionistic exchanges with the sights and sounds of the landscape. As this happens, they become interpreted and internalised in a way that positions an external balance of landscape, seasonal change and human response towards an inner stillness and serenity.

The musical palette of 'Autumn Song' breezes out at the first bars and immediately sets up a lightness of tone. The jazz-influenced guitar phrasing and Sinatra-like vocals sonically match the autumn colours of brown leaves, red coals on the fire, the amber of roasting chestnuts, the hues of the raisins and almonds. Images and colours are scattered throughout the song. It's also a social place, moving with the sights and sounds of people out-and-about in the natural world. Children play games. Friends get together. 'The old accordion man plays mellow and bright'. The songwriter thus paints an autumn scene in music and lyrics that might well be likened to a Bruegel painting, with its earthy colours and a depiction of the daily life outdoors. Moreover, this atmospheric scene is a canvas against which senses are heightened across landscape and relationships.

While 'And It Stoned Me' has friends and passers-by as supporting players, a relationship between two lovers sits at the centre of the movement of 'Autumn Song'.⁷ This is a good example of what Smyth (2019, online) sees as a feature of Van

⁷ In this respect, it is one of the first of its kind in the Van Morrison canon. Later songs like 'Fair Play', 'Country Fair' (both from *Veedon Fleece*, 1975) and 'When The Leaves Come Falling Down' are examples of songs that will evoke the same sense of landscape and relationship.

Morrison's landscape of the mind – 'a place where love, nature and enchantment enter into a mutually informing relationship' (IV, paragraph 6). The opening verse positions the image of leaves outside with the inside space of the house - the interiority of the built environment is connected with the emotional space of desire.

Leaves of brown they fall to the ground
And it's here, over there leaves around
Shut the door, dim the lights and relax
What is more, your desire or the facts
Pitter patter the rain falling down
Little glamour sun coming round
Take a walk when autumn comes to town

Images are enclosed and suggest physical intimacy - looking from inside to the falling leaves outside, dimmed lights closing down the spaces, 'the rain falling down' keeping them indoors. Hereafter, there are constant reminders of feelings of being aroused.

Little stroll past the house on the hill
Some more coal on the fire will do well
And in a week or two it'll be Halloween
Set the page and the stage for the scene

Little game the children will play
And as we watch them while time away
Look at me and take my breath away yeah

You'll be smiling eyes beguiling
And the song on the breeze
Will call my name out and your dream

Chestnuts roasting outside as you walk
With your love by your side
The old accordion man plays mellow and bright
And you go home in the crispness of the night

A glance while watching children playing is exciting, a smile is beguiling, the breeze carries a dream-like song. It is being outdoors and the connections across the personal, relational and natural that catalyse the energies, and move the songwriter towards the uplifted state at the end of the song. These opening verses show again that Van

Morrison's relationship with the natural world is often focused on the small details that might otherwise, in other hands, go unnoticed.

When the sun breaks through, the scene is then experienced across all the senses. 'Autumn Song' (third verse at 1.02 to the coda at 5.10) now takes on some of the characteristics of a 'walk poem'. This is interesting, given suggestions that Van Morrison's songs about place share certain commonalities with Romantic poets. Alexander and Cooper (2013) write that 'the imaginative importance given to the spatial practices of walking' among post-war poets of space and place can be traced back to Romantic poets like Wordsworth (p. 11). They further observe, citing poets (including Thomas Kinsella) that the walk poem considers the experience of being in the landscape, rather than observing it as a static entity, and so the poetry becomes '*transcriptive* rather than *descriptive*' (Alexander & Cooper, 2013, p. 11, emphasis in original). Getting outside, walking, and taking in the sights, sounds and actions of the setting are key features of 'Autumn Song', and so a connection with 'walk poetry' is salient. Walking across the terrain opens up the 'imaginative possibilities' that are central to the transcriptive concerns of the song. We might see some slight connections here with the predispositions of the urban *flâneur*. However, in this rural environment the narrator is totally connected and involved with all the sights and sounds he comes across as he walks, and each encounter contributes to the song's mood and atmosphere. Nor is this atmosphere confined to the lyrics alone. The singer throughout plays with the words and stretches and holds onto sounds in ways that express the emotion being carried, with the music variously emphasising each episode. Consider, for example, the section about children playing. At the line 'the little game the children will play' (1.36), the vocals and backing express jauntiness evocative of the fun of the kids. And then, at the 'look at me and take my breath away', the voice drops at 'away' and extends into a barely voiced 'yeah' (three seconds from 1.48 to 1.51) and then an 'mmmm'. Direct

links between the lyrics and the breathless admiration are drawn from the fleeting look.⁸ As the song proceeds, the walking and the observations across the countryside lay the foundations for the transcendental shape of the experience. The ‘pauses’ in the walking stress the responses across the social and the natural spaces, first in ways that imply that the strength of the physical attraction is intensified within the harmony between the people and the natural environment, and second, in ideas around friendship and community in celebration of the changing season. At 5.10 the song breaks. The pace slows, as the vocals emphasise the words ‘Autumn Song’, and then lower into an expressive tone as it deliberates over the repeated words:

Just might have to break out
Just might have to lose control
Cause you got it in your soul

This ushers in the song’s contemplative coda. Lyrics placed and scatted over the quietly picked guitar, bring together images of sounds and movement, personal and physical exchanges. The coda gathers the preceding images and exchanges and holds them within thoughts about the transcendence.

Way out in the distance
Way over in the corner
A cable car moves
And I hear the church bell chime

Way out in the distance

Infinitesimal beauty of your eyes
And just me and my starlight gazing at almonds
Raisins something
Turn around
Hand on my shoulder
Saying ‘it’s so peaceful’
It’s so peaceful
Inside

⁸ See earlier chapters where it was observed that in many Van Morrison songs there is a conflation of the roles of singer and protagonist (drawing on Elliott, 2016). ‘Autumn Song’ is another clear instance of this.

Inside
I believe I've
Transcended myself child

There is now the flavour of an unhurried walk experienced for the contemplative natural and imaginative spaces being traversed. Spaces are contained and internalised within deliberations. The 'breaking out' and 'losing control' are not about outward pouring of emotions, but rather quiet thoughts about the chime of the distant church bell, a physical attraction ('Infinitesimal beauty of your eyes'), the 'gazing' at almonds and raisins. Spiritual and sensory domains move from the outside world to the intimate and 'inside' spaces of the touch on the shoulder and the unspoken, 'It's so peaceful'. It is an example of how Van Morrison takes listeners from observations about the relational and the natural to a spiritual domain. The vocals hold the repeated 'inside' three times and the voice is hushed as it ponders the transcendence ('I believe I've/Transcended myself child') from 9.50 to 10.23, where the song's opening riff is brought back and scatted in a ten second revision of the song's opening mood. The two sections of the song (the outdoors sights and sounds and the internalised responses to these) are held together in these celebratory closing sounds. In 'Autumn Song' Van Morrison's persona reaches out to a natural place, gets closer to the people, experiences and objects he bumps into along the way, and holds onto these in a moment of heightened awareness. Spiritual connections are found across the inner dimensions of the human experience with the outer workings of this natural world, and these are the connections that sit at the heart of Van Morrison's transcendental responses to the natural world.

Responses to Nature - Contemplation

Nature also provides opportunities for the expression of emotions surrounding the interdependence of humankind and nature, and this also embraces an appreciation of the finer details of the natural world. This is the attention to the ‘easily overlooked’ and ‘the spiritual in the commonplace’ that Mills (2010) and Rankin (2014) observe in the songwriter’s lyrics. As we have already seen, it is very noticeable in Van Morrison’s nature poems. Thus, river pebbles, an opening pinecone, once flowing cascades, now ice-bound and silenced, falling leaves - all induce contemplation. These songs illustrate how Van Morrison focuses on how to understand his place in the natural world. So, he muses on his experiences in nature and how these impact his own relationship within the topography, his own consciousness of rites-of-passage, his own sense of what the passing of time means physically and psychologically. In these responses we might well see parallels to the concerns of Romantic poets, like Blake and Wordsworth. Thurston and Alderman observe how they internalise impressions of idyllic places and locate them within their own experiences (2013, p. 134). Similarly, Van Morrison’s nature songs often describe contemplative responses that draw attention to the relationships between lived experiences and the patterns and tempo of landscape and season.

‘Country Fair’ (1974) highlights this confluence of setting and contemplation. It brings together the natural setting and the feeling of the passing of time, and combines these into a quiet and still reflective experience. Its free-formed sounds and unhurried pace gather up feelings of contemplative responses to the sight of the flowing river, the feel of the long green grass, the tactile nature of the pebbles and sand. At each of the scenes the shared response to the landscape is quietly entered.

We stood and watched the river flow
We were too young to really know

In the country fair
Oh in the country fair

We laid out in the long green grass
And never thought that it would pass
In the country fair
In the country fair

On an old, on an old open day
On an old rainchecked open day
In the country fair
In the cool night air
In sweet summertime

We counted pebbles in the sand
Sand-like time slipping through our hand
In the country fair
In the country fair

On an old, on an old open day
On an old rainchecked open day
In the country fair
In the cool night air
In sweet summer time

On that old pinecone open day

They stand and watch the flow of the river. They lay out in the field of green grass. They count pebbles in the sand. The song hints at unspoken communication. At the settings of river, field and beach, references are temporally framed, from unknowing innocence ('We were too young to really know'), to the feelings of changelessness ('And never thought that it would pass'), to the certainty of transience ('Sand-like time slipping through our hand'). The lyrics of the verses are hence filled with images of the inevitability of time passing, and summarised within the closing image of the sand falling through the hand, simultaneously referencing the physical touch and the steady slipping away of the grains in an hourglass. We're constantly reminded that it's an 'open day' - the sun is out, life is 'rainchecked' and possibilities are unconstrained. This is caught in the closing solitary line where the picture of the ovulate cone with its open plates delivers a telling symbol of ripeness and fertility. 'Country Fair' points to a

relationship that Van Morrison has with the natural world where there is a slowing down of time and a responsiveness to the rhythms of nature that are more enduring and powerful. The observations draw attention to a union between place and both immediate and deep time that can be seen in Wordsworth's poems such as 'Tintern Abbey' (Thurston & Alderman 2013, p. 136). This responsiveness is further illustrated in the final two songs in this chapter. 'Snow In San Anselmo' (1974) has a starkness and bluntness of lyrics within its observations about the human experience within, and in contrast to, the natural world. A quarter of a century later Van Morrison would open 'When The Leaves Come Falling Down' (1999) with an atmospheric picture that places the driving wind and rain touching a face, within a meditation about the sophistication and elegance of a falling leaf. The song expresses responsiveness to both the spacious sweep of topography and weather, and the small representation of the forces of nature.

'Snow In San Anselmo' might initially appear to be a rudimentary drawing of the contact between the outside world and a small town as it is hit with an unexpected winter storm. And it is. But in placing a set of almost incongruous images alongside of, and against each other, the song also manages to point to the continuities and interruptions within the intersecting rhythms of the natural and material worlds. These continuities and interruptions reflect a very different response to experiences in the natural world than the other songs in this chapter.

Snow in San Anselmo
The deer cross by the lights
The mission down in old San Rafael
And a madman looking for a fight
A madman looking for a fight

The massage parlor's open
The clientele come and they go
The classic-music station
Plays in the background soft and low
Plays in the background soft and low

Continuities are seen across the material world. Men keep looking for fights. Brothels are always busy. The well-worn songs of the classic-music stations predictably play out a soundtrack to the comings and goings of their clientele. The pancake parlour operates twenty-four seven. Interruptions occur at the intersection of both worlds. Deer cross roads where traffic lights have replaced their habitat. The reference to the mission at San Rafael might carry subtle reminders of the loss of Indigenous land. Snow falls now for the first time in 30 years. The seasonal cycle, for the time being, is suspended. The people notice all this but carry on, their actions and decisions of no impact on the workings of the weather. In this way Van Morrison again alerts us to a sense of the ‘bigness’ of the natural world. The specificity of the San Anselmo location provides a setting in a time when the routines and predictabilities of humankind seem to pale against the unpredictable rhythms and images of the outside world. The third verse provides the fulcrum for this comparison.

And there’s silence round the Cascades
And the air is crisp and clear
The beginning of the opera
Seem to suddenly appear
Seem to suddenly appear

Each side of this verse are sketches of the earthly and social spaces. Here the silence of the snow-halted cascades and the ‘crisp and clear’ air portend to something on a far grander scale, and connect to the transcendental moments of the other songs in this chapter. ‘The beginnings of the opera’ appear not in the trappings and practices of men and women, but in the focused micro images of a stream in a wintry landscape, even as that landscape has caught the onlookers unaware. The reference to the sudden appearance of the beginnings of an opera in this central verse is arresting. It focuses the observations away from the everyday comings-and-goings to an essential and clear

space. Note again the songwriter's use of silence as a suggestion of contemplation and serenity (see, Chapter 4). Furthermore, the reference now connects with the sounds of the song. The song starts with a sense of operatic grandeur, the choral introduction building a sense of width and space.⁹ These performative touches combine to bring forward an atmosphere that is evocative of lofty themes and observations. This atmosphere now sits at odds with the earlier stark impressions of the mundane and lowbrow - fighting madmen, the massage parlour, the greatest hits radio station. At the end of the preceding verse there is a musical interlude (1.28) taken up by the saxophone and piano before the choir swells in behind again and instruments and voices build to a crescendo. The choir sings, 'Holy, holy, holy' before the lyrics of the verse enter. The pace then slows, and the voice quietsens. It is the central image and conceit of the song, and the ordinariness that follows (the pancake house, the small-talk about the weather) only serves to add import to the image.

And the pancake house is always crowded
Open twenty-four hours of every day
And if you suffer from insomnia
You can speed your time away
You can speed your time away

Snow in San Anselmo
My waitress, my waitress, my waitress
Said it was coming down
Said it hadn't happened in over thirty years
But it was laying on the ground
But it was laying on the ground

While Van Morrison, perhaps a little dismissively, offers that 'Snow In San Anselmo' is a 'sketch on when it snowed in San Anselmo' (Yorke, 1975), p. 101), critics have looked at it more favourably. Mills (2010) writes about how it sits with songs like 'And It Stoned Me' and 'Country Fair' where seasonal cycles provide both image and inspiration and point to ways that the songwriter is especially aware of the

⁹ The Oakland Symphony Chamber Chorus provides the backing vocals throughout.

rhythms of the natural world. Hinton (2009) notes how the coming together of the singer's voice, the backing voices, and lyrics paint a 'picture of a world whose energy has dripped away' (p. 149).¹⁰ It is, indeed, a sketch across a social landscape, though the placement of everyday images against the simplicity and purity of the central frozen cascade elevates this beyond a simple observation. The song does show the songwriter attuned to topography and seasonal cycles, but it also pays attention to ways that these cycles can play out in unpredictable ways, and how these stand out against the daily repetitions that constitute everyday life. Finally, 'Snow In San Anselmo' invites listeners to consider how the commonplaces of the environmental and material worlds often stand in marked contrast to each other. In some ways it challenges earlier ideas about the ways humans are interconnected with the ecology of the natural world. There is a sense in the stark central image of the song that something is more ancient, bigger and more enduring than the day-to-day happenings in this small world.

The starkness of observation and imagery in 'Snow In San Anselmo' contrasts with the narrative and symbolism of 'When The Leaves Come Falling Down'. When both are placed against each other, there are some important similarities and differences in the contemplative responses to the natural world. Similarities can be seen in the ways that Van Morrison draws on different settings, and so captures the spirit of places in his lyrics. Choices of setting for each are interesting. 'Snow' was written when the songwriter was living in California and it seems likely that the song is based on a real observation. Rogan (2006) maintains that the reference to 'my waitress' is to his new girlfriend (p. 281), and this was at a time when he was being divorced from his first wife. We might see some parallels with the song's themes and interruptions to his own life. There is also the idea that common ideas about the interdependence of human and

¹⁰ Hinton (2009, p. 149) argues that the song is a shorter take on the concerns of Bob Dylan's 'Desolation Row' (1965), though it arguably seems less about an observation about urban decline that characterises that song.

natural world may be seen in different kinds of natural settings, and across different times in his musical career. Differences are found in the way he mixes his musical palette to capture the ideas that interest him. The coldness of the icebound town in ‘Snow’ is caught in the leanness of the lyrics, and the intensity of vocals and the swelling sounds play out the drama in the tensions between two contrasting worlds. ‘Leaves’ is measured and moves carefully through its scenes with an atmosphere that brings together encounter, observation and reflection. Although Morrison has mentioned Paris twice in his songs (also, ‘Angeliou’) there is no biographical evidence that this song is based on a real experience. Rather the setting in this city (‘the city of love’) is deployed to capture the relationship between place and love. Likewise the beach setting of the third verse and the accompanying Chet Baker soundtrack seem placed to make connections between landscape and human ideas, rather than recalling an actual event.

The opening image of ‘When The Leaves Come Falling Down’ speaks of facing natural elements head-on, pushing against their intrusion. It is also suggestive of an acceptance and embrace of conditions beyond human control – the something bigger that we see in ‘Snow In San Anselmo’. The song immediately alerts listeners to emotional touchstones about both resolution and inevitability. These are aligned with the song’s central theme of transience within continuity.

I saw you standing with the wind and the rain in your face
And you were thinking ‘bout the wisdom of the leaves and their grace
When the leaves come falling down
In September when the leaves, come falling down

There is a sense of wonder here, both in the lyrics and in the wistful, melancholic tone of the vocals with the quiet support of the Hammond, piano and guitar. We stop with the narrator and are taken in by the scene of the other person, deep in thought as the

'leaves come falling down'. The picture also promotes a shared sense of wonder, an unspoken conceit that they are both attuned to the symbolism of the falling leaves that are signaling seasonal changes in the natural world, and, by association, portending human temporality. It goes beyond this feeling of shared reflection. The personification of the 'wisdom' and 'grace' of the falling leaves extends the conceit to where the falling and dying leaves parallel the finite world of the two players in the song. If the leaves have 'wisdom', it is in the knowing acceptance of the inevitability of their cycle of life. If they have 'grace', it is in their symmetry and the elegance of the falling movement that signals their end, and the spiritual blessing that maintains the continuity of the cycle. 'Wisdom' and 'grace' then hold together the memories, reflections and resolutions across the following three verses and the chorus. Again we see a central element in Van Morrison's relationship with nature in the way the most common and immediate images of an autumnal street scene, are deployed in a consideration of enduring natural rhythms. The loss of the leaves foreshadows the inevitable human loss that comes with the passing of time.

In the second verse, night is falling and there is clarity in the picture of the moon and the clear sky that sits in contrast to the earlier rain and the leaves on the ground.

And at night the moon is shining on a clear, cloudless sky
And when the evening shadows fall I'll be there by your side
When the leaves come falling down
In September when the leaves, come falling down

This clarity brings resolution in the face of inevitability. Time is running out and the physical spaces in the chorus that follows ('garden and the wall') interplay with time passages ('the space before the twilight and the dawn').

Just as the first and fourth verses connect through the image of the leaf, the third verse paints a scene where the memories of being outdoors take them back in time.

Oh, the last time I saw Paris in the streets, in the rain
And as I walk along the boulevards with you, once again
And the leaves come falling down
In September, when the leaves come falling down

The shift from past to present tense between the two lines signifies the strength of the memory, and the ‘we’re back there walking down the street’ sensation it forces. Yet as the song continually reminds us, closeness is accompanied by fragility. The weather is stormy, and the rain and fallen leaves carry meanings beyond their description. Winter approaches, time is passing, closeness must inevitably lead to separation. It is this wisdom and the grace to accept this inevitability that work their way around the verses.

The beach setting of the fourth verses uses motifs of streams and rivers, and associations between topographical features and personal meaning making.¹¹

And as I’m looking at the colour of the leaves, in your hand
As we’re listening to Chet Baker on the beach, in the sand
When the leaves come falling down,
Woe in September, when the leaves come falling down
Oh when the leaves come falling down
Yeah in September when the leaves come falling down

The reference to Chet Baker is significant, connecting across both lyrics and music.¹²

Think of a life and career that promised so much, but fell from grace and faded.

Contrast that to the purity and grace of the falling leaf. Bring to mind the melancholic sounds, lyrics and pacing of his most famous song, ‘My Funny Valentine’ (1954).

Consider how the words of that song strike at tensions between the imperfections of ‘what is’ and the request to ‘don’t change a hair’, and then place these against the ideas

¹¹ Listeners may be reminded of the beach in ‘Country Fair’ and the images of counting pebbles and hand slipping through fingers as allusions to the passing of time

¹² Van Morrison has only referred to Chet Baker twice in the catalogue. The other time is in the song, ‘In Tiburon’, from the 2016 album, *Keep Me Singing*, (see Chapter XX). Morrison recorded Chet Baker’s ‘Let’s Get Lost’ on the 2017 *Versatile* album.

around the inevitability of change in ‘When The Leaves Come Falling Down’. There is an unfinished shape to this fourth verse. The two opening clauses are left open, and so there is a suspension of time at the point of the reflection on the colour of the leaves. What happens is beyond resolution and completion, and we are left with the continued falling of the leaves, as persistent reminders of time passing.

All the while the autumn settings of moonlight, boulevard and beach accelerate emotions around impermanence, and against this are the assurances and invitations in the chorus of being spiritually and physically together, even into the future.

Follow me down, follow me down, follow me down
To the place beside the garden and the wall
Follow me down, follow me down
To the space before the twilight and the dawn

These support the theme of transience and continuity - the first place (garden and wall) moving from the open to the enclosed, and the second space (between twilight and dawn) from the end to the new beginning. The motif of garden in this song traverses borders between the natural and the human-built (see, Mills, 2010, p. 109), and stands for fertile and contemplative spaces.¹³ The wall signifies a boundary and an ending to these spaces in time. Twilight represents the interlude between the enlightened daytime and the concealing shadows of night, and the dawn expresses the hope and optimism of a new day. There is a movement from the built places to symbolic places and spaces where contemplation offers ‘the wisdom of the leaves and their grace’ as a way of coming to grips with the inevitable fall. The song winds down in coda after the fourth

¹³ Elsewhere the garden symbolises an idealised vision of Ireland, and a place to revisit through memory as a challenge to the pressures of distance and time (for example, the seminal lines from ‘Sweet Thing’: ‘We shall walk and talk, in gardens all misty wet/All misty wet with rain/And I will never, never, never grow so old again’).

verse, the recycling repetitions of the lines a final reminder of the enduring continuity and inevitability of life across the natural and human realm.

‘When The Leaves Come Falling Down’ stands as a timely later career reminder of the importance that Van Morrison places on the natural world as a conduit to heightened states of awareness and reflection. It draws attention to the songwriter’s continual attention to the movements and elements of nature, and how this asks critical questions about his own place in his created world, and the interplay of down-to-earth experiences with the mysteries of life. The song also harks back to the earlier songs in this chapter in its overriding conceit that life can be grasped and experienced most intensely when the mind is attuned to the physical features and patterns of nature (Mills, 2010, p. 114). Finally, it reinforces the thought that the natural world provides the songwriter with a palette that allows him to express both the idea and musical impression of the grace and fragility of nature.

Van Morrison’s nature songs draw on encounters and observations in the natural world to contemplate questions about the human experience. They take as their starting points shared interactions with topography and the weather conditions and their impact at the intersection of the natural and human worlds. Transcendental responses consider these encounters in ways that centrally position the recognising and seizing of transcendental moments. Contemplative responses consider the rhythms of the natural world and place these against questions about the human experience and the passages of time. The shared nature of the interaction is interesting. While the persona that Van Morrison often portrays in songs is that of the lone and isolated traveller, not quite belonging in any place (see, Mills, 2010, p. 252), it is also the case that invitation and shared journeys both sit centrally in many of his lyrics. These songs are good examples of this,

from the boyhood jaunts of 'And It Stoned Me', to the casual talk about the weather in 'Snow In San Anselmo', to the relational intimacy in 'Autumn Song', 'Coney Island', 'Country Fair' and 'When The Leaves Come Falling Down'. The spiritual and reflective pause is generated at the intersection with the natural world in each of the songs through close attention to everyday materials (pebbles, sand, leaves), landform features (streams, rivers, beaches, icy cascades) and human thoughts and actions. Motifs of water and autumn leaves play out across these materials, features and human experiences. The songs highlight different ways and in different places, that the songwriter is particularly attuned to the features and rhythms of the natural world. Finally, they each offer salient examples of the ways that Van Morrison consciously crafts a musical palette to support the synergies between narrative, terrain and contemplation that characterise his poetic encounters with nature.

9. City-Country

Go up to the mountain, go up to the glen
When silence will touch you
And heartbreak will mend

These final lines from 'I'm Tired Joey Boy' (*Avalon Sunset*, 1989) point to a need to escape from the city, and position the countryside as a place of spiritual healing. They pick up on earlier Van Morrison themes around the transformative and contemplative power of nature, and the harmony of the human and natural worlds. It is at the intersection of contemplation and healing that the songs in this chapter focus. The previous chapter argued that the Morrison has long been attuned to the topography and rhythm of the natural world. This reflected a wider Irish focus on both the natural and man-made features of specific places, and their role in generating meaning for a range of poets (Thurston & Aldeman, 2013, p. 159). The ways that Van Morrison takes up his experiences across the city and the country is considered in this chapter, and how each represents different perspectives across the built and natural worlds. The songs offer a critically different perspective to previous chapters that examined the artist's relationship to either city streets or the countryside. They cast a light on the ways that Morrison writes about the transition between these places, and how he sees the values, ideas and associations from one inhabiting the other. Mills (1994) points out the importance of this transition, when he argues that songs like 'Alan Watts Blues' (1987) that 'admit' both the city and the country, are successful because they forge a link between the spiritual desires that may be sought in either city streets or country lakes and mountains (p. 98). This chapter shows how thinking about both these places provides further insights into Van Morrison's relationships with his imaginary world. We can see in these songs that the city and the country stand for different kinds of

spiritual desires – the first to revisit childhood memories, and the second to travel out to new contemplative spaces. The city and the country also stand for mutually supportive places where either the practical work of the music industry is done, or, as has been shown in the previous chapter, where the sites and inspiration for much of this work takes place. The specific interest of this chapter is how these places of both desire and support are integral to Van Morrison’s work.

Van Morrison and the City-Country Duality

While the previous chapter observed that Van Morrison has been poetically in step with nature from his earliest days, it is evidently the case that the poetic world inhabited by the songwriter sits astride both the built and natural worlds. As we have seen, for the songwriter meaning is made out of places as different and distinctive as neighbourhood streams (‘Brown Eyed Girl’, 1967), lofty avenues (‘Cyprus Avenue’, 1968), street corners (‘The Healing Game’, 1997) and country roads (‘And It Stoned Me’, 1970). Oftentimes, Van Morrison’s songs do not entirely focus on either the city or the country, and they frequently move across streetscapes and landscapes, seeing importance in both. Van Morrison writes about this in ‘Santa Fe’ (1978).¹

I can feel it from the mountain top
Runnin’ down to the foamy brine
In a restaurant ‘cross a table top
Looking into a glass of wine
Whispering in the evening breeze
Green leaves glistening eucalyptus trees

Later in the song, ‘Santa Fe’ gradually morphs into the coda-like ‘Beautiful Obsession’, where Morrison sings about a ‘feeling’ that he looks for in these different city and

¹ It is acknowledged that ‘Santa Fe’ was co-written with Jackie DeShannon.

country places. In this way the songwriter encourages listeners to see that his search for, and sensitivity to the transcendental, are equally at home in both kinds of locations. It is the transition and contrast that the juxtaposition of these images brings to our attention, and the songs in this chapter pick up on this. Importantly, they show that feelings for both places exist in a close geographical and emotional proximity.

The city-country songs in this chapter are from the 1980s and are placed against thematic movements and influences from that period. It is in this period that this particular focus came more strongly into play. Having said that, a look through the Van Morrison catalogue reveals that the contract between these landscapes has been a regular feature of his songwriting. Earlier songs like ‘Brand New Day’ (1970), ‘Old Old Woodstock’ (1971), ‘Redwood Tree’ (1972), and ‘Flamingos Cry’ (1977) position the venturing out from the city to the country as a way of finding a place of healing, comfort and escape. In each song, the city and the country are neighbouring spaces, separated by a short distance, and easily traversed. As argued in the previous chapter, possibly growing up in Belfast where the harbour, city streets and surrounding hills sit within close proximity to one another imprinted the sense of this relationship. The importance of both city and country is a central aspect of the city-country duality, and there are two aspects that are illustrated in the songs in this chapter. First, Van Morrison describes processes and movement *between* the city and the country. The country is associated with walking, exploring and getting away – and then becoming spiritually uplifted. Mills (1994, p. 94) aptly labels this, ‘poetic excursions’. Second, local parts of his home city are tied up with strong nostalgic emotions. Just as ‘away’ from Belfast is almost always countenanced through memories of ‘home’ (see, Chapter 4), so too, the city is a place of necessary return physically and metaphorically, and often strongly associated with home. Processes and movement as key symbolic expressions of experiences in the city and country are keenly described in ‘A Sense Of Wonder’

(1985), a song referring to the way that the quality of the contemplative experiences in the countryside is brought back into the city – and how both places are enriched in the process. Here is an extension of the ideas from earlier songs like ‘Santa Fe’ where the same emotion is experienced across all locations. This is an important distinction between these city-country songs and those mainly focused on times spent in the natural world.

In two of the three songs featured in this chapter - ‘Alan Watts Blues’ (1987) and ‘I’m Tired Joey Boy’ (1989) - the city-country dualism is somewhat aligned with the persistent and contested view within Irish literature that rural places represent an idealised green and unspoiled landscape (Kennedy-Andrews, 2007, p. 4). Within this view, the countryside is seen to represent tradition, stability and a pure, simple form of life. In contrast, the city stands for change, uncertainty and the lived experience of complexity. There are also reminders of a broader sense of being away from the city in literature’s pastoral traditions (Potts, 2011, p. 6), and the spatial practice of walking in the countryside that owe much to the contributions of Wordsworth and other Romantic poets (Alexander & Cooper, 2013, p. 11). Note also, that in popular music, the city is sometimes depicted as a challenging and difficult place - where feelings of tranquillity are frequently elusive (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 74).² Importantly for Van Morrison and his grounding in the traditions of blues music, escaping from the city and being on the road in that genre is often associated with getting away from personal and social difficulties. Escape from city streets and pressures also gained traction as a theme within the late 1960s British folk-rock scene. Young (2010) writes that while the nurseries of this boom might have been mainly based in cities (for example, London,

² This is notwithstanding earlier observations in Chapter 2 about the contradictory ways the city is invariably viewed – for example from The Kinks’ celebration of the paradisaical wonder of a Waterloo sunset, to Don Walker’s intrigue with the seedy end of town in ‘Breakfast At Sweethearts’ (1979).

Birmingham, Edinburgh), the young songwriters sought rural enlightenment away from city that bleeds the soul and ‘scythes away humanity’ (p. 282). He cites Sandy Denny’s ‘The Pond And The Stream’ (1970) as encapsulating that mood of escape from the city. While we have seen that this is an important dynamic for Van Morrison, his songwriting displays a much closer emotional and spatial relationship between city and country, and, as argued in Chapter 2, his treatment of place frequently challenges the common city-country dichotomy.

Traditional aspects of the city-country duality in both literature and popular music are recognised in this chapter, and this recognition provides a useful way to compare the intentions of each of the songs. In each there is movement across city and country spaces. All position the country and the natural world as a source of inspiration and solitude - a place to escape from worldly pressures and to contemplate a more ‘simple’ life among autumn leaves, rivers, mountaintops and glens. ‘A Sense Of Wonder’ traces an excursion that is personal and remembered, abstract and allegorical. It is a journey first through, and then away from, familiar Belfast places, working its way around the recognisable Van Morrison themes concerning the transience and fragility of life, and the contemplative responses to experiences in the country. The final two songs, ‘Alan Watts Blues’ (1987) and ‘I’m Tired Joey Boy’ (1989), pit the demands of the city against the uncomplicated contentment to be found in countryside places. There is a sense of optimism in the words and sounds of ‘Alan Watts Blues’. Here, getting away from the city is always available, and is a matter of having the will to escape and become ‘cloud hidden’. By comparison, ‘I’m Tired Joey Boy’ carries traces of a symbolic exile, and a melancholic attempt to recapture identity through what Burke sees in Van Morrison’s work as the ‘curative qualities of the environment’ (2013, p. 195). In this, but not all respects, it falls in line with what Potts (2014, citing Yeats’ ‘The Lake Isle Of Inisfree’) notes are some of the features of the pastoral traditions in

Irish literature that contrast ‘the basic goodness of an idealized, rural lifestyle with the dehumanized context of life in the city’ (p. 8). That is, both songs position the topographical reaches of the countryside as a collective set of places that symbolise restorative spaces not to be found in the city – albeit within the Morrison challenge to the city-country dichotomy that is the focus of this chapter.

A Changing Dynamic

The songs in this chapter bring together a number of important thematic movements that Van Morrison embraced from the 1980s onwards - namely, a greater awareness of poetic tradition, an eclectic interest in spirituality, and an increased feeling of symbolic exile.

The 1980s was a period when Morrison’s song writing reflected influences from his reading of the Romantic poets (Wordsworth and Coleridge) and experiences walking in the English countryside (Heylin, 2002, p. 359; Rogan, 2006, p. 331).³ Both these heralded a subtle shift in the ways he expressed his experiences in the natural world. However, it would be too simplistic to say that these songs are merely a rehearsal of pastoral tradition and a celebration of the ‘naturalness’ of country life. The period did produce songs that spoke of the values of experiences in the country. Yet it is also characterised by what Hage describes as ‘the path to enlightenment’, and involvement with issues of spirituality (2009, p. 97). This is aligned with the songwriter’s long and public battle with the ‘music industry’ (with managers, critics and media). Morrison describes it this way: ‘I just drew a blank, especially goin’ through what I did in the

³ Critics note this influence. For example, Smyth (2019, online) writes that Van Morrison has an ‘ongoing response to the English folk mystique, involving poets such as Blake and Wordsworth’ (VI, paragraph 7). He references this in relation to ‘Piper At The Gates Of Dawn’ (*The Healing Game*, 1997), and observes Van Morrison’s interest in imagined locations like Avalon.

music business. Nothing made any sense ... So, I started reading, broadening out the picture to give me a different take on it" (Hage, 2009, pp. 106-107). The reading took him to W.B. Yeats⁴ and William Blake, and to the Antrim Glens poet, John Hewitt. It also took him to philosophers like Alice A. Bailey⁵ and Alan Watts. He had a brief dabble with Scientology.⁶ Moreover, it was a period where he embarks on his 'long journey home', with romanticised images of home and a 'fixed, deep-rooted identity, one of place as well as people' (Mills, 2010, p. 54). The 'different take' that Van Morrison was looking for is reflected in the songs in this chapter. They show a continuation of the interest in the natural world that had its beginnings in songs like 'Brown Eyed Girl' (1967) and 'And It Stoned Me' (1970), and display some resonances with pastoral traditions. There are also comments about the music industry and their city connections. All position the country as a place of contemplation and healing. Expressions of exile through memories of home as symbolised by the city are also found in 'A Sense Of Wonder' and 'I'm Tired Joey Boy'.

All of these influences are instructive for the way the songwriter approached his experiences across the built and natural worlds. His celebration of places away from the

⁴ Several critics draw comparisons between the writing of Yeats and Van Morrison. Mark (1979) talks about how they both 'are acquainted with the mystic and sing the ancient ways' (p. 12), and know how to make extreme romanticism work. Mills (1994) sees elements of Yeats' romantic sensibilities (for example, in 'Lake Isle of Innisfree') and 'spiritual sensation' in Van Morrison's lyrics (p. 100). However, both Mark and Mills counter that they might just as easily have focused on Leadbelly, Otis Redding (Mark, 1979, p. 14), Ray Charles, Mose Allison or John Lee Hooker (Mills, 1994, p. 91). Van Morrison talked about how he had written about 100 songs before he had read any poetry by Yeats. This was in response to a question about how some writers had seen connections between Van Morrison and Yeats with respect their 'sense of mystery' (Dawe, 2011, pp. 180-181). See also, Chapter 3, footnote 9.

⁵ Alice A. Bailey was credited in the cover notes to *Beautiful Vision* (1982). Her influence can be found on a 'Celtic Ray', 'Aryan Mist', 'Dweller On The Threshold' and 'Across The Bridge Where Angels Dwell'.

⁶ On the liner notes for the 1983 album, *Inarticulate Speech Of The Heart*, Van Morrison thanked Scientology founder, L. Ron Hubbard. This focused media attention, and in 1983 and 1984 Van Morrison tried to ban any mention of Scientology in interviews. As he told Turner in interview, 'It was when I started to get into the organisation that I didn't want to do it any more. I hate organisations and I think there are a lot of people in the organisation who haven't got a clue' (Turner, 1993, p. 153).

city falls in line with pastoral traditions, their ‘imaginative recreation of country life’ (Potts, 2011, p. 6), and associations with the ‘Irish literary revival’ (of writers like Yeats), with its protest against modernisation and its uncritical idealisation of Irish peasant life (p. 8). From this perspective, cities are associated with ‘culture’ and the countryside with ‘nature’, and the ‘naturalness’ of folk life (Raymond Williams, quoted in, Hirsch, 1991, p. 1120). Among Irish poets, including Patrick Kavanagh, John Montague and Seamus Heaney, the vitality of the pastoral has continued.⁷ For example, Potts observes Heaney’s utilisation of the pastoral tradition in his search for harmony between human experience and nature, and the longing for a simpler, more innocent world. He suggests these energies are much the same as for Yeats and Wordsworth (Potts, 2011, p. 15). Van Morrison inhabits some of this territory in his approaches to city and country. Within this world the city often stands for the ‘business’ of the music industry, while the country represents a reprieve from the pressures associated with the city. The songs in this chapter provide a salient cross-section of these ideas, offering insights into critical ways that Van Morrison imaginatively transitions between places in the city and in the countryside. The songs show again the restless energy that carries him away from familiar places, even while those are held tightly in his memory. They provide examples of the ways that Van Morrison continues to ask important philosophical questions, and to negotiate identity from within everyday places and experiences.

⁷ Seamus Heaney observes this ‘continued vitality of the pastoral’, in his critique of John Barrell’s assertion in *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse* that the genre was dead (quoted in, Potts, 2011, p. 14).

City-Country and the Poetic Excursion

In 'A Sense Of Wonder' the poetic excursion from the city to the country becomes a metaphorical process through which a physical journey allows the 'openness' and 'naturalness' of the topography to generate imaginative possibilities for the artist. The walk 'through the days of the leaves' brings together both remembered and imagined places, and holds them in balance. For Van Morrison, this is a critical feature of his writing, and is clearly on display in this song. The city and the country are deployed as metaphors for different kinds of longing. The city stands for Belfast and for childhood pleasures held in memory. The country symbolises a longing for new ideas. Here we see a clear departure from the concerns of the pastoral tradition in Van Morrison's work. He has an affection for the city as a place of imaginative return, and previous chapters on Home and Streets have highlighted this affection as an important aspect of his songwriting narrative. In 'A Sense Of Wonder' the tramping is out of the city and over familiar and recognisable landmarks and roads. While this happens, such places symbolise steps into contemplative spaces. This is 'Van Morrison territory' and he draws on past experience to build the narrative. The 'wonder' of the title and the chorus represents a passage in the philosophical journey towards enlightenment. Within this journey, being caught in wonder is not so much to be in uncertainty and puzzlement, but rather to be in 'a state of progressive and elevated spirit ... a sense of wonder is a way through to heightened perception' (Mills, 1994, p. 97). Fundamental to this dimension is the way that both the city and the country are mutually supportive places.

Contemplation sharpens the sensitivities around identity that is located across different parts of the artist's imaginative city and country world. Memories of former places are reminders of how this project is contingent on affection for the local haunts of his childhood.

In the liner notes for *A Sense Of Wonder* (1985) there is a short story involving three characters. Boffyflow is a dimwitted ‘buckijit’,⁸ physically covered in leaves, an image that mirrors the album’s cover photo, and suggests a preoccupation with what leaves stand for. Spike seems more measured and thoughtful, looking for answers. McDole has these answers, though they are not straight forward, and he has coded them on a piece of paper that Spike keeps in his pocket. The story is illuminating for a reading of ‘A Sense Of Wonder’.⁹ It is interesting to observe the textual and thematic connections between the story and ‘A Sense Of Wonder’. The Boffyflow and Spike characters are named in the second verse of the song as part of the ‘we’ who are walking and singing their songs, and in this verse the roads and districts they are tramping are in the same places - Gransha and Ballystockart. Hinton (2000, p. 274) identifies Boffyflow as Van Morrison’s alter ego, and argues that in setting himself up as a comical and foolish ‘buckijit’, rather too preoccupied with the meaning of leaves and thus out of touch with reality, the songwriter had learned to lighten up and poke fun at himself.¹⁰ This proposal has some currency when the story and the song are considered together. A further suggestion offered here is that both the Boffyflow *and* Spike characters stand for different sides of the songwriter’s alter ego, and this stacks up against the shape and theme of ‘A Sense Of Wonder’. Boffyflow is the dreamer, continually on the quest for enlightenment, always in the ‘days of blooming wonder’. He holds onto leaves as

⁸ Irish slang for a very great fool.

⁹ Hinton (2000, p. 247) sees similarities to the ‘gnomic wit’ of Bob Dylan’s story on the liner notes for *John Wesley Harding* (1967)⁹ in which the characters offer details of the songs. There might well be a speculation as to whether Van Morrison’s was alluding to that album’s religious themes in the *Sense Of Wonder* album, itself noted for its search for enlightenment.

¹⁰ The story finishes with McDole mumbling, ‘Blinkin’ Cowboys, Blinkin’ Cowboys’, prompting Hinton (2000, p. 247) to propose that Van Morrison is laughing at his ‘Belfast Cowboy’ nickname. This nickname was first coined by Robbie Robertson and Richard Manuel (members of The Band). Van Morrison played on The Band’s fourth album (*Cahoots*, 1971) and the nickname appeared in the lyrics of the song, ‘4% Pantomine’, in which vocals were shared between Manuel and Morrison. This was the first reference, though it has been reported that Robbie Robertson had coined the phrase beforehand (Viney, 1996).

symbols of time passing, taking time to study their changes in textures and colours, looking for understanding. Spike looks back for answers in the memories of home, his nostalgia for the characters, sights, sounds and tastes of boyhood. Together, they walk over and away from familiar city streets to the less-visited outer villages and their natural worlds. The song's conceit is that this is an excursion towards understanding ('shining our light'), and so metaphorically traces a path from the nostalgia of the past and perhaps never to be recaptured times, to new ideas and perspectives. It is this movement that brings the metaphor for longing into play, as the city stands as a symbol of the past, and the country as a place where spaces can be found that open up a state of heightened perception. Critically, both are held in equal importance. It is from these dual vantage points of looking outward and delving back that the meanings of the leaves can be described - and so too questions about the human experience can be considered. 'A Sense Of Wonder' seems to be a neat, local encapsulation of Hughes' contention that Van Morrison's lyrics drill down and back into origins and memories, and surge outwards to other places (2014, p. xviii). Furthermore, this reading resonates with the shape and texture of the song.

There is an air of quiet invitation into the 'A Sense Of Wonder'. The opening shimmering sounds of the organ, the softness of the backing vocals, the snap of the drums - all seem measured and evoke a lack of urgency. The instruments jostle with each other and the vocals lift as they go, the series of three drumbeats stepping out a walking pace. This texture sets up a stately reverie, moving with a quiet hymn-like intensity. When Van Morrison breaks in at 0.27 with the opening line, the vocals reach out and upwards, unhurried but purposeful.

I walked in my greatcoat,
Down through the days of the leaves.
No before after, yes after before
We were shining our light into the days of blooming wonder,
In the eternal presence, in the presence of the flame

It seems quite possible to pick up on the feeling of a setting out, the greatcoat buttoned up against the outside elements. And the voice drops again. His voice lowers and announces thoughts about the timeless quest ('the eternal presence ... of the flame') that is now being joined. The three verses play out this musical palette, their unhurried sounds in contrast to the church-like certainty of the chorus, and the spoken memories of the coda that ring with an East Belfast argot. This shaping of 'A Sense Of Wonder' sits well within the interplay of the themes of searching for new understandings as symbolised by the country, but still holding onto the importance of the past as seen in the metaphor of the city. Through the connections of these city-country metaphors, the song is casting Van Morrison's identity as inescapably tied with both memory and the path to enlightenment. The first verse sets the scene and establishes the theme of a journey. This is personal ('my greatcoat'), yet shared ('we were shining'), and abstract ('yes after before'). The place is defined by the autumnal season ('days of the leaves') and hence the passing of time. Time is indeterminate, caught as a conundrum between the past and the present. Van Morrison re-employs two images in this verse. 'Greatcoat' is a symbol of the decision to go for a long walk away from the city- it needs to be taken down and put on - taking on the elements and seasonal changes of nature, and wondering what they mean. The setting out is emblematic of a physical and spiritual experience - 'the fiery vision bright'. 'Shining our light into the days of blooming wonder' speaks of the flowering of ideas - the interplay of natural rhythms with human reasoning.¹¹ The chorus echoes with a reluctant lament, spoken not as one who 'knows the truth', rather a guide and supporter. In this respect this idea anticipates the lines that

¹¹ 'Greatcoat' is used in 'When Heart Is Open' from the *Common One* album with the same poetic intent: 'Oh, hand me down my old great coat/I believe I'll go walking in the woods'. The second image ('shining our light') is in 'You Don't Pull No Punches, But You Don't Push The River' from *Veedon Fleece* (1974), a song that opens with recollections of youthful innocence (maybe those lost), and then settles on its incessant invitation to cleanse the soul in a search for the imaginary 'Veedon Fleece'. The image captures well this interplay of innocence and the indeterminate search: 'Shining our light into the days of bloomin' wonder/Go in' as much with the river as not, as not'.

follow from the fourth verse. The ‘god’ is not Sophia, the goddess of wisdom, but rather Philosophy, which draws on its meaning from the Greek, *philosophia*. Van Morrison makes a distinction between someone who has the wisdom, and one who thinks deeply about the broader questions of life. His deployment of the phrase ‘sense of wonder’ reflects a desire to look for knowledge through the contemplation of the wonders of nature. Thought about this way, his walking through the countryside aligns with conservationist Rachel Carson’s (1965) ideas about the childlike wonder and awe to be found in the natural world.¹²

Didn’t I come to bring you a sense of wonder,
Didn’t I come to lift your fiery vision bright
Didn’t I come to bring you a sense of wonder in the flame

This places the search and the response into perspective - I don’t know the answers, but my enlightenment is to push ever forward with questions. Emphasising this point, the second verse paints a scene of a shared journey over familiar territory in County Down.

On and on and on and on we kept singing our song,
Over Newtonards and Comber, Gransha and the
Ballystockart road.
With Boffyflow and Spike, I said I could describe the leaves
for Samuel and Felicity,
Rich, red browney, half burnt orange and green

The references to the local places are reminders that these city and country places are in close proximity, and so both are within easy reach of each other. Close physical distances underscore close emotional distances. In the walk away from the city we hear the singing and the chatter about the leaves, we feel we ‘know’ the characters.¹³ And then, in the third verse we are reminded that this is a temporal journey, seasons change

¹² There is no direct evidence that Van Morrison is referencing Carson’s, *A Sense of Wonder* (1965), though its themes of walking together through nature and celebrating the awe that encounters with nature can bring, are consistent with the Morrison song.

¹³ Just as we do in songs like ‘And It Stoned Me’ and ‘Cleaning Windows’.

and there is a need for resilience through ‘the winter of our discontent’,¹⁴ when the answers in the leaves are not so readily found as in the changing colours of Autumn, or the flowering of Spring.

On and on and on, through the winter of our discontent.
When the wind blows up the collar and the ears are frostbitten too,
I said I could describe the leaves for Samuel and what it means to you and me
You may call my love Sophia, but I call my love Philosophy

There is an implicit nod to the passing of time - the innocence of youth (Spring), the more measured understanding with a more mature age (Autumn), and the fading away of old age (Winter: January and February). Note the connecting of the first two verses in the final lines of each. ‘In the eternal presence, in the presence of the flame’, speaks to the universal search for the fire of understanding. ‘Rich, red browney, half burnt orange and green’,¹⁵ links this search to what might be learnt in the response to nature - one’s place in a changing yet unbending world.

At 4.50 after the repeated third chorus, there is the barely audible, ‘Yeah’.

Listeners will recognise the recurring Van Morrison cue that says, ‘I understand and feel it.’ And in response to the urgent prompting of the chorus, ‘Didn’t I come to bring you a sense of wonder’, he nods back, ‘In the flame ... sense of wonder’. Then, as so often happens with Van Morrison, a vantage point is arrived at the journey and he’s back again (as are we) in the early days of Belfast. The city is textually rejoined with all

¹⁴ References to Shakespeare are rare in Van Morrison songs. Dunne (2000) proposes that this is because Shakespeare belongs to more of a classical tradition than those artists who call the songwriter - Yeats, Whitman, Donne (p. 21). ‘Winter of our discontent’ in this song may refer to either the first lines from *Richard III* or the book of the same name by John Steinbeck. Van Morrison does refer to Steinbeck’s (1937) *Of Mice and Men* in a line from ‘Alan Watts Blues’.

¹⁵ Mills (2010) makes an interesting suggestion about the line, ‘Rich, red browney, half burnt orange and green’. Suggesting this ‘is a sly joke for Northern Irish listeners’ in that the ‘burnt orange’ is a reference to the pudding of that name. This reference, according to Mills, is redolent of home. He goes on to add that orange and green are also the colours of Ireland, and so ‘memory, time and identity sublimate in the image of the leaves, both bearing and representing this sense of wonder’ (p. 113).

its sights, sounds, tastes, people and experiences.

Wee Alfie at the
Castle picture house on the Castlereagh road.

Whistling on the corner next door where
he kept Johnny Mack Brown's horse.
O Solo Mio by McGimsey
and the man who played the saw
outside the city hall.
Pastie suppers down at Davey's chipper
Gravy rings, barnbracks¹⁶
Wagonwheels, snowballs.

In this transitioning we feel the spirituality experienced in the country now coming back with the songwriter to the city. The childlike awe from the effects of being out in the natural world and the symbolic resonance of falling leaves, now infuse the remembered experience and everyday phenomena of his young urban life with a similar sense of the sacred. City-country connections between wonder across natural and built worlds are expressed in this transition. The wonder in nature is experienced as if a child, and that wonder is now inhabiting the childhood memories in the sights and sounds on the streets of Belfast - and the tastes of the traditional Northern Irish fruit bread and biscuits. The memories of Belfast further remind us that Van Morrison often writes songs with an 'exilic mentality', and these describe nostalgic memories of home as a place frozen in time. It is the rootedness of these remembered places that balances the path to enlightenment across the country places along the roads leading out of the city.

'A Sense Of Wonder' leaves us with these memories of home, but reminds us that this is just a key part of the 'wonder'. The phrase 'sense of wonder' is repeated as the backing singers pick up the intensity from 6.06 to the end, breaking at 6.25 with 'on and on and on ... down through the days of the leaves'. The ending is opportune. The

¹⁶ Spelt 'barnbrack' in the lyric sheet for *A Sense Of Wonder*. It is also spelt 'barmbrack'.

song starts with the sense of a walk through a landscape that circumscribes place and time. It positions the ‘on and on and on and on’ of the walk, first as a shared journey through recognisable outer Belfast places, but then increasingly, as a trip through the imagination. The city and the country of the song are held in balance, and this is a critical feature of the city-country duality. It is also a past-present duality. If we can see that getting out to the country is as much about what Mills refers to as ‘the country of the mind’ (1994, p. 94), a place where both geographic and imaginative spaces are opened up, then the city also holds importance for its representation of life’s beginnings. The characters set out from their home streets, but these streets are always held firmly in mind. Hinton picks up on this: ‘Van returns to the rich specifics of his childhood, which he can somehow make seem like our own. The details change, but the glow of recollection is universal’ (Hinton, 2000, p. 248). Perhaps this signifies some distinctions in Van Morrison’s poetic relationship with the country. He celebrates time away from the city. He walks across landscapes as a Romantic poet who is attuned to the ‘wisdom and grace’ of the leaves, and searches for what answers might be wrought from their changing colours and textures. He pushes ‘on and on’ as a physical and imaginative traveler, while still holding memories of the people, places, sounds and tastes of his childhood and youth as key markers of his identity. He seems less inclined to ascribe an essentialist sense of place to the countryside, but still shows an unbending appreciation for its redemptive qualities. In his situating of the countryside as a place of wonder and contemplation, and the city as a place where the spirit can be recaptured through the memories of the everyday of people, sounds, pleasures and tastes, Van Morrison plies again, and anew, his interest in what Rogan describes as ‘the strange combination of the mystical and the mundane’ (Rogan, 2006, p. 357).

‘A Sense Of Wonder’ highlights a particular approach that Van Morrison utilises in his depictions of the relationship between the city and the country. At the outset it

was proposed that these songs consider, in their own way, the ‘wonder’ that might be realised in attunement with the natural world. It plays with a narrative structure and the trope of the poetic excursion to consider abstract ideas surrounding heightened perceptions and a search for understanding. The following two songs in this chapter draw more firmly defined lines between what may be found in retreating from the city to the solitude and simplicity of the country.

City-Country: Restoration and Contemplation

Well, I have got to get out of the rat race now
I’m tired of the ways of mice and men

Oh I’m tired Joey Boy of the makings of men
I would like to be cheerful again

In these lines, first from ‘Alan Watts Blues’, and then ‘I’m Tired Joey Boy’, Van Morrison brings another layer to the city-country duality. Whereas awe and transcendence experienced in the countryside are hallmarks of ‘A Sense Of Wonder’, world-weariness rings through these two. Here, tiredness is associated with city life, inextricably connected to the ‘rat race’ of business dealings. It is well documented that the songwriter held a long-standing grudge with managers, booking agents and record producers (see, Rogan, 2006, throughout), and his ‘fame blues’¹⁷ songs would become an increasing feature of his lyrics from the late 1980s onwards, although they had been

17 Early examples are: ‘Glad Tidings’ (1970 – Moondance), ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview (1972) and ‘Drumshanbo Hustle (1973 – The Philosopher’s Stone). ‘Fame Blues’ songs constituted a solid theme in the opening side of Hymns To The Silence (1991), and then are almost standard in Van Morrison albums from the 1990s onwards (see, for example, ‘Big Time Operators’, 1993, ‘Russian Roulette’, 1995, ‘This Weight’, 1997, ‘It Once Was My Life’, 1997, ‘Talk Is Cheap’, 2002, ‘Too Many Myths’, 2003, ‘Fame’, ‘They Sold Me Out’, 2005 and ‘Playhouse’, 2006). The term ‘fame blues’ was coined by Mills (2010), who writes that while ‘they may be hard to love for his wider audience ... he has an absolute right to sing them. They are evidence of Morrison’s understanding of the purposes of the blues and his ability to make them connect truthfully with his own experience’ (Mills, 2010, p. 11).

dotted throughout his catalogue from the earliest times. The phrases ‘of mice and men’ and ‘makings of men’ are worthy of note in this context. The former might either refer to the John Steinbeck’s novella of the same name, or, to the lines from Robert Burns’ poem, *To A Mouse*. Certainly, the Steinbeck novella picks up on the intersecting themes of the need to escape and the capricious nature of planned actions. The Burns poem explores two ideas - the human dominion that sits at odds with the harmony of nature, and the burden of past memories and future fears that humans carry. In both, the parallels with Van Morrison’s interest in the city-country duality are in play. In ‘Alan Watts Blues’ and ‘I’m Tired Joey Boy’, a temporary escape to the ‘fresh air’ countryside of lonely mountaintops, glens and streams, offers an unrestrained feeling, where being in ‘whereabouts unknown’ and out in the simplicity and silence of the natural world is restorative. Thought about in this way, the movement from the city to the country is a physical process from the built to the natural environment, and from the order and disorder of the urban, to the free flowing topography of hills and rivers. Both ‘Alan Watts Blues’ and ‘I’m Tired Joey Boy’ glance backwards and forwards in their orientation, and strive towards more enduring feelings of tranquility. Both work on generalised ideas about the relationship between the city and the country, rather than being narratives of actual events and encounters, and so there are differences to songs about nature that in all likelihood are based on Morrison’s real experiences.

The conceit of ‘Alan Watts Blues’ centres on the image of being physically above and away from the world. It is a conceit that pulls against itself in a seeming contradiction of ideas surrounding obscurity and clarity. The thought of being ‘cloud-hidden’ immediately conjures the idea of being obscured, gone somewhere in the sky and out of reach. And certainly, that thought is in play, though alongside the notion of gaining greater clarity. The first two verses and chorus talk about the ‘intent’ (‘making

some plans for my getaway’) of escaping from the ‘rat race’ and the ‘ways of mice and men’.

Well, I’m taking some time with my quiet friend
Well, I’m taking some time on my own
Well I’m making some plans for my getaway
There’ll be blue skies shining way up above

When I’m cloud-hidden
When I’m cloud-hidden
When I’m cloud-hidden
Whereabouts unknown

Well, I have got to get out of the rat race now
I’m tired of the ways of mice and men
And the empires are all turning into rust again.
Out of everything nothing remains the same

That’s why I’m cloud-hidden
Why I’m cloud-hidden
That’s why I’m cloud-hidden
Whereabouts unknown

Note the positioning of ‘everything nothing’ in the second verse as a way of pointing out the transitory and tenuous nature of human endeavour. It is worthwhile to recognise that, alongside of Van Morrison’s poetic quest for the simple life and the healing force to be found in simplicity,¹⁸ there is an expression of the need to escape and find seclusion.¹⁹ Both these ideas are in ‘Alan Watts Blues’. Furthermore, at the same time, ‘cloud-hidden’ signifies a shedding of previously held thoughts and ideas, and entering into ‘the cloud of unknowing’ (Mills, 1994, p. 97). The cloud of cover and obscurity then becomes antonymously the ‘blue skies’ path towards clarity - the imaginative path akin to a plane ascending through clouds to the clear open spaces above and beyond. This explores the same kind of thematic territory as ‘A Sense Of Wonder’, where the ‘wandering and wondering’ are simultaneously a path towards a heightened

¹⁸ This flourishes strongly in the first side of *Hymns To The Silence* (1991), and then peaks in the 2008 *Keep It Simple* album (see, Hage, 2009, p. 115). See also, Chapter 7, Streets.

¹⁹ This need is articulated in, for example, ‘The Meaning Of Loneliness’ (2003), ‘Just Like Greta’ (2005), ‘End Of The Land’ (2008), and ‘Going Down To Monte Carlo’ (2012).

consciousness. The escape into the cloud of ‘clarity’ is also a physical escape from the city to the country. The third verse coalesces philosophical spaces of simplification, clarity and heightened perception with the countryside. Solitude here offers the chance to take ‘some time with the quiet friend’, contemplation taking over within the silence of the topography.

Sitting up on the mountaintop
In my solitude
Where the fog comes rolling in
Just might do me some good

This verse moves the song closer to pastoral ideals of the idealised country landscape. Within this heightened state, ‘the fog comes rolling in’, and this is a reminder first, that the view and clarity might soon be obscured and lost, and second, through the deployment of the Van Morrison motif alluding to home and the safe haven, that the city and the country are again being held in close proximity. Whereas the country offers an opportunity to be spiritually refreshed, the memory of home also affords a spiritual comfort. Again, both of these are in easy reach. This is reinforced in the final verse, where the trip back to the town is a motor ride away.

Well, I’m waiting in the clearing with my motor on
Well, it’s time to get back to the town again
Where the air is sweet and fresh in the countryside
Well, it won’t be long before I get back here again

‘Waiting in the clearing’ of the opening line is appositionally balanced with the ‘sitting up on the mountaintop’ of the previous verse. The ‘clearing’ of the physical place is now synonymous with the clarity of the imaginative space. This clarity found in the natural world will now be available for the necessary work back in the city.

This interpretation of ‘Alan Watts Blues’ recognises that Van Morrison drew from, at the very least, the title of a 1973 Alan Watts’ publication, *Cloud-hidden, Whereabouts Unknown: A Mountain Journal*. Watts was a philosopher who blended Eastern and Western ideas and lived for many years around San Francisco where he

attracted a large following, particularly through a weekly radio program that ran through the 1950s and early 1960s. Of most interest to this song, and to Van Morrison's evolving poetic relationship with the countryside, is Watts' Deleuzian discussion of the Tao principle of 'non-duality', or integration, whereby there might be possibilities for synergies between human and natural energies, synergies that constitute one integrated process (Zhang, 2016, p. 421). Watts (1973) utilises the metaphor of surfing to describe this. He writes, 'the whole art is to generate immense energy from going with your environment ... and so making yourself one with it' (1973, p. 34, quoted in Zhang, 2016, p. 421). This certainly falls in line with the songs in this and the previous chapter, where themes of synergies with the natural world are central. With respect 'Alan Watts Blues', Hage (2009) observes that it is another example of Van Morrison's 'roving spirituality'. He remarks about how it points to a time where he pledges 'to live a more Zen-like existence', and concludes that 'the singer seemed to have congealed and simplified the [Alan Watts] ideas down to the thing that he needed at that moment, then he incorporated it into song' (p. 106). There is a clear resonance here with the responses to nature that Van Morrison revisits throughout the catalogue, most notably in the keenness to seize and live in the moment that we have observed in his celebration of the fine details that he finds in his worlds. In these city-country songs this keenness is displayed in the recognition of what may be gained in transitions between the city and the country.

The sounds of the song are, evidently, more closely aligned to country pop than blues. It does seem to make sense that the musical palette might take up a West Coast country sound, in a song that openly acknowledges the ideas of a philosopher who lived and had influence in the San Francisco Bay area. Certainly, there is a lightness and flowing energy to the song that brings to mind bands like the Eagles and songwriters like Jackson Browne. This lightness does fall in line with the optimism underscoring the

lyrics. While the country pop sounds of ‘Alan Watts Blues’, might support this optimism, the word ‘blues’ in the title does reflect that the songwriter has, in his own way, worked within the lyrical traditions of blues music by locating his own personal experiences, and then expressing the struggles within those experiences. As observed above, Connell and Gibson, note that transient experiences are common in blues songs, and many are dedicated to themes of escape, songs of wandering and leaving home’ (2003, p. 138). In agreement, Mills (2010) writes that, ‘the blues also stands for restlessness and curiosity, moving forward and surviving’ (p. 11). It is this sense of restiveness and movement towards a physical and imaginative escape that characterises ‘Alan Watts Blues’. Thinking about the blues in this song opens out the idea that the emotional states of blues singers – struggle, transience, escape, survival – are held in the transitions between the city and country places of the song. However, for Morrison, it is neither the escape to the country nor return to the city that is able to offer a permanent ‘escape’. Rather it is the movement between the two that offers an uplifted emotional state. As Mills (1994) argues when he sees the ‘admittance’ of both city and the country, there is, on return from the uplifting experience, a refreshed view within the symbolic ‘return to a located, directed sense of place’ that is found in the city (p. 98). Thus, the escape works both away from and back to the city, recognising the contingent relationship between it and the country. Whereas the city might represent the ‘rat race’ of harsh and compromised dealings, it also stands for the place where the work has to be done. ‘It’s time to get back to the town again’, the songwriter acknowledges in the final lines. This arguably carries an understanding that the country provides places for clarity, rejuvenation and awareness, where the creative spaces for songwriting might be opened up, and these are then able to be parceled up and expressed in the music industry ‘work’ of recording and touring that happens back in the city. That both the city and the country can operate as mutually supportive places within the art of Van Morrison is a

critical aspect of his city-country duality. 'I'm Tired Joey Boy' dwells on this duality alongside of wider expressions of nostalgia borne from a symbolic exile.

The second verse of 'I'm Tired Joey Boy' makes these connections between the city and the country.

This life is so simple when
One is at home
And I'm never complaining
When there's work to be done
Oh I'm tired Joey Boy of the makings of men
I would like to be cheerful again

At first glance, the ideas might seem to sit slightly at odds with the overall direction of the song. Nonetheless, and importantly, they subtly disconnect the city as a place of danger, lost dreams and the 'makings of men', to its position as a positive place ('I'm never complaining') where the 'work' of songwriting and performing are 'to be done'. This is a noteworthy aspect to the city-country duality in 'Alan Watts Blues' and 'I'm Tired Joey Boy'. Since the work of recording, producing and performing is mainly done in the city, then it maintains its importance as a place, even as that place no longer stands for what it used to in his younger formative years. A distinction is once more drawn here between the city place that is held in childhood memory, that which is expressed in 'A Sense Of Wonder', and the adult place of necessary work that both these songs describe. There is also a difference noted from the outset in this chapter – between the city and country as either a spiritually supportive place, or a place where the important work of songwriting is supported in either an inspirational or practical sense.

When these latter two songs are considered together, there is also a number of notable differences within their approaches to the city-country duality. These differences further mark out some relevant writing and performative aspects. Broadly, these aspects are along the lines of optimism versus world-weariness. First, while it was

suggested above that there was a feeling of optimism in the ‘blue skies shining’ promise of ‘Alan Watts Blues’, and this feeling was conveyed as much by the lyrics as the breezy West Coast sound, there is a discernible note of world-weariness in ‘I’m Tired Joey Boy’. To be fair, both songs project a tiredness with the ‘makings of men’, a tiredness that is held metaphorically in city places. This is signalled in the opening verse.

I’m tired Joey Boy
While you’re out with the sheep
My life is so troubled
Now I can’t go to sleep
I would walk myself out
But the streets are so dark
I shall wait till the morning
And walk in the park

Yet the weariness of the second song is now strongly tied up with a yearning to return to where he came from. This yearning extends across temporal and physical spaces. Burke (2013) talks about the ‘been there, seen this, done that’ sensibilities of the song, and suggests that his longing to return is the ‘affirmation of an ache to belong somewhere’, and the place he seeks ‘may no longer exist as he remembers it, and it almost certainly carries little semblance to the idealised version he has assembled from the unreliable articles of nostalgia’ (p. 195). This is the notion of exile as an ‘existentialist phenomenon’, where as Kennedy-Andrews concludes, ‘the materiality of place is dissolved in textual place’ (2007, p. 19). That is, the countryside now assumes importance as a representation of a former place and time, and the exiled position becomes a discursive process mapped out across insecure territories. In ‘I’m Tired Joey Boy’ this phenomenon and representation takes the shape of an introspective ‘exile’ monologue. The imagined conversation with a country working boy coalesces the songwriter’s longing for home, his perennial quest for simplicity, and his long-standing inclination to find escape, solace and transcendence in nature.

The song reminds us of the simpler and idealised Ireland, the kind symbolised in ‘gardens all misty and wet with rain’ (‘Sweet Thing’, 1968), and sought out in albums like *Veedon Fleece* (1975). The shepherd is both a metaphor for the traditional rural working-man, whose pastoral life stands in stark contrast to Van Morrison’s world in ‘the makings of men’, and also a poignant parallel and reminder of his own childhood and adolescence, marked by the ‘recalled dreams’ and ‘forgotten things’ that took him away from the more modest city streets of his East Belfast home.

Ambition will take you
And ride you too far and
Conservatism bring you to boredom what’s more
Sit down by the river
And watch the stream flow
Recall all the dreams
That you once used to know
The things you’ve forgotten
That took you away
To pastures not greener but meaner

At this point the songwriter has fallen into line with traditions in Irish literature through which the ‘peasant’ is aestheticised and simplified into a ‘single undifferentiated identity’ (Hirsch, 1991, p. 1117), one that represents a romanticised ideal of the pure and trouble-free life in the country.²⁰ It can only be a matter of conjecture whether Van Morrison takes up this stereotype as a considered position. What seems more salient here are the parallels drawn in the first verse between the untroubled life of the youthful shepherd.²¹ The use of the word, ‘Boy’, is instructive here, with the memories in the third verse of the young musician whose dreams have been compromised by the

²⁰ Hirsch observes how these stereotypes form part of the Irish Literary Revival, and the ‘imaginary entity’ of the Irish peasant is emblematic of ‘Yeats’ spiritualised fishermen, Synge’s wandering tramps and Joyce’s hard and crafty peasants’ (1991, p. 1117). He goes on to describe how writers like Patrick Kavanagh (*Self Portrait 9*), Seamus Heaney (‘archaeological’ poems) and Michael Longley (‘Mayo Monologues’) have attempted to demythologise the peasant figure and that ‘one legacy of the Revivalist’s glorification of the country people has been an nearly endless intertextual regress in Irish literature’ (p. 1116).

²¹ Of course this falls into a stereotype that dismisses the loneliness of the solitary life, the hardship of being out in all weather conditions and the dangers of working alone in the countryside.

pressures of ambition and conservatism, and how he has now been taken away ‘to pastures not greener but meaner’. The ‘greenness’ nods both to childlike naivety, and to the ‘green’ homeland left behind in the pursuit of musical dreams. Tensions between city and country feed into these parallels. The constructed world of ‘streets so dark’ stands for social structures that harbour ‘lovers of greed’, and encourages a ‘life ... so troubled’, and given over to ‘boredom’. These streets are representative of what has been lost, and are compared with the country landscape of ‘rivers’, ‘streams’, ‘mountains’ and ‘glens’ where the simplicity and the silences offer chances for dreams to be rediscovered.

Love of the simple is all that I need
I’ve no time for schism or lovers of greed
Go up to the mountain, go up to the glen
When silence will touch you
And heartbreak will mend

Yet for all the yearnings and resolution, there is an overriding mood of melancholy. This is an exiled position where heartbreak will not be easily mended. Van Morrison’s resigned and world-weary vocals echo this emotion through a quiet, yet distinctive East Belfast brogue. The languid pacing, where the first 43 seconds of a brief 2.30 song are taken up with a scene setting in 6/4 time that overlays a gentle pastoral feel of bucolic country places with a late 1960s pop vibe, reminiscent of Glenn Campbell or Scott Walker. In this way, early lines about the darkness of the city are washed away with the sounds of instrument and voice. The established mood is mediated by the spirituality that straddles the competing but essential worlds of city and country.

This chapter has discussed Van Morrison’s sensitivities to both the city and the country. The songs highlight different ways that a city-country duality plays out - first through the trope of the poetic excursion, seeking wonder and transcendence within the

commonplace journey between the metaphorical spaces of city and country, and second, through a yearning for solace, solitude and redemption in the quietness and anonymity of the natural world. The songs show how the songwriter sees the values, ideas and associations from one inhabiting the other. These songs reflect a particular Van Morrison take on the relationship between the city and the country, as the songwriter broadened his literary interests and expanded his spiritual searching. They offer us a way of understanding the songwriter's evolving relationship with the topographical reaches of his world, and they build on the transcendental and contemplative features of the nature songs of the previous chapter.

10. Foreign Lands

When Van Morrison recorded *Inarticulate Speech Of The Heart* (1983) he had already embarked on what Mills labels his ‘long journey home’ (2010, p. 54). This had begun, according to Mills, with *Beautiful Vision* in 1982. *Inarticulate Speech* is notable for the Irish nature of many of its songs, from the sense of nostalgia and displacement in ‘Cry For Home’, ‘Irish Heartbeat’, and ‘The Street Only Knew Your Name’, and for the use of traditional instruments in songs like ‘Connswater’¹ and ‘Celtic Swing’. Asked by a journalist about the ‘Irishness’ of the album, Morrison replied:

It’s just an internal thing. It’s like getting back to your roots. You live in a lot of different places and it gives you a broader perspective on life in general ... But there’s a big part of me that’s just strictly involved with the island of Ireland
(quoted in Turner, 1993, p. 153)

These comments are instructive, signaling the significance for Morrison of being away from home and in foreign lands. He talks about ‘the internal feeling’, the psychological experience of exile (Tabori, 1972), and hints at the spatial and temporal distances between being away in different and foreign places, and the need to get back to his home roots. These experiences and feelings are considered in this chapter, through a discussion of songs that focus on foreign places, far removed from the Belfast of Morrison’s upbringing.

¹ See also, Chapter 5, Home, for a description and discussion of the importance of Connswater, the Beechie River and the Hollow for Van Morrison.

Being Away: Conditions and Experiences of a Symbolic Exile

The blueprint of travelling overseas was set early for Van Morrison. He had already toured Scotland, London and Germany with the Monarchs before he was 18 (Rogan, 2006, pp. 58-67). Not long after, in 1965 and 1966, he went to London, Paris, New York and San Francisco with Them (Rogan, 2006, pp. 136-155). There was a pattern (from the mid-1960s onwards) among more ambitious Irish rock musicians of moving away from Ireland in order to become more internationally successful. McLaughlin and McLoone (2012) write about how this pattern had been established by Them, who had conquered the home market in their Maritime Hotel days, and then relocated to London to record and build a larger following (p. 82).² They suggest that in both Belfast and Dublin there were limited live music venues, the recording facilities were not up to standard, and the media were mostly interested in showbands, and folk and traditional music.³ In these early days Van Morrison was responding to both the material limitations of his hometown and the changing cultural dynamic of popular music. His transition from showband to Them had now added a more pressing reason for the young songwriter to contemplate moving away from home. As we shall see, compulsion was to become a critical part of what exile would look like for him in the future.

While professional commitments and opportunities had Van Morrison first leaving his hometown, there was also a siren call to the places across the Atlantic where the artists he revered had made their music. These were to be the conditions leading to

² Both of Them's albums featuring Van Morrison (*The Angry Young Them* and *Them Again*) were recorded at Decca Records studios in North London.

³ Other Northern Irish artists from that period who moved overseas included, The Method (later Andwella's Dream and Andwella) and The People. From south of the border there were Granny's Intentions and Skid Row (both featuring Belfast guitar hero, Gary Moore), Rory Gallagher (and his band, Taste), and Thin Lizzy (McLaughlin & McLoone 2012).

his earliest states of exile, at the same time, professional, geographical and aspirational. There was thus a double-edged complexity to his exile at this point. The move away from home was enforced by what was seen as a lack of professional opportunity, but there was also a desire to discover new places, artists and sounds. It was to the sounds of the artists that he had first heard in his East Belfast home that he was now drawn. This puts a different twist on the common Irish exile narrative, one that tends to be driven solely by poverty and lack of opportunity. Böss (2005) categorises this as 'symbolic exile', whereby certain individuals understand the circumstances of their lives referenced by 'aesthetic notions of exile' (p. 20). Morrison saw the circumstances of his life as a musician circumscribed by the straightforward choice to travel and work overseas. Like many other Irish writers and artists who had made such a choice, Van Morrison's exile would have a significant impact on his art. As Mills (2010) observes, exile is a state to which Van Morrison is culturally drawn, and it embraces liminality, displacement, and the burdens and freedoms of being perpetually in motion (p. 251). It is evident that Van Morrison inhabits what Williams (1996) terms an 'exilic mentality' through much of his songwriting. This is characterised by the inner feeling that leaving a place of origin means there is always something that is unrecoverable (Wagner, 2001, p. 105). For Tucker, there is a resonance here with other writers in exile - reflected in the artistic persona (Tucker, 1991). Gurr (1981) and Tucker (1991) both observe that the artistic persona of writers in exile is bound within 'exilic writing', one encompassing a search for identity that might be metaphorically summed up as a 'quest for home' (Gurr, 1981, p. 14). Such a quest often compels the writer 'to a retrospective fabrication of stable images of home from the components of personal memory' (Böss, 2005, p. 31). This is the kind of poetic territory that Van Morrison often inhabits, and is a key component of the 'long journey home' that defines much of his work during the 1980s. We also observe, for Morrison, the ironic impossibility in this journey, one that looks to

recapture a boyhood and adolescent place and time that no longer exists in real terms, and this becomes a critical part of his exiled position as it unfolds through the 1980s and beyond.

When Van Morrison brings back his boyhood and adolescent experiences in songs like 'Cleaning Windows' (1982) and 'On Hyndford Street' (1991), or locates himself in faraway places in 'Santa Fe' (1978), 'Angeliou' (1979) and 'Going Down Geneva' (1999), or pushes himself into indeterminate 'beyond places' in 'Into The Mystic' (1970), 'Stranded' (2005) and 'End Of The Land' (2008), he is negotiating an identity that stretches beyond the narrow familiarity of what home once was, to a wider engagement with an outside world. As he acknowledges, it is 'a broader perspective on life in general', one which allows him to express his cultural background through a mixing of the 'foreign with the familiar'. Kearney (1988, p. 22, quoting James Joyce) writes about how this theme is evident in the songs of Van Morrison. He also notes it in the music of Irish groups such as the Chieftains, the Pogues, and U2, and in the writings of Irish authors such as Seamus Heaney, John Banville, Paul Durcan, Nuala Ní Dhomnaill, and Dermot Bolger (1988, pp. 22-23). The 'foreign-familiar' trope is illustrated throughout this thesis, from coming-of-age memories of 'Brown Eyed Girl' (1967), to the lyrical and musical references to soul and doo-wop as the songwriter wills himself back to the street corners of his youth in 'The Healing Game' (1997), to the Appalachian palette of 'Song Of Home' (2008 – see below) as ideas about the imagined 'nearness' of home and a reconciled exile are countenanced. When thinking about what exile looks like for Van Morrison, it should also be kept in mind that the decisions made by this young man from East Belfast to chase a musical career overseas and explore new musical terrains were markedly different to the exile 'choices' and circumstances of many other writers. Consider, for example, James Joyce, who left what he felt was the suffocation of British-ruled and deeply conservative Catholic Dublin for Trieste in

the early 1900s. This was different for Seamus Heaney, who fled Troubles Belfast to Wicklow in 1972, and Paul Muldoon who travelled to the United States to pursue an academic career. What these writers and popular music artists share, as discussed in Chapter 3, is the way a sense of home is amplified through the exiled experience, and how awareness of different places encountered heighten the emotional relationship with place.

Foreign Lands, Exile and Van Morrison

Van Morrison's poetic expression of exile is built on articulations of place in the home, the rooms, the streets, the city and the natural world that have been the focus of previous chapters. Foreign lands are symbols of movement, markers of difference, and places where personal feelings of exile are experienced. All these form part of a wider representation of the songwriter's quest for answers to questions of his cultural identity.

It has been highlighted throughout this thesis that a sense of perpetual movement is one of the defining characteristics of Morrison's songwriting. References have been made to Hughes' (2014) observations about songs that surge outwards to other places (p. xviii), and to Mills' (2010) suggestions that he is always moving down the road (p. 251). Within this movement, foreign lands make available unfamiliar locations for the songwriter, where a range of perspectives invites constructions of cultural identity through dialectics of past and present places (Sørensen, 2005, p. 160, drawing on Hall, 1990). The metaphor of 'rhizome' (Deleuze and Guatari, 1987) finds traction here. For Kennedy-Andrews (2007), this metaphor of a plant that moves outwards and makes new connections helps us understand a more open view of identity. It highlights the concept of deterritorialization and the associated requirement to negotiate multiple and changing identities, and consider new social and cultural connections.

Foreign places provide opportunities for Morrison to consider the complexity of such negotiations. So an imagined chance meeting on a foreign street in ‘Angeliou’ (1979) can ask questions about what might be shared across cultural boundaries, or the impersonal spaces of an airport departure lounge in ‘Got To Go Back’ (1987) throw up feelings of dislocation, or, in ‘Too Long In Exile’ (1993) thinking of other exiles like Samuel Beckett, George Best and Alex Higgins carries reminders that a return to ‘home’ might never be possible. Such complex responses to questions of identity have also been the focus in Irish literature as new ideas shifted attention away from traditional and rooted views of culture and identity. Kennedy-Andrews (2007) writes about how these questions around place and identity gained traction among Northern Irish poets – especially the younger ones, including John Hewitt, Tom Paulin, James Simmons, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, Paul Muldoon, Ciaran Carson, and Medbh McGuckian (p. 14). Furthermore, these unsettled responses are commonly expressed across Irish traditional and popular music, where what Connell and Gibson (2003) refer to as the ‘cultural baggage’ of home interplays with away locations, and where alienation and exile throw up ambiguities around contrasts between what home and foreign places now stand for (p. 161).⁴ When Van Morrison scrutinises the foreign land and associated exiled experience through the lyrics and music of his songs, it constitutes the layering of systems of social meanings (Frith, 2004; Smyth, 2005) that are important components of his poetic world. Compulsion is writ large in this world. The songwriter seems to accept that loneliness and hardship are inevitable parts of the perpetual ‘job’ he is compelled to follow through on. Compulsion has him physically and

⁴ In a list of traditional songs far too long to list here, ‘Spencil Hill’ (recorded by, among others, The Corrs, The Dubliners and Christy Moore) and ‘Skibbereen’ (recorded by, among others, Wolfe Tones and Sinéad O’Connor) are notable examples. In popular music, examples of exile songs can be seen across a wide range of genres, including, ‘City Of Chicago’ (1984), the Luka Bloom song recorded by his brother, Christy Moore, the Pogues’ ‘Thousands Are Sailing’ and ‘Fairy Tale of New York’ (both, 1988, the latter recorded with Kirsty McColl), ‘N17’ by the Saw Doctors (1991) and Morrissey’s ‘Irish Blood, English Heart’ (2004)

metaphorically on the road, and foreign lands stand for a sense of psychological and cultural hardship. At times he is in specific locations, but he is very often in places that are 'other' - indiscriminate, indeterminate, different, away. And, symbolically, he has no choice, even though he has the means to return home at any time. The rub is that the home that has left been behind is caught in another place and time, and its call to return can only be answered through memory and a lyrical recreation of what it once was. Thus, Van Morrison's exiled position is caught between the aspects of spatiality and temporality that Ilie draws attention to in his study of exilic writing (1980, quoted in Böss, 2005, p. 31). This can be seen in songs that look back at the memories of home, or those that see exile as an existential experience that involves being forever away.

Foreign Lands, Van Morrison and 'Returning Home'

This chapter highlights songs across the Van Morrison catalogue about the state of exile, and with the specific focus of 'returning home'. These connect with tropes across literature and popular music where exile is a condition of loss, a rift between a person and native place, and between the self and the true home (Said, 2000, p. 173).

'Returning home' for Van Morrison involves a dual process. First, there are 'exilic mentality' songs, where nostalgic memories of home are bound within stable images of what once was (Gurr, 1981, p. 14, see above). This has been illustrated in earlier chapters in songs like 'Brown Eyed Girl' (1967), 'The Street Only You're your Name' (1974) ('Wavelength' (1978), 'Cleaning Windows' (1982), and 'On Hyndford Street' (1991). These kinds of exilic mentality songs highlight a critical way that exile is manifested in Morrison. They show that when he talks about the 'big part' of himself that is 'just strictly involved with the island of Ireland', he indicates that it is East Belfast he is missing – the people and the childhood memories. There is arguably a

sense that, for Van Morrison, exile is closely interwoven with the emotions of growing up and leaving behind childhood, adolescence and the kinds of bonds and connections people form there. Second, returning home may be seen in the allegorical spaces between longing and belonging, between being away from home and the constant call to return. It is this second process that is considered more fully in this chapter.

The chapter has a number of different and interconnected vantage points. The first is an early movement (up to the early 1980s) where exile is expressed as a journey and a reaching out to new personal and cultural places. Second, there are songs about the hardships caught within compulsions of the surging outwards and looking back through the 1980s and early 1990s. Third, there is a later career stance that embraces exile as both inevitability and reconciliation.

Moving Away, Being Away (1967-1979)

While caution needs to be heeded around reading too much into different thematic movements across different periods, some commentators have done just that, talking about Morrison's 'long journey home' (Mills, 2010), the exilic arch in his development of identity (Sørensen, 2005), and his path to enlightenment (Hage, 2009). With this in mind, I suggest that the period from *Blowin' Your Mind* (1967) through to *Into The Music* (1979) might be read as a period of both moving and being away from his hometown - the nostalgia of 'Brown Eyed Girl', the contradictions of 'The Back Room' and 'T.B.Sheets', and across the focus of *Astral Weeks*. Hereafter the albums stretch themselves out into a range of places and thematic spaces. It is interesting that McLaughlin and McLoone (2008, p. 103) see the first seven albums as 'grounded in Ireland, and especially Belfast', because, after *Astral Weeks*, listeners travel with the songwriter to different places, many of these across North America. Canada ('These

Dreams Of You'), New York ('Glad Tidings') and indeterminate gypsy places ('Caravan') feature on *Moondance* (1970). *Tupelo Honey* (1971) is wrapped in the bucolic country and western fabric of 'Old Old Woodstock'. If we accept that many of Morrison's songs are based on real experiences and situations then it makes good sense that these reflect his current life on America's West Coast. Listeners to *Saint Dominic's Preview* (1972) find the songwriter in a lonely apartment block in San Francisco, a hip 52nd Street New York apartment, a Californian forest ('Redwood Tree') and on the streets of San Francisco's Chinatown ('Almost Independence Day'). 'Snow In San Anselmo' and 'Autumn Song' provide North American colour in *Hard Nose The Highway* (1973). What McNaughton and McLoone are referring to when they talk about the albums being grounded in Ireland, is that while there are different song locations and musical sounds, they also pause from time to time to look backwards to the hometown. This duality of reaching out and looking backwards is perhaps most clearly expressed in 'Into The Mystic' (*Moondance*, 1970), where at the same time as the 'soul and spirit fly/Into the mystic', the foghorn is a symbol of the safe returning harbour, a Van Morrison motif for Belfast, and a call for home.

And when that fog horn blows
You know I will be coming home
And when that fog horn whistle blows
I got to hear it, I don't have to fear it

As noted above, this is the interplay of the foreign and the familiar that Kearney (1988) recognises as a trope among Irish artists and writers who looked back on their homeland from abroad.

The three following albums add to the themes of moving and being away. *Veedon Fleece* (1974) returns, not to the Belfast of his childhood, but to the Republic, the Killarney lakes ('Fair Play'), and the 'Streets Of Arklow'. The significance of Van Morrison not returning to Northern Ireland at the time is that by now the Troubles in Belfast were arguably further clouding his memories of his boyhood home, and he was

seeking alternative ways to keep in touch with his wider homeland. This is perhaps borne out in what critics recognise as the essential ‘Celtic’ feel of the album, in terms of place, rhythm and imagery. Nonetheless, there are interspersed reminders that the writer has been professionally ‘exiled’ across the Atlantic Ocean, and this is a work of a temporary ‘homecoming’ and rediscovery. In a very real sense this is a misplaced homecoming, and the expression of his return throughout the album is from an ‘outsider perspective’:

He is a visitor, a guest in his own country. It is an album of exile on local and global scales; back from the many years across the Atlantic ... but he is also a Northern Irishman in the Republic (Mills, 2010, p. 305).⁵

This perspective adds to the away movement. He is an exile but chooses to ‘almost come home’, as if to say, ‘It’s not time yet.’ And it wasn’t. The aptly named *A Period Of Transition* (1977) was recorded in England with New Orleans based Mac Rebennack (Dr John). In a press release for the album, Morrison confides, ‘I want to get back to the roots, back to where I started off’ (Rogan, 2006, p. 307) – the double-edged complexity to his exile that we have already noticed. *Wavelength* (1978) followed, widely considered his most ‘American’ album, both in musical style and instrumentation, and in references throughout to American places - in songs ‘Venice U.S.A’, ‘Sante Fe’, ‘Wavelength’ and ‘Take It Where You Find It’. Responding to critics who saw this album as evidence he had dropped into the American dream, Van Morrison retorted, ‘The only real reference to America in the whole album is a couple of lines ... nothing to do with any American dream; it’s not about the country, it’s about my experiences, it’s about my personal experiences’ (Rogan, 2006, pp. 316-317). This is central to Van

⁵ It was also a physical return. Van Morrison visited Dublin, Cork, Cashel, Killarney and Arklow, but did not travel across the border to Northern Ireland. In interview Morrison said he wrote all the songs quickly during that vacation in the south (Heylin, 2002, p. 281).

Morrison's songwriting mentality throughout this period, as he draws heavily from experiences in different places, and sees the importance of these experiences for his identity as a songwriter away from home. It must also be noted, that even in this American mood, both 'Kingdom Hall' and 'Wavelength' are both directly connected to Van Morrison's formative years in Belfast.

In summary, his experiences in foreign places have, to this point, become part of an exiled condition that might be thought of as 'exile as journey', a necessary condition that comes before 'exile as existential homelessness' (Kearney, 1988, p. quoted in Böss, 2006, p. 40). When exile is thought of as the journey away from home that comes before feelings of unrecoverable loss and alienation, the 'seeds of exile' are planted as much from the experiences away from home, as the remembrances of home that must inevitably accompany those experiences.

Reaching Out, Encountering and Reconciling Differences

The last Van Morrison album of the 1970s (*Into The Music*, 1979) is a significant change in direction. Mills (2010) suggests that the preoccupation with America in *Wavelength* was a 'prelude to a goodbye', and concludes that *Into The Music* signalled the end of 'the American phase of his art', and that it is 'a European record ... made in, and from exile' (p. 322). This is worth considering. The places now bring listeners back across the Atlantic. There are city gates and garden walls ('Troubadours'), jigs among the rolling hills that speak of a British countryside ('Rolling Hills'),⁶ references to

⁶ Heylin (2002, p. 351) quotes Herbie Armstrong (childhood friend and guitarist on *Into The Music* and other Van Morrison albums) as saying the hills referred to those in the Cotswold countryside.

Cyprus Avenue in the opening lines of ‘And The Healing Has Begun’,⁷ and evocations of old rendezvous spots by the pylons (the Hollow) in the coda of ‘You Know What They’re Writing About’.⁸ Each song, in its own way, makes specific references to place as either metaphor or as an expression of remembered or imagined experiences. *Into The Music* seems a deliberate turning back towards his home as a prelude to the stances of hardship and compulsion that would mark out an important dynamic to his later writing about exile.

Among the tapestry of *Into The Music* songs that turn back to these homeland places, there is ‘Angeliou’ ... and Paris. While this song differs from later Van Morrison ‘exile’ songs from the 1980s onwards that ache with longings for home and earlier times, it nonetheless makes important statements. The songwriter is still away, and while there are backward glances to earlier places, there is still a road to be travelled away from the physical and imaginative reaches of those places. It also picks up on issues of cultural identity and reinforces the notion of exile as journey - its location in a foreign place is where there are possibilities for encountering and reconsidering difference. In this way, it speaks to issues surrounding the search for identity through ‘self-discovery’ and ‘self-realisation’ commonly expressed in exilic writing (Gurr, 1981, p. 14). Sørensen (2005, p. 160) argues that Van Morrison’s conceptualisation of cultural identity very often coincides with ideas of the one shared culture, in which the notion of self is part of a wider shared set of selves held in common through history and ancestry. He goes on to suggest that Hall’s (1990) alternative second view of cultural identity that belongs as much to the present and future as much as the past (an identity that is continually waiting to be found) seems to

⁷ Both Hage (2009) and Marcus (2010) recognize this reference. The latter observes how, in the song’s opening, ‘the singer promises that he and the woman he’s singing to will go back to the avenue they once knew and that once knew them’ (p. 128).

⁸ Hage (2009, p. 91).

fit the songwriter's situation better. 'Angeliou' is a late 1970s marker of when the mapping of new worlds is part of a complex, fluid and constructed notion of place that Kennedy-Andrews (2007) sees in poets like Paul Muldoon - bound to 'map his own place in the world (p. 19). Comparisons between Muldoon and Morrison within this framing of place must always be tempered with the idea that the songwriter's exiled position carries a much stronger feeling of rootedness and awareness of what home stands for. This aside, Van Morrison's sense of surging outwards and perpetual motion are critical aspects of the songwriter's world and the exiled condition that increasingly looms large in this world.

'Angeliou' is a narrative of an unexpected encounter. There are good reasons to believe that this is an imaginary encounter, given there is no biographical evidence that Morrison spent much time in the city. It does seem, however, that the songwriter is adopting the persona of the lonely exile in Paris. Perhaps this is to deploy the persistent motif of the city as the city of love, or, as Mills (2010) suggests, it could be to connect with other Irish writers like James Joyce that he was beginning to find connections with (p. 329). The song is also a parable about the potential depths of human connection. It is at the level of parable that distinguishes the song as an interesting take on Van Morrison's sense of exile. The song invites listeners to enter into emotional spaces and 'feel inside' the ways that people might physically and spiritually connect. Its location in Paris in springtime speaks of romance and intimacy, but also of difference and isolation. For Mills (2010), the composition of the song is coloured by exile, and he talks about the romantic view of Europe in its setting and musical palette (p. 329). The atmosphere is set in the stately introduction. The mandolin and violin sound out a dancing melody line, repeated four times. While Mills (2010, p. 328) hears an Old World evocation and romantic view of Europe, equally, its dance-like, metronomic pattern can bring to mind the feel of gypsy folk music and its references to a life on the

road. Either way, the effect is to be taken to a different place, neither back home, nor to the land that first took him away from his home.

In the month of May
In the city of Paris
In the month of May
In the city of Paris
And I heard the bells ringing
And I heard the bells ringing
In the month of May
And I called out your name
In the city of Paris

The scene is set. Paris in May, and we think of springtime and romance. Perhaps the ringing out of the church bells reinforces these thoughts of romance. Maybe these hint at spiritual connections. For Van Morrison listeners it is a motif that carries reminders of the church bells of home. Tensions are thus established between old and new worlds, between current and past places. In this way it is arguably the case that the songwriter's exiled persona is being caught between the processes of moving away and yearning for a metaphorical return to a homeland. Now, the foreign land in this song is not so much weighed down with the burden of exile, but rather holding markers of difference and distance. It is a timely reminder that Van Morrison's expression of a search for identity through his ideas about exile is regularly bound within personal experience rather than a wider exploration of national or cultural identity. The spoken lyrics talk about walking on foreign city streets and being 'touched by a total stranger', the accented Belfast voice carries the sounds of home, and differentiates background and location.

Just walking on a city street
Who would think you could ever be touched
By a total stranger
Oh not me
But when you came up to me that day
And I listened to your story
It reminded me so much of myself
When I listened to you
It wasn't what you said

It was just the way it felt to me
As I listened to your story
About a search and a journey
Somewhere inside
Just like mine ...

The ‘search and a journey’ is about an understanding ‘somewhere inside’. It is felt as much as it is expressed and received, a tacit emotional connection that straddles geographical and cultural lines. Finally, there is another conversation as the storyteller brings this idea about the depths of human connection back within his own story - the emotionality of what has been found in these streets far away from those of his hometown.

I said yeah
I got a story too
Do you want my story
Aint got no words
It goes something like this

‘Angeliou’ is an example of how the early phases of the exiled experience embrace both a physical and imaginative journey, and a questioning of previously held ideas. In this way the song points out some of the foreign land insights about self-discovery that will later be brought to songs that more readily articulate the existential burden of being an exile compelled to be continuously in worlds away from the homeland.

Foreign Lands and Exile: Hardship and Compulsion

Tensions between the need to be away from home and the longing for home began to surface in a suite of songs across the 1980s. His exiled position straddles both a physical and psychological roving, and a search for an Irish identity. When Sørensen (2005) characterises Van Morrison’s psychological hardship of being away from home, as an arch in his ‘personal development of identity’, he is seeing this as a process that

stretches from an Irish journey into exile, through hardship to ‘a homecoming and “settling” in Irish climes’ (p. 159).⁹ It is this hardship that characterises the ‘long journey home’, through the 1980s and into the early 1990s, reaching backward across temporal and spatial dimensions, while also stretching out along a ‘path to enlightenment’ (Hage, 2009) that took him to New Age philosophies, Christian spirituality and Irish poetry (see, Chapter 9). Thus the re-envisioning of formative boyhood and adolescent experiences, what Burke (2013) terms as ‘mystical adventures on Hyndford Street’ (Burke, 2013, p. 138), ply against quest and compulsion, and together they move down the road in Van Morrison’s exilic songwriting.

This multidirectionality is illustrated in *No Guru, No Method, No Teacher* (1986), an album notable for interrelated themes around a quest for spiritual meaning and the ache of exile. ‘Got To Go Back’ leads off the album, establishing a melancholy and reflective atmosphere, focusing on a metaphorical return from a distant land. ‘Foreign Window’ works from a different foreign place perspective, looking ever outward, catching a sense of disruption and burden, and the seemingly eternal spiritual search. As we shall see, these songs present different, though related, perspectives on the songwriter’s expression of the hardship of exiled experience.

‘Got To Go Back’ is a song that yearns for home, and begins in the songwriter’s days at Orangefield High School, a 20 minutes’ walk from Van Morrison’s East Belfast home. This is clearly another instance where the song’s persona is realistic, though under ideas put forward by Keightley and Pickering (2012), there might well be an interplay of memory and imagination. We do know that that Ray Charles was a

⁹ This ‘settling’ is recognized by Sørensen (2005, p. 159) as culminating in *Irish Heartbeat* (1988) where Van Morrison collaborates with the Chieftains in a collection of traditional Irish songs as well as adding ‘Irish Heartbeat’ (*Inarticulate Speech Of The Heart*) and ‘Celtic Ray’ (*Beautiful Vision*). See, below.

significant influence, and it is also a fact that Morrison left school early because it held little interest for him (Rogan, 2006, p. 41), and so there two parts of his life are depicted economically in the opening lines. The tone of the song is set from its opening sounds. Burke (2013) observes how the musical introduction ‘is entrancing ... easing the singer, the song, and the song receiver (the listener) through a portal into the past’ (pp. 138-139). The ‘easing’ is ushered in by an, ‘Oh yeah’ (that cue again), and then the image of the young Van Morrison gazing out of the classroom window, dreaming.

When I was a young boy back in Orangefield
I used to gaze out my classroom window and dream
And then go home and listen to Ray sing
‘I believe to my soul’ after school
Oh that love that was within me
You know it carried me through
Well it lifted me up and it filled me
Meditation, contemplation too

The image is telling, a symbolic connection between past dreams and a future reality that those dreams opened up for the young songwriter. There is also symmetry with the 1982 song, ‘Cleaning Windows’. Both songs utilise the conceit about finishing the drudgery of work that has to be done before going home to listen to the ‘real work’ of his musical heroes. The first verse aligns the singer’s love of music with current and future emotions of love, healing and spiritual ‘wondering’. The reference to Ray Charles’, ‘I Believe To My Soul’, is significant, with its themes of disenchantment and moving away. Dreaming of a different life and meditation become common spaces, and so allude to themes about enlightenment in the songwriter’s lyrics. The second verse takes listeners to streets, not as markers of suffering and distance, but as symbols of optimism and rebirth, where open and clear spaces are not far away, and clarity can be breathed in, processed and ‘breathed out with radiance’.

Ah there’s people in the street
And the summer’s almost here
We’ve got to go outside in the fresh air
And walk while it’s still clear

Breathe it in all the way down
To your stomach too
And breathe it out with a radiance
Into the night time air

These are the streets that carry suggestions of home, and preserved through memory. Radiance emanates from this preservation. There is an emotional quality to this verse that sets itself apart from the rest of the song, and this emotionality gestures to how Van Morrison feels as he looks back at his home streets – the affection that is caught in the street songs of Chapter 6. This clearly contrasts with the feelings about the roads we encounter in songs like ‘Foreign Window’.

The third verse is located in transit - an airport in a different place with different cultural systems, flight tickets in hand.

Got my ticket at the airport
Well, guess I’ve been marking time
I’ve been living in another country
That operates along entirely different lines
Keep me away from port or whiskey
Don’t play anything sentimental it’ll make me cry
Got to go now, my friend
Is there really any need to ask why?

Going home? Going further away? There are no answers beyond the avoidance of sentimental expressions of home, the emotional packing away of the cultural baggage. The airport stands for a defining place for the perpetual traveller who is always going somewhere. In this case, it indelibly holds tensions between home and away. ‘Got to go now, my friend,’ the traveller accepts, ‘Is there really any need to ask why?’ The lines skirt their way around feelings of inevitability, acceptance and understanding. The deliberate and poignant ambiguity in this verse reveals much about what exile now looks and feels like for Van Morrison. Ever present and powerful memories of home are to be avoided, as all the while those memories crowd in at the away places of airports

and foreign countries. The ‘different lines’ of these away places contrast sharply with the ambiguities around comfort, but yet distress, of music and tastes of home.

‘Foreign Window’ also positions the window as a symbolic opening. This is not the familiar space of the classroom where the window offers a temporary escape and the promise of future dreams. The place is indeterminate, and the ‘foreign window’ points to the songwriter being away.

I saw you from a foreign window
Bearing down the sufferin’ road
You were carrying your burden
To the palace of the Lord
To the palace of the Lord

Outside the window the roads are endless, and long burdens have to be endured now and into the future. The epithet, ‘sufferin’ road’, captures this interplay of place and emotion. There are also, as Buzacott and Ford (2005) suggest, undertones of John Bunyan’s Pilgrim and ‘the Everyman of the medieval miracle plays’, where the traveller is ‘searching in a foreign country, trying to find ... [the] way back home’ (p. 211). It is noteworthy that these foreign streets are points of relentless hardship, and a far cry from the local streets in songs like ‘Cleaning Windows’ and ‘The Healing Game’ (see, Chapter 6) that symbolise richly populated community places, where coming-of-age formative experiences provide spaces for the negotiation of identity and the recapturing of earlier times. The contrasts between foreign and home streets are pointed. ‘Foreign Window’ does not have the same personal narrative of ‘Got To Go Back’. This is not nostalgia for the past and an associated need to reconnect with an earlier place and time, but a watershed moment that combines the longing of the exile with a clear point of self-examination. With respect to the second of these themes, it is reasonable to conclude that the songwriter is employing a number of standpoints. The first is that of the detached narrator, and that his observations are about the personally experienced

weight of exile. The second is these personal observations subtly represent all those compelled to wander both physically and spiritually, and so the songwriter aligns his own situation with other writers and performers compelled to be continually on the road and considering the complexities of life.¹⁰ These standpoints throw an important light on how exile functions for Van Morrison. His condition of exile is represented in this song as both a unique and individual phenomenon, and also a universal state that others might identify with. There is a detachment in both these standpoints. Actors are seen from afar, through windows and down the road, and this detachment accentuates feelings of isolation. The interplay of suffering and searching play out in the first two verses, the first heavy with the load being borne, the second leading off with a scenic atmosphere of blooming flowers and sunshine.

I spied you from a foreign window
When the lilacs were in bloom
And the sun shone through your window pane
To the place you kept your books
You were reading on your sofa
You were singin' every prayer
That the masters had instilled in you
Since Lord Byron loved despair
In the palace of the Lord
In the palace of the Lord

The fertility of these images is mirrored in the reading, singing and opening out of ideas. But the image is quickly interrupted, and listeners are prompted to recall that there is a price to pay for the soul in wonder. Throughout 'Foreign Window', the

¹⁰ The idea that 'Foreign Window' takes these two standpoints (about himself and others like him) is supported by the songwriter. In 1989 Van Morrison performed this song with Bob Dylan on a hill overlooking Athens. As he introduced the song he explains, 'It's not about any one person, or any two people, it's an idea ... when I was singing it with Dylan it just occurred to me that part of it could be about him and I didn't realize it until that actual second' (see introduction and the clip on *Youtube* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzaObRl76RY>)).

interplay of brightness and caution is reinforced by the mournful and expressive way the vocals linger over the words, sometimes soaring, other times falling away. About the singing, Mills (2010) observes the ‘perfectly balanced mix of blues gravity and metaphysical lightness ... the better to communicate the empathetic urge of the performance’ (p. 259). The locations of the song symbolise a composite interaction of spiritual movement, nostalgia, escape and self-examination. This tentative interaction serves a purpose of representing the exilic complexities and uncertainties that are central to the song. The wide search for knowledge and enlightenment is located first in the artist’s study, pouring over and singing about Rimbaud, thinking about Byron and despair.

I saw you from a foreign window
Bearing down the sufferin’ road
You were carryin’ your burden
You were singing about Rimbaud
I was going down to Geneva
When the Kingdom had been found
I was giving you protection
From the loneliness of the crowd
In the palace of the Lord
In the palace of the Lord

These are images that mingle feelings of physical isolation and loneliness with emotional and intellectual outreach. Elsewhere locations shift in quick succession - a side trip to the foreign city of Geneva,¹¹ communing with religion and nature on green hills, sleeping rough on the floor. Putting these together we encounter an escape ‘from the loneliness of the crowd’, the acceptance of shortcomings (‘carrying your defects’),

¹¹ The reference to Geneva is elusive. Hinton (2000) proposes that this is a reference to Calvin who founded his kingdom in Geneva (p. 256). Van Morrison mentions the city one other time, in the 1999 song, ‘Goin’ Down Geneva’. In this song he writes about the difficulty of exile, and refers to Vince Taylor, who was a failed rock and roll singer who moved to Geneva after an erratic career in the UK. Van Morrison refers to him as a kind of parallel to his own story, life as an exile and the transience of fame. In this song there are lines that are very similar to some in ‘Foreign Window’: ‘Look out my window, back at the way things are’ ... ‘He was goin’ down Geneva, give him helping hand’.

the nostalgia for earlier and simpler days in the image of the green hills ('Just like when you were a child'), and the spiritual endgame in the journey ('the palace of the Lord'). As wide-ranging as these locations are, they come together to represent the exiled experience that is driven by personal and spiritual compulsions, one that gains momentum through contemplation and the recognition that the road ahead still has to be travelled.

Both songs draw inspiration from 'masters'. The first, as noted above, singles out Ray Charles, and not for the first or last time in the catalogue is he directly or indirectly referenced.¹² The second brings together two poets, Lord Byron, and Arthur Rimbaud.¹³ Both travelled extensively to foreign places, both died in their thirties. This combination of being away from their homeland and trapped by physical and emotional suffering fits well with the song's intentions.

References across the songs are interesting. In 'Got To Go Back', Ray Charles stands as an example of the music of his home, and is another instance where childhood memories are strongly inscribed in the songwriter's identity, while those experiences pushed him to follow a transatlantic musical dream. Again, we catch glimpses of the contradictory forces of 'rootedness and transcendence' in Van Morrison's song writing (McLoone, 2008, p. 166). While Ray Charles stands for the nostalgic past, a time in the place of his childhood that emotionally pulls him back, the references in 'Foreign Window' push out to new imaginative and spiritual places - Byron, the melancholic and guilt-ridden Romantic hero who railed against vain ambitions and pretences (Marchand, 2017), and Rimbaud, whose symbolic poetry ranged across a rejection of home and a

¹² See, 'These Dreams Of You' (1970), 'Wavelength' (1978), and 'In The Days Before Rock 'N' Roll' (1990).

¹³ This is the only reference by Van Morrison to Byron in his lyrics. Rimbaud has only been referenced one other time in the writers' block song, 'Tore Down À La Rimbaud' (1985).

desire for freedom and adventure (Mendelsohn, 2011). These are interesting references that inform not only Van Morrison's notion of exile, but also many of the wider themes of his work. Thus there are the memories of home through the music heard in his bedroom (Charles), the rejection of fame and the quest for a simple life (Byron), and the decision to leave home to seek the adventure of new worlds of music (Rimbaud). Together, these references pick out different aspects of the experience in foreign lands, and support the home-and-away counterpoints in the locations the song moves across. At the end of the second verse in 'Foreign Window', the line, 'Since Lord Byron loved despair', plays the card of the melancholic whose art is fashioned within the experience of despair, and so ironically affords a kind of grudging satisfaction. As seen throughout the Morrison catalogue, this is a position that the songwriter has found to be elusive. In the concert (November 2014) for the launch of *Lit Up Inside*, Van Morrison introduced 'Foreign Window' by saying, 'This was partly based on a documentary about Lord Byron in which he said "I have learned to love despair". I wish I could' (*The Telegraph*, 4th February, 2016). The concluding comment ('I wish I could') suggests he found it hard to obtain the right balance of melancholia and enjoyment, and is foreshadowed in the lines that also allude to his difficulty with reconciling his life on the road and the oft-reported impatience with interpreting his words:

And if you get it right this time
You don't have to come back again
And if you get it right this time
There's no need to explain

The critical lines in this bridge are the first and the third, 'And if you get it right this time'. They connect the 'suffering' with the healing on the endless spiritual and

scholarly journey.¹⁴

‘Getting it right’ is directly connected to the concept of healing. As discussed in Chapter 6, this healing is rarely achieved by the *physical* act of returning home. When this is accepted (as it must be, in the end), home is reconceptualised as a place that is both preserved in place and time through memory, and ‘a spiritual state’ (Buzacott & Ford, 2005, p. 211). The first of these gains traction in ‘Got To Get Back’, a song that positions healing through a textual re-envisioning of home. Even if the airplane ticket of the third verse is for a trip back home, it is now just another place to be visited before heading off again. ‘Is there really any need to ask why?’ The question, by now, is rhetorical. Burke (2013) writes about a regression to earlier times in this song and many of Van Morrison’s lyrics - the need to re-envision earlier times, and connect again ‘with the formative sensations of boyhood’ (p. 138). Within this re-envisioning and reconnecting, going back ‘for the healing’, is to imaginatively and textually recapture the *spirit* of earlier times, rather than to set foot on the physical place where the dreaming took hold.

The healing in ‘Foreign Window’, while offering a hint of the nostalgic recapturing of home, has a clearer focus on the search for enlightenment. If the exile is to find solace, it is through processes that are simultaneously physically, emotionally and spiritually difficult. These are also intellectual and bodily processes (Mills, 2010, p. 260), where challenges to find answers are demanding and in diverse places, and where a restless and lonely life on the road entails a constant series of physical hardships. Finding ‘home’ requires an acceptance of the exiled experience, and the search for meaning must continue through scholarly and spiritual endeavour. The spiritual state of

¹⁴ Mills (2010) uses the term ‘scholarly’ to describe the academic pursuits of reading about philosophy and literature, alongside of the religious endeavour: ‘The protagonist is a wandering, scholarly, suffering spirit, someone obliged somehow to be continually in transit, driven to experience and to learn, and far away from home in the process’ (p. 259).

‘home’ is to be found along the ‘sufferin’ road’.

In both ‘Got To Go Back’ and ‘Foreign Window’ the foreign land is an indeterminate ‘away place’ that locates exile in the spaces between memories of the past and the compulsion to be forever on the move. They represent a particular expression of the songwriter’s exiled condition through which the spirit of home is both re-envisioned and recaptured through memory, while, at the same time bound within a spiritual state that can only be reached through the ‘hard yards’ of physical, emotional and spiritual suffering. As previous chapters have shown, expressions of exile are not confined to songs that are located in foreign places. Nonetheless, these two songs offer a particular mid-1980s take on the weight of exile, at a time when the songwriter resolves to push through the hardship towards a homecoming that is defined and decided beyond the materiality of place. The acceptance that the materiality of the sights and sounds of home might be endlessly seen and heard from afar is a position that ‘Got To Go Back’ and ‘Foreign Window’ strive toward. Such a position is reached in later career exile songs.

Foreign Lands, Purpose and a Reconciled Exile

Throughout this chapter, references have been made to writers who have described the movements in Van Morrison’s exploration of foreign places and exile. Quite a few have pinpointed the *Irish Heartbeat*¹⁵ album (1988) as a pivotal moment in the songwriter’s

¹⁵ This album is a collaboration between Van Morrison and the Chieftains that reportedly came about because the songwriter wanted to ‘be Irish in some way’ and to make ‘an Irish-identity album’ (Heylin, 2002, p. 415).

search for identity (see, among others, Burke, 2013, Mills, 2010, Sørensen, 2005).¹⁶ To be fair, they also comment on exile songs post-*Irish Heartbeat*,¹⁷ but the late 1980s period is commonly considered to be the watershed period in Morrison's exile songs. While accepting this conclusion, this chapter also proposes that there is a steady stream of songs from the *Too Long In Exile* album (1993) onwards that settles on a more sanguine view of life on the road. The title track from this album promoted a resigned admission that 'you can never go back home again', that going back was now a project of the imagination. This seems like a very significant realisation about the fundamental nature of all exilic experiences. We have seen throughout the Van Morrison catalogue that the places he thinks about are imaginative spaces, and this clearly applies to the codes and ideas around home. Songs like 'Ancient Highway' (1995) hold reminders of present-day distance, transience, isolation and exile. 'Going Down Geneva' (1999) drops one line about the life on the road ('It's not easy baby, living on the exile plan') among accounts of being away on different foreign places. 'Philosopher's Stone' (1999) adds the important idea about purpose to Van Morrison's sense of exile. In this song, the perpetual sense of movement is a straightforward choice. It is, as Mills (2010) observes, 'what he does' (p. 258). Hardship ('the lead' of the journey) is accepted as part of the authentic and continuous pursuit of musical dreams (turning lead into

¹⁶ Burke (2013) argues that it is on *Irish Heartbeat* that Van Morrison 'would get round to truly revealing his inner Paddy' (p. 166). Sørensen (2005) writes about the imaginative 'settling' in Irish climes culminates in the *Irish Heartbeat* album (p. 159). Mills (2010) observes that Van Morrison's 'long journey home' 'flowered most fully' on *Irish Heartbeat* (p. 54)

¹⁷ Sørensen does acknowledge that *Irish Heartbeat* was not the final statement of Van Morrison's identity project, and mentions the listing of street names and places in 'On Hyndford Street' (pp. 173-4), the linking of his own exiled position with other literary and sporting figures in 'Too Long In Exile' (p. 174), the coming of terms with his father in 'Choppin' Wood' (p. 175), and the inwardly compulsive exile as a quest for adventure in 'Irish Heartbeat' (p. 175). Also see, Burke (2013, p. 205), Hage (2009, p. 117), and Mills (2010, pp. 260-261).

‘gold’).¹⁸ There is a strong impression of movement that is harsh yet inevitable, and places and hard roads to be taken when the ‘job’ has to be done. In the end, resolution overrides grudging reluctance, and, this is central. The *Down The Road* album (2002) has a suite of songs (‘Down The Road’, ‘What Makes The Irish Heart Beat’, ‘Whatever Happened to PJ Proby’, ‘Fast Train’) with ideas of ‘just keeping on’ (Hage, 2009, p. 136), the Irish cultural predisposition to ‘roam’ (Mills, 2010, p. 57), the inevitability and the loneliness of being endlessly ‘down the highway’. ‘Stranded’ and ‘Just Like Greta’ (*Magic Time*, 2005) move towards feelings of a calm and uneasy acceptance of his current and future position. The first admits a sense that this is a world of the songwriter’s own making, and the second the need to retreat from that very world. As these songs proceed, layers are stripped from the songwriter’s examination of the dichotomies within the compulsion to be endlessly away from home, while constantly yearning for the spirit of a remembered home. What remains are unfettered thoughts surrounding the impulses to be away, the freedom that comes with an acceptance that this is the way it has to be, and a recognition that, even though far away, the spirit of home is within an imaginative reach.

These are important points in understanding Van Morrison’s changing dispositions towards exile. If the late 1980s reflect a watershed moment of a symbolic homecoming, then what flows on from that moment is a growing realisation this homecoming is not to a physical present-day place, but to a place in time. There is a clear turning point towards a ‘reconciled exile’, and, in this way, Morrison makes important statements about the long road away from, and back to, home. This is

¹⁸ The use of the hip 1950s term, ‘daddy-o’ is interesting. It brings to mind Beat writers like Kerouac, and skiffle singers like Lonnie Donegan (‘Don’t You Rock Me Daddy-O’, 1957), both influential for the young Van Morrison (see, Chapter 2). It connects with following lines (‘born in the back street Jelly Roll’), and alludes to his own childhood and early musical career in parallel with the legendary Jelly Roll Morton, who Morton began his career at the age of 14 playing piano in New Orleans.

illustrated in 'Song Of Home' (2008), where differences between other songs that utilise the foreign land as a way of accommodating shifting understandings of place and identity, are as informative as the similarities. As such, it provides a good summative point about the journey away from, and back to home, in the Van Morrison songwriting narrative.

The musical palette of 'Song Of Home' sets itself apart. Its atmosphere is established early, with the banjo over the top of a backgrounded steel guitar, and the unhurried three-four time. The introductory sounds are evocative of country and folk music, and, arguably, from both sides of the Atlantic. Hage (2009) hears a song that might have been written by Leadbelly or Woody Guthrie (p. 145), and Mills (2010) detects something approaching 'a Nashville-Appalachia hybrid', and concludes this sets up a feel that is both Irish and American (p. 261).¹⁹ Either way connections between home and away can be detected. There is a lightness of mood that is supported by the vocals as they softly work their way in at 0.30. Immediately noticeable are contrasts between the gravity of the openings to earlier songs like 'Got To Go Back' and 'Foreign Window'. The temper of the song is relaxed and free, a match for the opening lines that bring forward the image of a bird in flight effortlessly riding the wind. This is both a physical support and a predetermined course ('written in the wind'). In this way 'Song Of Home' is reminiscent in character to earlier songs like 'Cry For Home' and 'Irish Heartbeat' (both 1983), that together offer earlier perspectives on spiritual and physical closeness to home, and a readiness to go back imaginatively to earlier times.

Well it's written in the wind
For the story to begin
I will go back to my kin across the sea
And the bird that's on the wing and is flying free

¹⁹ Mills is very likely recognizing the large numbers of Scotch-Irish who emigrated to Appalachia and formed one of what Fischer hypothesized as one of the 'four folkways' (Fischer, 1989) in the formation of the United States.

He can hear the song of home endlessly

There is a consonance of performance and lyric, spanning a quarter of century of Van Morrison exile songs. While there is a discernible lightness and freedom in the musical palette, the lyrics by no means turn their back on critical ideas that have been reached within the songwriter's exiled position. Now the emphasis is on movement that is less weighed down and constricted. It is still a movement that both reaches out to unknown places and looks back to familiar times. This is captured first within the simile/metaphor of the migrating bird, its apparent freedom of flight compromised by the unrelenting 'song of home'. Against this is the picture of adventuring sailors looking for new and free worlds.

Well the further I must go
Then the nearer I must stay
Men have sailed the seven seas to be free
And like that bird that's on the wing and is flying free
He can hear the song of home endlessly

Freedom is central to both these images. They stand in stark contrast to the conflicted anguish of the in-transit traveller in 'Got To Go Back', unable to countenance memories of home, and the suffering, searching soul of 'Foreign Window'. The centrality of the freedom is contingent on the reconciliation of two apparent (and, previously conflicted) opposite directional forces ('the further I must go' and 'the nearer I must stay').

Reconciliation hinges on place as a physical and geographical location, versus place as a location in time that is imaginatively recaptured. 'Further' and 'nearer', at first pull against each other in the visual symmetry of the lines, and the imperative 'must' intensifies the movement. Movement continues to be compulsive movement, and the 'further' the distance travelled the stronger the pull to return, and the 'nearer' imaginatively the exile must stay within the re-envisioned spirit of home. The places of

'Song Of Home' are located within each of these away-and-back movements. The migrating birds and adventuring sailors venture across indeterminate places - the birds across familiar migratory patterns, the sailors into uncharted territories. The lines are symbolic of the concept that the familiar and the unknown are key markers of the exiled position. 'Free' and 'endlessly' are held together in rhyme, and so the freedom of movement away from home is collected within the endless 'song of home'. Against these indeterminate places are two foreign 'rocky shores' each side of the Atlantic.

From the rocky shores of Maine
I will sail back home again
Back to where my heart longs to be
And the bird that's on the wing and is flying free
He can hear the song of home endlessly

I can see the harbour lights
Hear the foghorns in the night
Moving up and down the lough, calling, calling

From the rocky shores of Spain
I will sail back home again
Back to where my heart will always be
Just like a bird that's on the wing and is flying free
He can hear the song of home endlessly

The 'rocky' offers a hint of danger for the returning 'sailor', and a prompt that going home can never again be straight forward. Hage (2009) notices that these two coastal destinations both 'point straight towards Morrison's native isle' (p. 145). This might be a geographical stretch, but the two places do emphasise transatlantic spaces, and link the old and new worlds that the sailors in the earlier verse moved across, and indeed, Van Morrison's own experiences as he moved from Belfast to America. While the song pauses at times to check different places travelled either side of the Atlantic, the dominant place that beckons is again unmistakably his Belfast home, and the bridge between the second and third verses places memories of home firmly between these foreign places. Harbour lights and foghorns have long been symbols of the cultural

safety of Belfast. Home is forever held in these sights and sounds, and the 'nearness' of travelling home is endlessly within imaginative, emotional and textual reach, even when foreign distances are the furthest away. There is also an awareness that the longed for concept of home is both spatially and temporally framed. The home that is within this reach is held within memories of what once was, and even a physical return to the hometown may not dispel the feeling of exile. In this way, there is no absolute return to the home captured within earlier memories, and when this is acknowledged peace might be found in an acceptance of the condition of being transient (Kearney, 1988, pp. 198-199).²⁰ This is exile as reconciliation.

When Van Morrison writes about experiences in foreign lands, he deploys these places to sharpen sensitivities around what it means to be living in exile, continuously on the move, and away from home. Foreign lands provide spaces where questions surrounding dislocation, difference and cultural identity might be considered. These places offer important insights into the songwriter's expression of the exiled condition that plays out across exile as journey, exile as compulsion and hardship, and then, finally, exile as reconciliation.

²⁰ Kearney discusses this with reference to film-maker Neil Jordan, whose exile experiences brought him to view Irish identity as a collective that embraced many aspects of exile, including exile as journey, exile as exclusion and alienation, exile as an existential homelessness, an exile as the necessary position of the artist (quoted in Böss, 2005, pp. 40-41).

11. 'Where You Wander ... and You Roam From Your Retreat and View'

Van Morrison had been a professional musician for 53 years when he recorded his 34th studio album in Belfast at the age of 68. It is aptly titled, *Born To Sing: No Plan B* (2012). One of the songs on the album reintroduces a phrase the songwriter had coined more than 40 years before.

From my retreat and view
Make my own break through
And I might see things new
From my retreat and view ...

Well the higher you go
The more that you know you can find
Like a memory that's there
Stuck in the back of your mind ('Retreat And View')

The words 'retreat and view' are from a line in 'Beside You' (*Astral Weeks*, 1968).

There is an interesting symmetry between the two songs – the earlier talking about the beginning of a journey, the latter looking back on that journey, contemplating what has been learnt along the way, and what still might be learnt in the future. The notion of a journey through song is salient as we look back on the way Van Morrison writes about place, and this notion is picked up later. Meanwhile, let us return to 1968 and 'Beside You' as a way of bringing together some of the ideas and positions explored in the preceding chapters.

‘And You Roam From Your Retreat And View’

This is a particularly telling line within the ‘farewell to Belfast’ flavour of *Astral Weeks*. ‘Retreat’ carries the meaning of going back and finding a safe place. ‘View’ suggests looking outward and taking a position about a belief or an idea. Put together they signal tensions between the drilling down and back through memories, and the surging outwards to other places and ideas in the songs of Van Morrison. These directions had been noted in Chapter 1, in agreement with Hughes (2014), and Mills (2010). The words sit between the childhood memories of the opening lines of the song and the moving away from those memories in the rest of the verse. These later lines establish the theme of lost childhood and stepping out alone to face the attractions (‘diamond-studded highway’), challenges and dangers of the world (‘dogs are barking’), and away from the protection of home and family.

Little Jimmy’s gone
Way out on the backstreet
Out of the window
To the falling rain
Right on time
Right on time
That’s why Broken Arrow
Waved his finger down the road so dark and narrow
In the evening
Just before the Sunday six-bells chime, six-bells chime
And all the dogs are barking
Way on down the diamond-studded highway where you wander
And you roam from your retreat and view
Way over on the railroad
Tomorrow all the tipping trucks will unload together
Every scrapbook stuck with glue
And I’ll stand beside you
Beside you child ...
To never never wonder why at all
To never never never wonder why it’s got to be
It has to be

Now, what seems to start out as a narrative, quickly becomes a wider playing out of the inevitability of growing up and moving on. Time and place intersect, as the disappearing childhood captured in ‘little Jimmy’ is picked up in images of escape (‘out of the window’ ‘the road so dark and narrow’) and in passages of time. Along the way the childhood trappings are cast off. Youthful imaginations of television and film are replaced with the reality of adolescent discoveries. In these imaginations, heroes, like Broken Arrow from the 1950s television series, point to the paths of new adventures where dangers of the dark and narrow roads are inevitably overcome. This ‘wandering’ goes to places hitherto not imagined, and from where there can be no return - beyond the ‘railroad’ tracks that are a sign of danger and another reminder of travel and distance.

What can be seen in this opening verse that picks up on central thrusts of this thesis? First, as with ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ (1972) that led off the opening chapter, the places are lived ‘social places’ - replete with sights and sounds that symbolise notions of growing up and the leaving behind of earlier times. And, as observed in Chapter 1, thinking about place in this way connects with ideas around the ‘poetics of place’ and the centrality of the production of human meaning that artists often attach to place in their writing. This conceptualisation drew on the spatial theory of Heidegger (1962) and Bachelard (1964). This framework around place, experience and meaning has been deployed throughout the thesis, in order to make connections with themes in popular music and with parallels in Irish and Northern Irish literature. Second, there is detail in the scattershot images that carry reminders of the importance of home for the songwriter. While they may not have the loco-specificity of places listed in ‘On Hyndford Street’, nonetheless, the ‘falling rain’ and the chiming Sunday six-bells are clearly suggestive for Van Morrison listeners of Belfast – first in the motif of falling rain, and then more locally to St Donard’s Church, which was within earshot of the

family home. Third, the lines remind us that memory of earlier places and times are deeply important to Morrison's work. In this case they allude to earlier times than those featured in 'Brown Eyed Girl' (1967) and 'Wavelength' (1978), but in similar ways address competing tensions between leaving home and the need to return there through memory. These tensions have worked their way through the thesis, in chapters that focused on home, rooms, streets and foreign lands. The deployment of memory has been highlighted throughout the chapters, a feature that Van Morrison shares with other Northern Irish poets, including Seamus Heaney and Ciaran Carson. This is illustrated in the image of the tipping trucks dumping scrapbooks - childhood memories temporarily abandoned. The repeated lines and words of chorus build on each other in a conversation that speaks of compassion and empathy, and the acceptance of the passing of time.

The passing of time is a particular Morrison motif, and is often utilised when the songwriter is attuned to the rhythms and caprices of nature. There is a connection here with the opening lines of the second verse.

Way across the country where the hillside mountain glide
The dynamo of your smile caressed the barefoot virgin child to wander
Past your window with a lantern lit
You held it in the doorway and you cast against the pointed island breezes
Said your time was open, go well on your merry way
Past the brazen footlets of the silence easy
You breathe in you breathe out you breathe in you breathe out you breathe in
You breathe out you breathe in you breathe out
And you're high on your high-flying cloud
Wrapped up in your magic shroud as ecstasy surrounds you
This time it's found you
You turn around you turn around you turn around you turn around
And I'm beside you
Beside you
Oh darling
To never never wonder why at all
No no no no no
To never never never wonder why at all
To never never never wonder why it's got to be
It has to be
And I'm beside you

Beside you, Oh child

The places of the city with their roads, railroads and highways have now changed. Natural images of gliding ‘hillside mountains’ and ‘pointed island breezes’ first paint scenes of the distances travelled. Later they pick up on what will increasingly become familiar territory for the songwriter – the relationship between love, nature and wonder. This is clearly highlighted in the chapters on nature in the thesis. Here he is employing the imagery to evoke perhaps the ultimate ‘rite of passage’ – the loss of childhood innocence in the act of sexual exploration. Finally, as ‘Beside You’ winds down in its last chorus and coda, there is a cranking up of emotion with each ‘beside you’, and the guitar and pipes go with him until the final and climactic, ‘Oh child’. We are reminded that, as both Marcus (2009, pp. 88-89) and Elliott (2016, p. 72) point out, Van Morrison often conflates singer and protagonist through a ‘heightened vocal presence’.

Performative aspects have been highlighted throughout the thesis, recognising the value of viewing songs as ‘speech acts’ (Frith, 2002, pp. 158-159), and thinking about the way they often function in ‘the way of plays’ (Astor, 2010, p. 148). ‘T.B. Sheets’ (1967), ‘Autumn Song’ (1974), ‘Angeliou’ (1979) and ‘Burning Ground’ (1997) are among those discussed that show the use of this heightened vocal presence.

Contributions to Knowledge About Van Morrison and Place

As much as ‘Beside You’ is prescient in the ways it throws light on some of the places and techniques of Van Morrison’s work as a songwriter and performer, it does not tell the complete story that this thesis has covered. So let us now return to the central question of the study, and draw conclusions about how it has contributed to an increased understanding of his work and life. We began by asking - What are the ways

that Van Morrison employs the concept of place to explore the wider themes of his writing across his career from 1965 onwards? The thesis opened with two assumptions. The first was that Van Morrison's lyrics repay close scrutiny. The second was a belief (supported, but underdeveloped in the literature) that place is an important driver within his songwriting. From these assumptions the thesis closely read a number of Van Morrison songs, and through these readings showed how thinking about place as a specific lens would contribute to a greater understanding of his work and life as a songwriter. From these processes a thesis shape evolved that would set it apart from other scholarship on the songwriter. This happened through a consideration of the places that Van Morrison deploys and the ways these could throw light on the major themes he explores throughout his career. The shape across the seven 'place' chapters of the thesis (Chapters 4 to Chapter 10) traced a particular trajectory in the songwriter's life and work. This was not done by thinking about times and milestones in Van Morrison's life in a chronological sense, nor by following a release order to songs and albums. These approaches had already been comprehensively done (see below), and needed not to be replicated. Rather the context, ideas and detail of the places themselves opened out a unique way of telling the Van Morrison story. This idea of telling Van Morrison's story through song is supported by Peter Mills. In his introduction to *Hymns To The Silence* (2010), Mills rejects the calls for Van Morrison to write autobiographically in the style of Dylan's *Chronicles* (2004), arguing that the songs themselves are able to record and process the detail of his experiences. 'We need to follow the art, not the artist,' he reasons, adding that the songwriter's art is a journey down the road, and to follow this journey through song offers the opportunity to open up insights into different aspects of this art (p. xviii). This thesis brought a shape to this proposition through the places of each successive chapter.

So, we can think of Chapters 4, 5 and 6 as focused on home places. Taken together, these three chapters distilled the nostalgia for home, the necessary pain of having to leave home, and the ways that home can be 'returned' to through memory. Chapter 7, 'Other Narratives Of Belfast', reflected on two distinct physical, social and cultural narratives of Belfast. It connected the early experiences that Van Morrison retreats to in song with a view from the perspective of being away. Chapters 8, 9 and 10 pushed away from the home places of Belfast, and thus highlighted a different set of codes and ideas that have become part of the artist's journey. Some songs hold the Belfast haunts close at hand, and have nostalgia writ large across their lines. Others have a distinct North American or European flavour, and offer ways of seeing how Van Morrison is able to harness the spirit of other places that he lives in and visits. Songs about experiences and observations in the natural world cast a light on how these can be places of transcendence and contemplation. The final chapter, 'Foreign Lands', detailed songs where being away from home and overseas capture the emotionality of being perpetually on the move, and being trapped in an existential state of exile. When we look back on all of these chapters, a picture emerges of the journey that Van Morrison details through his songs, one that sees him wandering as a boy through his East Belfast haunts, and then as a young man to a wider world away from this local place. This is a world where a retreat back to that world would assume the same importance as the view out towards new places and new ideas.

While the shape of the thesis tells a story about Van Morrison's life and work, the close readings extended the story in a number of ways, and these add to the thesis's contribution. From the outset the study was mindful of, and engaged with, the scholarship on Van Morrison, and recognised the importance of building on this. The biographies by Ritchie Yorke (1975), Clinton Heylin (2002) and Johnny Rogan (2006) provided a context for the songs, and allowed for a more nuanced appreciation of how

place was being utilised. Critical books (Steve Turner, 1993, Brian Hinton, 2000, David Buzacott and Andrew Ford, 2005, Erik Hage, 2009, David Burke, 2013) also covered his life and work from a chronological perspective, and offered brief comments about albums and songs. There was value in extending these comments into a more detailed reading of a select group of songs that would more fully open out the ideas that were being explored. Scholarship by, among others, Dawe (1998, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2017), Elliott (2016), McLoone (2008), Onkey (2006) and Smyth (2005, 2019) further highlighted Van Morrison's own approach and attitude towards his work. References to all these have been made throughout the thesis and further contributed to the incorporation of a 'cultural literacy' (Dunne, 2000, see Chapter 1) that brought much to the interpretations of the songs. The books by Greil Marcus (2009) and Peter Mills (2010) were particularly valuable to the scope and shape of the thesis. In a selective sample of songs, Marcus highlighted the value of a close engagement with their lyrics and music. Mills also selected a number of songs for close readings within his very comprehensive study of the Van Morrison's words, music and performance. Both critics present salient examples of readings of songs and demonstrate how lyrics and performance (music and voice) come together in informative ways in the songwriter's art.

The significance of close readings of Van Morrison's songs was also given much impetus by the publication of his *Selected Lyrics* (2014). This was a clear statement by Faber and Faber – namely that these were words that *could*, and *should* be taken seriously. As Ian Rankin argues, Van Morrison's lyrics do 'work' as standalone texts, and repay close critical scrutiny. This was precisely what the study undertook in a very serious way. Another opportunity arose during the research that strengthened the positions taken up in the thesis. In 2014, and before publication, I had the opportunity to meet with Eamonn Hughes at Queens University in Belfast and talk with him about the

work he was doing in collaboration with Van Morrison in the editing of the book.¹ This was a conversation that confirmed that place is, indeed, one of the critical drivers in the songwriter's work. That point is made forcefully in Hughes' Introduction to *Selected Lyrics*. In this introduction (2014, pp. xv-xxiii) Hughes invites readers into the world that Van Morrison creates in his songs – a world of backstreets and ditches, of sights and sounds and aromas, of childhood memories and adult imaginings, and a world that stretches out beyond its retreat and view. The thesis has responded to that invitation by putting detailed 'flesh' to this world, and in doing so has sought to extend our knowledge of Van Morrison's life and work.

What Might Also Have Been Told?

It would be fair to conclude that the decision to concentrate on a small number of Van Morrison songs has been a strength and limitation of the study. Limitations centre on processes around selection, and then to how much of the Van Morrison story was able, and needed to be told.

Subjectivity was inevitable in the selection of songs. While it was reasoned that the places chosen constituted a balanced representation of Van Morrison's work across the catalogue, and this was supported in the literature, the selection of the songs to best capture the songwriter's fascination with those places will invariably be open to debate. Others may well have chosen a different set of songs. Not all of the songs appear in the *Selected Lyrics*, and so there are songs that Morrison and Eamonn Hughes did not find the most important. It might be seen as a limitation to select songs outside this collection. Some of these include, 'Ballerina' (1968), 'And It Stoned Me' (1970),

¹ While I was in Belfast I was also able to visit a number of places made famous in Van Morrison songs – the Hollow, the pylons, Cyprus Avenue, the bridge over the railway line on North Road – and 'see' those early songs within their settings as local childhood hangouts.

‘Autumn Song’ (1974), ‘The Healing Game’ (1997) and ‘Song Of Home’ (2008).² It must be said, however, that these songs clearly fit well within the framework, and so their readings have made important contributions to the thesis. On the other hand, there are songs that have attracted much critical attention and were not seen to fit within the framework of places, and so were not singled out for a detailed reading. ‘Cyprus Avenue’ (1968), ‘Into The Mystic’ (1970) ‘Summertime In England’ (1980) and ‘In The Garden’ (1986) are just some that might have been included in a different thesis set up. Opportunities exist for follow up studies that would include detailed readings of these songs to build on the critical work of this thesis. The research decisions and processes also meant that this was to be a story that focused on the critical place aspect of Van Morrison’s songwriting, and was thus never intended to offer a comprehensive account across all his songs. The place lens also determined that highly valued Morrison songs that did not fit that lens were not discussed. So acclaimed love songs like ‘Moondance’ (1970), ‘Someone Like You’ (1987), and ‘Have I Told You Lately’ (1989) did not make it into the thesis. In addition, the interplay of sacred and profane love, and issues of mysticism and spirituality have not been directly discussed. There is clearly an opportunity for further research into these areas that would add to our understanding of Morrison’s work as a songwriter.

In summary then, this thesis has presented a detailed story of Van Morrison’s art through a particular lens and via a selection of songs that were judged best able to tell that story. The aim was to really get inside these songs and so make a different and important contribution in our understanding of the twists and turns of a five-decade

² Postscript. Since the thesis was submitted and examined, the following songs discussed in the thesis were included in the second edition of the lyrics – ‘Astral Weeks’, ‘And It Stoned Me’, ‘Autumn Song’, ‘A Sense Of Wonder’, ‘I’m Tired Joey Boy’, ‘The Healing Game’, ‘Behind The Ritual’ and ‘Retreat And View’. See Morrison (2020).

musical journey that now stretches across 40 studio albums. It is a contribution that built on the arguments of those who have taken Van Morrison as a writer to be taken seriously, and then found reward in paying close scrutiny to his songwriting.

Words and Music

On the official Van Morrison website³ there is a clip of Northern Irish poet Paul Muldoon reading to an audience from ‘Cleaning Windows’.⁴ Before this clip he comments in interview:

You know, there is no need for a song lyric to stand up on the page. Absolutely no need at all. What it has to do is work with music. And the great waggish distinction between the poem and the song lyric is the poem brings its own music.

Of course, he was referring to the belief that the standalone words of Van Morrison do indeed, ‘bring their own music’. This thesis was founded and borne on the belief that these words have a ‘music’ that offers important insights into the scope of his life and work as a songwriter.

³ <https://www.vanmorrison.com>

⁴ The reading was in 2016 when *Lit Up Inside* was featured as part of the Aspects Festival. It is from the same video where Ian Rankin’s words about ‘close scrutiny’ were quoted that led off this thesis. Paul Muldoon’s quote is at 6.10 (Video downloaded at: <https://www.vanmorrison.com/videos/an-evening-with-van-morrison-lit-up-inside-september-2016>).

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Discography

Van Morrison Songs (Albums listed in Appendix A)

'Gloria' (1965) [Recorded by Them]. On *The Angry Young Them*. Decca.

'If You And I Could Be As Two'. (1965) [Recorded by Them]. On *The Angry Young Them*. Decca.

'Mystic Eyes' (1965) [Recorded by Them]. On *The Angry Young Them*. Decca.

'You Just Can't Win' (1965) [Recorded by Them]. On *The Angry Young Them*. Decca.

'Bring 'Em On In' (1966) [Recorded by Them]. On *Them Again*. Decca.

'Hey Girl' (1966) [Recorded by Them]. On *Them Again*. Decca.

'Brown Eyed Girl'(1967) On *Blowin' Your Mind*. Bang.

'He Ain't Give You None' (1967) On *Blowin' Your Mind*. Bang.

'The Back Room' (1967) Released 1991 on *Bang Masters*. Epic/Legacy.

'T.B. Sheets' (1967) On *Blowin' Your Mind*. Bang.

'The Story Of Them' (1965) [Recorded by Them]. On *Them Rock Roots*. Released by Decca, 1976

'Astral Weeks' (1968) On *Astral Weeks*. Warner Brothers.

'Ballerina' (1968) On *Astral Weeks*. Warner Brothers.

'Beside You' (1968) On *Astral Weeks*. Warner Brothers.

‘Cyprus Avenue’ (1968) On *Astral Weeks*. Warner Brothers.

‘Madame George’ (1968) On *Astral Weeks*. Warner Brothers.

‘Sweet Thing’ (1968) On *Astral Weeks*. Warner Brothers.

‘And It Stoned Me’ (1970) On *Moondance*. Warner Brothers.

‘Brand New Day’ (1970) On *Moondance*. Warner Brothers.

‘Caravan’ (1970) On *Moondance*. Warner Brothers.

‘Glad Tidings’ (1970) On *Moondance*. Warner Brothers.

‘Into The Mystic’ (1970) On *Moondance*. Warner Brothers.

‘Moondance’ (1970) On *Moondance*. Warner Brothers.

‘These Dreams Of You’ (1970) On *Moondance*. Warner Brothers.

‘Old Old Woodstock’ On *Tupelo Honey*. Warner Brothers.

‘Tupelo Honey’ (1971) On *Tupelo Honey*. Warner Brothers.

‘Almost Independence Day’ (1972) On *Saint Dominic’s Preview*. Warner Brothers.

‘Redwood Tree’ (1972) On *Saint Dominic’s Preview*. Warner Brothers.

‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ (1972) On *Saint Dominic’s Preview*. Warner Brothers.

‘Autumn Song’ (1973) On *Hard Nose The Highway*. Warner Brothers.

‘Drumshanbo Hustle’ (1973) On 1991 *The Philosopher’s Stone*. Polydor/Exile.

‘Hard Nose The Highway’ (1973) On *Hard Nose The Highway*. Warner Brothers.

‘Snow In San Anselmo’ (1973) On *Hard Nose The Highway*. Warner Brothers.

‘Wonderful Remark’ (1973) On 1998 *The Philosopher’s Stone*. Polydor/Exile.

'Country Fair' (1974) On *Veedon Fleece*. Warner Brothers.

'Fair Play' (1974) On *Veedon Fleece*. Warner Brothers.

'Linden Arden Stole The Highlights' (1974) On *Veedon Fleece*. Warner Brothers.

'Streets Of Arklow' (1974) On *Veedon Fleece*. Warner Brothers.

'You Don't Pull No Punches, But You Don't Push The River' On *Veedon Fleece*.

Warner Brothers.

'The Street Only Knew Your Name' (1974) Released 1998 on *The Philosophers Stone*.

Polydor/Exile.

'Flamingos Cry' (1977) On *A Period Of Transition*. Warner Brothers.

'You Gotta Make It Through The World' (1977) On *A Period Of Transition*. Warner

Brothers.

'Beautiful Obsession' (1978) On *Wavelength*. Mercury.

'Kingdom Hall' (1978) On *Wavelength*. Mercury.

'Santa Fe' (1978) On *Wavelength*. Mercury.

'Take It Where You Find It' On *Wavelength*. Mercury.

'Venice U.S.A.' On *Wavelength*. Mercury.

'Wavelength' (1978) On *Wavelength*. Mercury.

'Angeliou' (1979) On *Into The Music*. Warner Brothers.

'And The Healing Has Begin' (1979) On *Into The Music*. Warner Brothers.

'Rolling Hills' (1979) On *Into The Music*. Warner Brothers.

'Troubadours' (1979) On *Into The Music*. Warner Brothers.

'You Know What They're Writing About' (1979) On *Into The Music*. Warner Brothers.

'Haunts Of Ancient Peace' (1980) On *Common One*. Mercury.

'When Heart Is Open' (1980) On *Common One*. Mercury.

'Satisfied' (1980) On *Common One*. Mercury.

'Celtic Ray' (1982) On *Beautiful Vision*. Mercury.

'Aryan Mist' (1982) On *Beautiful Vision*. Mercury.

'Dweller On The Threshold' (1982) On *Beautiful Vision*. Mercury.

'Across The Bridge Where Angels Dwell' (1982) On *Beautiful Vision*. Mercury.

'Cleaning Windows' (1982) On *Beautiful Vision*. Mercury.

'Celtic Swing' (1983) On *Inarticulate Speech Of The Heart*. Mercury.

'Connswater' (1983) On *Inarticulate Speech Of The Heart*. Mercury.

'Cry For Home' (1983) On *Inarticulate Speech Of The Heart*. Mercury.

'Irish Heartbeat' (1983) On *Inarticulate Speech Of The Heart*. Mercury.

'The Street Only Knew Your Name' (1983) On *Inarticulate Speech Of The Heart*.
Mercury.

'A Sense Of Wonder' (1985) *A Sense Of Wonder*. Mercury.

'Tore Down À La Rimbaud' (1985) *A Sense Of Wonder*. Mercury.

'Got To Go Back' (1986) On *No Guru, No Method, No Teacher*. Mercury.

'Foreign Window' (1986) On *No Guru, No Method, No Teacher*. Mercury.

‘Here Comes The Night’ (1986) On *No Guru, No Method, No Teacher*. Mercury.

‘In The Garden’ (1986) On *No Guru, No Method, No Teacher*. Mercury.

‘One Irish Rover’ (1986) On *No Guru, No Method, No Teacher*. Mercury.

‘Alan Watts Blues’ (1987) On *Poetic Champions Compose*. Mercury.

‘Coney Island’ (1989) On *Avalon Sunset*. Mercury.

‘Have I Told You Lately’ (1989) On *Avalon Sunset*. Mercury.

‘I’m Tired Joey Boy’ (1989) On *Avalon Sunset*. Mercury.

‘Orangefield’ (1989) On *Avalon Sunset*. Mercury.

‘In The Days Before Rock ‘N’ Roll (1990) On *Enlightenment*. Polydor.

‘Real, Real Gone’ (1990) On *Enlightenment*. Polydor.

‘See Me Through’ On *Enlightenment*. Polydor.

‘So Quiet In Here’ (1990) On *Enlightenment*. Polydor.

‘Hymns To The Silence’ (1991) On *Hymns To The Silence*. Polydor.

‘On Hyndford Street’ (1991) On *Hymns To The Silence*. Polydor.

‘Ordinary Life’ (1991) On *Hymns To The Silence*. Polydor.

‘See Me Through Part II (Just A Closer Walk With Thee)’ (1991) On *Hymns To The Silence*. Polydor.

‘Some Peace Of Mind’ (1991) On *Hymns To The Silence*. Polydor.

‘Big Time Operators’ (1993) On *Too Long In Exile*. Polydor.

‘In The Forest’ (1993) On *Too Long In Exile*. Polydor.

'Too Long In Exile' (1993) On *Too Long In Exile*. Polydor.

'Ancient Highway' (1995) On *Days Like This*. Polydor.

'Days Like This' (1995) On *Days Like This*. Polydor.

'No Religion' (1995) On *Days Like This*. Polydor.

'Russian Roulette' (1995) On *Days Like This*. Polydor.

'Burning Ground' (1997) On *The Healing Game*. Polydor/Exile.

'If You Love Me' (1997) On *The Healing Game*. Polydor/Exile.

'It Once Was My Life' (1997) On *The Healing Game*. Polydor/Exile.

'Rough God Goes Riding' (1997) On *The Healing Game*. Polydor/Exile.

'The Healing Game' (1997) On *The Healing Game*. Polydor/Exile.

'This Weight' (1997) On *The Healing Game*. Polydor/Exile.

'Going Down Geneva' (1999) On *Back On Top*. Virgin/Exile.

'Philosopher's Stone' (1999) On *Back On Top*. Virgin/Exile.

'When The Leaves Come Falling Down' (1999) On *Back On Top*. Virgin/Exile.

'Choppin' Wood' (2002) On *Down The Road*. Polydor/Exile.

'Down The Road' (2002) On *Down The Road*. Polydor/Exile.

'Fast Train' On *Down The Road*. Polydor/Exile.

'Steal My Heart Away' (2002) On *Down The Road*. Polydor/Exile.

'Talk Is Cheap' (2002) On *Down The Road*. Polydor/Exile.

'What Makes The Irish Heart On *Down The Road*. Polydor/Exile.

‘Whatever Happened to PJ Proby’ (2002) On *Down The Road*. Polydor/Exile.

‘Fame’ (2003) On *What’s Wrong With This Picture?* Blue Note.

‘The Meaning Of Loneliness’ (2003) On *What’s Wrong With This Picture?* Blue Note.

‘Too Many Myths’ (2003) On *What’s Wrong With This Picture?* Blue Note.

‘Whinin’ Boy Moan’ (2003) On *What’s Wrong With This Picture?* Blue Note.

‘Just Like Greta’ (2005) On *Magic Time*. Polydor.

‘They Sold Me Out’ (2005) On *Magic Time*. Polydor.

‘Stranded’ (2005) On *Magic Time*. Polydor.

‘Playhouse’ (2006) On *Pay The Devil*. Polydor/Exile.

‘Behind The Ritual’ (2008) On *Keep It Simple*. Polydor/Exile.

‘End Of The Land’ (2008) On *Keep It Simple*. Polydor/Exile.

‘Song Of Home’ (2008) On *Keep It Simple*. Polydor/Exile.

‘Going Down To Monte Carlo’ (2012) On *Born To Sing: No Plan B*. Blue Note.

‘Pagan Heart’ (2012) On *Born To Sing: No Plan B*. Blue Note.

‘Retreat And View’ (2012) On *Born To Sing: No Plan B*. Blue Note.

‘In Tiburon’ (2016) On *Keep Me Singing*. Caroline.

‘Out In The Cold Again’ (2016) On *Keep Me Singing*. Caroline.

Songs and Albums by Other Songwriters

Barrett, S. (1967) 'Scarecrow'. [Recorded by Pink Floyd]. On *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*. EMI Columbia.

Bloom, L. (1984) 'The City of Chicago'. [Recorded by Christy Moore]. On *Ride On*. WEA.

Bristol, J., Fuqua, H. & Starr, E. (1969) 'Twenty-five Miles'. [Recorded by Edwin Starr]. Gordy.

Bruce, J. & Brown, P. (1968) 'White Room'. [Recorded by Cream]. Polydor.

Brown, J. (1964) 'Out Of Sight'. Smash.

Burns, J. (1979) 'Alternative Ulster'. [Recorded by Stiff Little Fingers]. On *Inflammable Material*. Rough Trade.

Capaldi, J., Winwood, S. & Wood, C. (1967) 'Berkshire Poppies'. [Recorded by Traffic]. On *Mr. Fantasy*. Island.

Charles, R. (1957) 'I Got A Woman'. Atlantic.

Chevron, P. (1988) 'Thousands Are Sailing'. [Recorded by The Pogues]. On *If I Should Fall from Grace with God*. Island.

Cooke, S. (1964) 'A Change Is Gonna Come'. RCA.

Davies, R. (1964) 'Dead End Street'. [Recorded by The Kinks]. Pye.

Davies, R. (1967) 'Autumn Almanac'. [Recorded by The Kinks]. Pye.

Davies, R. (1967) 'Waterloo Sunset'. [Recorded by The Kinks]. Pye.

Davis, W. (1940) 'Come Back Baby'. [Recorded 1954 by Ray Charles]. Atlantic.

Denny, S. (1970) 'The Pond And The Stream'. [Recorded by Fotheringay]. On *Fotheringay*. Island.

Denver, J. (1971) 'Take Me Home Country Roads'. RCA.

Dumont, C. & Vaucaire, M. (1960) 'Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien'. [Recorded by Edith Piaf]. Columbia Records.

Dylan, B. (1963) 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall'. On *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. Columbia.

Dylan, B. (1963) 'Blowin' In The Wind'. On *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. Columbia.

Dylan, B. (1963) 'Down The Highway'. On *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. Columbia.

Dylan, B. (1963) 'Bob Dylan's Dream'. On *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. Columbia.

Dylan, B. (1963) 'Oxford Town'. On *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. Columbia.

Dylan, B. (1963) 'Talkin' World War III Blues'. On *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. Columbia.

Dylan, B. (1965) 'Desolation Row'. On *Highway 61 Revisited*. Columbia.

Dylan, B. (1965) 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue'. On *Bringing It All Back Home*. Columbia.

Dylan, B. (1965) 'Positively 4th Street'. Columbia.

Dylan, B. (1965) 'Subterranean Homesick Blues'. Columbia.

Dylan, B. (1966) *Blonde On Blonde*. Columbia.

Dylan, B. (1967) *John Wesley Harding*. Columbia.

Gaye, M., Stevenson, W. & Hunter, I. (1964) 'Dancing In The Street'. [Recorded by Martha and the Vandellas]. Gordy.

Finer, J. & McGowan, S. (1988) 'Fairy Tale Of New York'. [Recorded by The Pogues with Kirsty MacColl]. On *If I Should Fall from Grace with God*. Island.

Foreman, C. & Smyth, C. (1982) 'Our House'. [Recorded by Madness]. Stiff.

Hooker, J. L. (1948) 'Boogie Chillen''. United Sound Systems.

Hooker, J. L. (1964) 'Don't Look Back'. Vee Jay.

Kelly, P. (1984) 'From St. Kilda to Kings Cross'. On *Post*. Mushroom.

King, C. (1971) 'Home Again'. On *Tapestry*. A&M.

Ledbetter, H. (1937) 'Bourgeois Blues'. Library of Congress.

Ledbetter, H. (1938) 'Scottsboro Boys'. Library of Congress.

Lennon, J. & McCartney, P. (1962) 'Love Me Do'. [Recorded by The Beatles].

Lennon, J. & McCartney, P. (1968) 'Mother Nature's Son'. [Recorded by The Beatles]. On *The Beatles*. Apple.

Lennon, J. & McCartney, P. (1967) 'Penny Lane'. [Recorded by The Beatles].

McComb, D. (1885) 'Wide Open Road'. [Recorded by The Triffids]. On *Born Sandy Devotional*. Mushroom.

McGowan, S. (1984) 'Dark Streets Of London'. [Recorded by The Pogues]. Stiff.

McTell, R. (1984) 'Streets Of London'. On *Spiral Staircase*. Transatlantic.

Mitchell, J. (1970) 'Big Yellow Taxi'. Reprise.

Mitchell, J. (1970) 'Woodstock'. On *Ladies of the Canyon*. A&M Studios.

Moran, L., Carton, D. & O'Connor, M. (1991) 'N 17'. [Recorded by The Saw Doctors].
On If This Is Rock and Roll, I Want My Old Job Back. Pinnacle.

Morrison, J., Manzarek, R., Krieger, R. & Densmore, J. (1967) *The Doors*. Elektra.

Morrissey, S. (2004) 'Irish Blood, English Heart'. On *You Are the Quarry*.
Sanctuary/Attack.

Nash, G. (1970) 'Our House'. [Recorded by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young]. On *Déjà Vu*. Atlantic.

Prieto, J., Vance, P. & Pockriss, L. (1966) 'In My Room'. [Recorded by The Walker Brothers]. On *Portrait*. Phillips.

Rafferty, G. (1978) 'Baker Street'. On *City To City*. United Artists.

Reed, J. (1961) 'Bright Lights, Big City'. Vee Jay.

Robertson, R., Danko, R., Helm, L. & Dylan, B. (1971) [Recorded by The Band].
Cahoots. Capitol.

Rodgers, R. & Hart, L. (1937) 'My Funny Valentine'. [Recorded 1956 by Chet Baker].
On *Chet Baker Sings*. Pacific Jazz.

Saint-Marie, B. (1964) 'Universal Soldier'. On *It's My Way*. Vanguard.

Sebastian, J., Sebastian, M. & Boone, S. (1966) 'Summer In The City'. [Recorded by
The Lovin' Spoonful]. Kama Sutra.

Seeger, P. (1966) *God Bless the Grass*. Columbia.

Seeger, P. (1966) 'My Dirty Steam (The Hudson River Song)'. On *God Bless the Grass*.
Columbia.

Simon, P. (1965) 'Leaves That Are Green'. [Recorded by Simon and Garfunkel]. On *1966 Sounds Of Silence*. Columbia.

Simon, P. (1966) 'Homeward Bound'. [Recorded by Simon and Garfunkel]. On Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme. Columbia.

Sloan, P.F. (1964) 'Eve Of Destruction'. [Recorded by Barry McGuire]. RCA.

Springsteen, B. (1973) 'The E Street Shuffle'. On *The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle*. Columbia.

Springsteen, B. (1973) 'Incident on 57th Street'. On *The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle*. Columbia.

Springsteen, B. (1975) 'Backstreets'. On *Born To Run*. Columbia.

Springsteen, B. (1975) 'Born To Run'. On *Born To Run*. Columbia.

Springsteen, B. (1975) 'Jungleland'. On *Born To Run*. Columbia.

Tex, J. (1961) 'Baby You're Right'. [Recorded by James Brown]. United.

Traditional 'Baby Please Don't Go'. Recorded 1935 by Big Joe Williams. Bluebird.

Troup, B. (1946) 'Route 66'. [Recorded by Nat King Cole]. Capitol.

Tweedy, J. (2002) 'I Am Trying To Break Your Heart'. [Recorded by Wilco]. On *Yankee, Hotel, Foxtrot*. Nonesuch.

Walker, D. (1979) 'Breakfast At Sweethearts'. [Recorded by Cold Chisel]. On *Breakfast At Sweethearts*. WEA.

Walker, D. & Prestwich, S. (1984) 'Flame Trees'. [Recorded by Cold Chisel]. On *Twentieth Century*. WEA.

Whyton, W. (1957) 'Don't You Rock Me Daddy-O'. [Recorded 1972 by Lonnie Donnegan]. Pye.

Wilson, B. & Usher, G. (1964) 'In My Room'. [Recorded by The Beach Boys]. Capitol.

Williamson, R. & Heron, M. (1968) [Recorded by The Incredible String Band]. *Wee Tam And The Big Huge*. Elektra.

Williamson, S. (1946) 'Elevate Me Mama'. [Recorded by Muddy Waters] Released 1992 on *The Complete Muddy Waters*. Chess.