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COMMEMORATING SEAMUS HEANEY (1939–2013)

Guest Editor: Michael Parker

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Editor's Notes

Memory is the dominant theme of this issue of *HJEAS* and remembrance its main performance. As the issue was going to press, word came of the death of Brian Friel, the Irish playwright who has become acclaimed not only as the finest dramatist of his generation, but also as a crucial figure in world theatre. Friel's popularity with Irish, as well as international audiences may to a great extent rely on his "gift," as Irish critic and writer Fintan O'Toole has noted, that "he could salvage human dignity from the wrecking ball of history." His plays achieve this effect, however, by offering complex, paradoxical visions dramatizing the power of memory and language in shaping identity at the same time as exposing their inescapable instability, unreliability. *HJEAS* asked long-time contributing editor Csilla Bertha, one of the most discerning commentators on Friel's dramatic artistry, to compose an *in memoriam* to Friel. It is on this sad note that the issue begins.

The ensuing special section, guest edited by established *HJEAS* International Advisory Board Member and distinguished Heaney scholar Michael Parker, is dedicated to another literary giant and a friend of Friel's, literary Nobel Prize winner Seamus Heaney. The juxtaposition of the act of remembrance for Friel and the section on Heaney has the touch of the uncanny. Two years ago, as *HJEAS* was going to press, word came of the death of Heaney, thus the 2013 fall issue of the journal opens with an *in memoriam* to the poet, written by Parker. That note has become a stepping stone for a more extended remembrance as well as scholarly exploration of Heaney's multifaceted legacy presented here. *HJEAS* is indebted to Parker for both, and I am glad to have had the opportunity to work with him. As these introductory remarks are followed by his own editor's notes, I refrain from describing the essays commissioned by him; I only wish to note that I feel enriched by having read them.

Remembering Heaney has taken many shapes in the past two years. Fellow Irish poet Paul Muldoon, whose eulogy is the starting point of Helen Vendler's act of remembrance opening the Heaney section, has also written an elegy in memory of his friend, "Cuthbert and the Otters." The poem renders the pain of loss—"I cannot thole the thought of Seamus Heaney dead"—by conjuring up the legend of a seventh-century saint who was fed by six otters carrying him a large salmon by way of brain food every day, as Muldoon himself explained in a Heaney memorial lecture in Budapest in September 2015. The first of the four essays on miscellaneous topics presented here opens with Wit Pietrzak's exploration of Muldoon's poetic

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acts of remembrance up until the mid-1990s, especially two of his elegies, "Yarrow" and "Incantata," written in memory of the poet's mother and Mary Farl Powers, respectively. Pietrzak reads these two longest poems in the collection *The Annals of Chile* (1994) "as a culmination of [the poet's] experimental treatment of mourning verse," and argues that Muldoon's elegies "represent an attempt to withstand death as the deceased and/or decaying flesh is being revived in an ongoing act of incorporation into the living body of poetry." According to Pietrzak, unlike his more recent elegies, Muldoon's mourning verse written in the 1980s and 90s follows a similar logic, "lifting the deceased unto a textual plane where the speaker and the dead can re-establish contact."

Memory also plays a crucial role in the contemporary British novelist, Tom McCarthy's debut novel, *Remainder* (2006). Recognizing at the start how the text has been described in terms of a "programmatic antipscychologism" challenging the "customary pieties of trauma fiction," Wojciech Drąg's lucid reading of McCarthy's novel focuses on the remainder of psychology in the text. Analyzing the unnamed protagonist-narrator's "obsessive longing to repeat and return" first in terms of Svetlana Boym's concept of restorative nostalgia, and then through the Freudian notion of repetition compulsion, Drąg concludes that "those two categories do not need to be seen as distinct motivations determining the narrator's actions at different stages in the novel," as nostalgic and traumatic fixations overlap in their "obsessive harking back to a past which permeates the present."

If Drąg offers an alternative reading of McCarthy's novel, Gábor Ittzés presents a corrective to previous critical attitudes concerning the issue of temporality in the first three, extra-terrestrial books of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Challenging the long-standing critical skepticism about the applicability of time in the opening books, as well as more recent critical attempts to include them in an overall epic chronology, Ittzés argues that "it is possible to reconstruct at least a general chronology of events in the first three books," but to do so requires a hermeneutic procedure different from the ones applied before. Here, unlike in later parts of the epic where the passage of time is clearly indicated, "an interplay of a set of assumptions and recognitions [concerning the epic's poetic qualities and larger structural patterns] must be brought to bear on the interpretation." As Ittzés further claims, the principles of interpretation mobilized in his reading can also be "generalized and extended to the rest of *Paradise Lost*, enhancing the reading of the poem."

Finally, Angelika Reichmann offers an illuminating re-reading of J. M. Coetzee's re-writing of Dostoevsky's 1871 classic, *Devils* (or *The Possessed*), in his novel *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) explicitly addressing the issue of authorship. Reichmann convincingly demonstrates how Coetzee's re-inscription of the master trope of Dostoevsky's novel, that of possession, reinterprets the stereotypical, monstrous image of the Russian writer and his art prevalent in the English speaking world. According to Reichmann, Coetzee was a more discerning reader of Dostovesky than Coetzee commentators, thus, going against the critical tide, she suggests that the way the trope of possession functions in *The Master of Petersburg* "seems to be a consistent continuation of and an organic development from its Dostoevskian original." As the master trope of possession implies in Dostoevsky's text itself the inescapable ambiguity of the authorial position, "a necessary resignation from mastery as authorial control in the polyphonic novel," what Coetzee's novel does is it "takes these implications to their extreme."

The review section is headed by long-time contributing editor of *HJEAS*, Mária Kurdi's review essay, which brings our readers back to the terrain of Irish literature. It provides a comprehensive and informative overview of recent trends in criticism addressing the work of the world-famous Irish dramatist, John Millington Synge. Mapping the developments of Synge criticism in the past twenty-five years, Kurdi delineates a few distinct, though not entirely unrelated fields of inquiry: re-readings of Synge's dramatic oeuvre informed by postcolonialism and feminism from the late-1980s on, studies highlighting the modernism (and, at times, postmodernism) of Synge's plays, research analyzing the plays in performance, and most recently, in a cross-cultural context. The impressive array of critical material that Kurdi surveys clearly suggests a vibrant field of academic activity as well as Synge's contemporaneity. The following eight reviews cover a wide variety of topics and approaches from Richard Rorty's analytical philosophy through Gilles Deleuze and modernism, literary translation, film sequels, modes and techniques of visualizing pain, to the queer dimensions of the uncanny. They also enhance the Irish dimension of the issue, however, as one review focuses on twentieth-century literary representations of the 1798 United Irishmen Rebellion, and another discusses Christopher Murray's most recently published book on Brian Friel's dramatic artistry.

The editor of the present issue of *HJEAS* wishes to thank all the blind peer reviewers for their invaluable professional help, the members of the

editorial board—especially copy editor Judit Szathmári, review editor Gabriella Moise, and technical editor Balázs Venkovits—who have been instrumental in bringing out this issue, and last but not least, editor-in-chief Donald E. Morse for his professional guidance and support.

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In Memoriam Brian Friel (1929-2015)

Csilla Bertha

Hardly two years after his close friend of over a half a century, Seamus Heaney died, which shattered Brian Friel, the internationally acclaimed, best-known Irish playwright, one of the most highly-esteemed playwrights in the English language in the twentieth century, also passed away on 2 October, 2015. His death is a great loss to all the theatre world, to all those who admire his work, and a sad personal loss to all of us who had the good fortune to know him and benefit from his intellectual inspiration, wit, and warm-hearted generosity. In August, the first Lughnasa International Friel Festival—whose events the celebrant was able to follow only from his sickbed—honored Friel with performances, staged readings, conference papers, lectures, and discussions in his beloved County Donegal (and Belfast), with the intention to initiate an annual celebration of his work and loyalty to the region and, especially, the village of Glenties which, as Ballybeg, he elevated to become a literary site of memory in many of his plays.

Since he revitalized Irish drama with *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964), the fictitious Ballybeg—Baile Beag in its original, Gaelic name—has become known to the world as a metonym for, and microcosm of, Ireland, where the local may stand for the universal, as in his artistic belief: "The canvas can be as small as you wish, but the more accurately you write and the more truthful you are, the more validity your play will have for the world" (Friel, *Essays* 48). Ballybeg remains throughout his work the playwright's Archimedic fixed point from which to observe and to which to relate the world without sentimentality, without nostalgia: a small town and the center of the world, offering stability of place in the "flux" of changing times. The mutability of time, of course, destabilizes the place as well, yet it remains the archetypal locus to which one can always return (as Friel does even in his last original play, *The Home Place* [2005], and now he chose it for his final resting place). The interaction between place and time, stasis and change, tradition and modernity, looking backward and progress defines in varying proportions the economic-political-cultural life of Ireland throughout the twentieth century. Friel dramatizes this continual co-existence, collision, and battle. Current social, political situations and issues, however, show up in the majority of the plays obliquely, indirectly, and in a complex relationship to the characters and dramatic situations. Responses

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to the situations are never didactic or one-sided, yet the author's values shine through the balances. "Confusion is not an ignoble condition" (*Selected Plays* 446), as one of his key characters in *Translations* famously declares, yet it is not an empowering one either, nor does it lead to a relativization of loyalties, beliefs, or truths. His plays unsettle old certainties, and yet the organic relationship and interdependence of the individual and the community—whether peaceful, happy, or full of sharp collisions—remains essential. He asserts that playwrights, instead of having solutions or answers, are "vitally, persistently, and determinedly concerned with the one man's insignificant place in the here-and-now world," and defines their function as "to portray that one man's frustrations and hopes and anguishes and joys and miseries and pleasures with all the precision and accuracy and truth that they know, and by so doing help to make a community of individuals" (*Essays* 14). Each word of this early credo bears out in the oeuvre, with growing assurance of hand, language, scenography, and theatricality. Friel never proposes returning to the past, never suggests that it might be regained through lamenting or blindness to reality, yet illuminates again and again some past values that prove vital, sustaining, even necessary. A "necessary uncertainty"—as he puts it in his *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* (1997)—that is the condition of all life.

From *The Enemy Within* (1962) and *Philadelphia*, through *Aristocrats* (1979), the absolute masterpiece, *Faith Healer* (1979), *Translations* (1980), *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), *Wonderful Tennessee* (1993), *Molly Sweeney* (1994), to the last full-length, *The Home Place*, in his twenty-four published plays and seven translations/adaptations he dramatized the subtleties of the Irish psyche, the transformations of Irish identity and consciousness through half a century while wrestling with general and special Irish postcolonial confusions, amongst them the dual English and Irish, Protestant and Catholic heritage, ongoing conflicts between unionists and republicans, North and South, and so forth; and with all that, increasingly merging with the danger and false allure of globalization. The dualities and the consequential uncertainties in his plays derive from an inherent doubleness—a vital historical, political, and cultural experience of the Irish, which, as if symbolically, accompanied Friel personally all his life, beginning with his birth certificates marking two different days (8 and 9 January) as his birthday (to which he referred by saying "perhaps I'm twins"), two versions of the same given name: the English Brendan and the Irish Brian, continuing with growing up a Catholic in Northern Ireland, then moving over to live in the Republic as a Northerner, thus belonging to both

Irelands, with a double English and Gaelic-Irish language-background, living geographically and metaphorically at the borderlands.

One of Friel's secrets is that his plays that at first glance appear fairly conservative and naturalistic in the sense that they rely heavily on language, on the written text, and work with sensitively psychologized, complex characters against clearly delineated social backgrounds, prove eminently theatrical and varied in form. Often referred to as the "Irish Chekhov," his plays show nuances of thought and feeling, not with spectacular, loud, or fashionable dramatic innovations, but in inventing dramatic solutions to suit the contents, thereby deeply influencing the course of Irish drama. Several critics have recognized his brilliant style and praised his constant experimenting, renewal, and revival of the dramatic form. Anthony Roche, for instance, emphatically points out and substantiates in his *Theatre and Politics* that Friel is a much "more radical and experimental playwright than is commonly perceived" (3). On closer look, each play introduces some innovation of form, some unexpected theatrical solution that organically emerges from the content, as if smuggled into the otherwise realistic dramaturgy. Such is embodying the inner self of a character as a double—a separate figure on stage—in *Philadelphia*, or using a divided stage and applying different dramatic styles side by side as the "real" events are acted out naturalistically in the center while various (partial, biased, and distorted) interpretations and viewpoints are represented around and above it in an expressionistic structure, thus the discrepancy between truth and its reporting becomes embedded in the drama form (*The Freedom of the City*, 1973). One of his most influential innovations is introducing and varying the monologue-drama (*Faith Healer*, *Molly Sweeney*), which then was followed by a host of new Irish plays written in that form. Elsewhere, he gave space to dance to take over words (*Dancing at Lughnasa*), or bravely let music be the main "character" of a play, with real musicians playing whole movements of a String Quartet onstage (*Performances*, 2003). He made emotional and artistic doubts, uncertainties, and fears palpable on stage, allowing fiction or memories of non-existent moments to hold their own against "facts," without leaving entirely the realm of realism, without moving in the direction of fantasy-play. Also, as a "Proteus figure . . . [he] is constantly changing his shape in an effort to escape categorization, being identified with any one theatre, any one style or set of beliefs" (Murray 2); after a successful play Friel hastened to write another one responding to the previous one, yet of a totally different nature (*Philadelphia* followed by *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, *Translations* by *The Communication Cord*, *Lughnasa* by

Wonderful Tennessee). In an organic way, motifs in earlier plays return to flourish as full-blown themes in later ones; similar issues reappear illuminated from a different angle, holding the whole oeuvre together, yet constantly modifying, developing, and enriching it.

A particular Friel bravura is that, without much ado or spectacular time-shifts, time collapses, or different layers commingle almost imperceptibly—including different qualities of time, such as actual, physically definable lived time, and infinity from which the protagonist's unghostly ghost comes back to speak about his homecoming as he goes to meet his death (*Faith Healer*). *Translations*, set in the nineteenth century, acts out in a deceptively realistic milieu what happens in the play's present (the renaming of place names that will lead to the loss of the mother tongue) and, simultaneously, its consequence at the time of its writing and producing 150 years later, in the 1980s, when everybody speaks English instead of Irish. He achieves this by deploying the theatrical conceit of two languages spoken by the characters, but the audience hears only the one spoken by the actors onstage. The protagonist of *Performances*, Laos Janáček talks, plays the piano, eats lettuce on stage, and mentions in annoyance the publication date of one of his works as "[t]wenty years after I was buried, for God's sake" (15). Not a gratuitous theatrical game, but a representation of the artist's confrontation with the afterlife of his work, a serious (although often humorous) investigation into what happens to the work, how it continues living, how valuable life experiences are vis-a-vis the accomplished work, after the author dies.

Friel was also a playwright most acutely aware of the significance of stage space. As Christopher Murray argues, he "constantly made audiences conscious that 'space' is more than setting: action and mood are articulated *by* the space in which stories are told on stage" (195). In *Wonderful Tennessee*, for example, Murray claims, "Friel made the setting: a large seaside pier come alive as a brooding spiritual presence," as in the stage directions space is created "to draw the audience into the silence emphasised at the opening and close of the play" (196). Silences sometimes are as meaningful as sounds in Friel's plays; words often gain their significance through confrontations or completions with music, song, and dance. Music, song, dance—as the playwright suggests in several plays—each is more expressive than words. *Dancing at Lughnasa*, for instance, ends with the narrator's famous reminiscence: "Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement. . . . Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary . . ." (71). And in *Performances*, we keep hearing the

composer's testimony of how music is superior to literature, "a much more demanding language . . . [b]ecause we reach into that amorphous world of feeling itself; a unique vocabulary of sounds created by feeling itself" (31). And yet, it is words, beautifully and precisely crafted words, that encapsulate nature, give significance to the silences, to dance, to the composed music, and frame the memories which are beyond words.

Friel's masterful language—at once refined, subtle, sophisticated, and precise—reflects back on itself in several different ways. Language is, famously, in *Translations*, both a subject and medium, a central issue, as well as a theatrical conceit. Through focusing on losing the mother tongue, having to accommodate to the colonizers' standards and values while trying to keep some measure of cultural independence, scrutinizing issues of "identity-colonization" (see Dani) and ways of resistance, *Translations* became a key play of postcolonial drama all over the world. Moreover, "[i]n pursuit of a meaningful, but not naïve, authenticity, Friel has reflected and refracted contemporary theoretical concerns in the most complex and productive manner, sophisticating an analysis initiated by and opening up areas of debate which resonate across the whole of Irish Studies" (Richards 198).

Frequently, memory—private and public, individual and cultural—negotiates between home and displacement, authenticity and contemporary life, the incommensurable elements of the originary culture and their elusiveness or absence in the present. Memory is unreliable by its nature, yet not less significant or true for all that. Facts are no more important than fiction embedded in memories or dreams, and often convey less of the truth. In *Philadelphia*, the whole course of the protagonist's life might have turned out differently if his father could have engaged with his childhood memory, which for the boy was deeply true and enabling, although probably never happened quite the way he remembered it. In *Aristocrats*, facts and creative memories only inhabit different regions of reality: as one character consoles the dreamer: "There are certain things, certain truths, . . . that are beyond Tom's [the fact-hunter historian's] kind of scrutiny" (*Selected* 309-10). Or, as *Faith Healer*, this "most intense, most beautifully shaped and most theatrically mesmerising" of Friel's plays (Murray 10) brilliantly dramatizes, everybody's version of reality is valid, which sometimes coincides with, other times sharply diverges from, those of other participants in the same events. In the last monologue, Frank Hardy, the protagonist speaking from "the other shore," in an uncanny moment entirely destabilizes the boundaries between fact and fiction, past and

present, matter and spirit when he, the now-dead man, reads out a newspaper clipping that praises his one-time huge success as healer and testifies to his identity, and then crumples it up and throws it away in front of the audience while describing how he did so in the last hour of his life.

This extraordinary play self-reflexively calls attention to its own performance-like quality through the almost bare stage featuring only a poster and rows of chairs in front of which the monologues are delivered, which, "in turn makes the audience itself a crucial participant in the faith-healing ritual, extending the drama from the confines of the stage to embrace the entire auditorium" (Roche 158). The faith healer, with all his doubts, uncertainties, anxieties, and anguishes, still living according to "some private standard of excellence of his own" (*Selected* 346), becomes a metaphor for the artist, or rather, a portrait of the artist in the late twentieth century—a self-portrait. The dark, doubtful, and despairing world of most of the plays almost imperceptibly metamorphoses by the closing scene, which shows a glimpse of hope, possibility, renewal or redemption, and that happens in *Faith Healer* in the most exquisite way. As Richard Rankin Russell argues, Friel in the conclusion "inscribes an intimate immensity . . . that expands the metatheatrical yard into the world" (11). And with that, this play "frees us from modernity's time trap of irreversibility and the lure of futurity by returning us to the repetitions of ritualistic, religious time. . . . [W]e suffer [Frank Hardy's] anguish and hope against hope that his sacrifice will somehow bring forth healing" (Russell 139). Heaney's poetic description of the play's ending voices similar feelings: the motion of this destructive and self-destructive, failed healer towards his murderers "has the radiance of myth, it carries its protagonist and its audience into a realm beyond expectation, and it carries the drama back to that original point where it once participated in the sacred, where sacrifice was witnessed and the world renewed by that sacrifice" (237).

Friel's plays are translated into many languages—several into Hungarian—and are staged all over the world. The most frequently produced play in Hungary—not surprisingly—is *Lughnasa*, and *The Communication Cord*, *Faith Healer*, and *Afterplay* have also been performed. The Hungarian premiere of *Translations* happened in Debrecen, with the direction of Dublin-based director, Patrick Burke, who was sensitive to the Hungarian resonances this play evokes. The Abbey Theatre's production was brought to Budapest for two nights (2001), and later the play was produced by Hungarian theatres in Kolozsvár (Cluj in Romanian) and Nagyvárad (today Oradea), both towns in old Hungarian territory that today

belongs to Romania, with their place names forcefully changed into Romanian.

The *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* has published numerous essays on Friel throughout the years, and in 1999, on his seventieth birthday, devoted a special issue to his work (ed. Mária Kurdi). Later, this collection of essays was expanded and became *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry. "The Work Has Value"* (ed. Donald E. Morse, Csilla Bertha, and Mária Kurdi), published as the first HJEAS book, by Carysfort Press in Dublin in 2006.

Aosdana, the Irish Association of Artists, elected Friel a "Saoí" (Wise One) in 2006—an honor limited to only seven artists at a time in the country. Friel, the wise man, is no longer with us, but the wise playwright of universal appeal, who already in his life became a classic, stays with us through his work. Friel's "genius lay in his ability not to mourn the loss of [old] certainties, but to transform their broken forms into a kind of beauty" (O'Toole 1). With his "Theatre of Hope" (Friel's own phrase), laden with all the uncertainty, frustration, sadness and anger over a broken and disappearing world, culture, language, identity, and traditions, this artist of the "divining"-shamanic-priestly order will continue making, as he hoped "some tiny thumbscrew adjustments on our psyche" (*Conversation* 211).

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The Lagans Road - Heaney's route to and from Anahorish School 1
River Moyola at Castledawson, Heaney's Birthplace 2
Heaney family pump at The Wood 3
St Columb's College, Derry 4

Photos Courtesy of Michael Parker

A friend throughout the poet's years in Boston, Tom Sleigh confessed in a recent article that he had yet to come to terms with the idea of Seamus Heaney as no longer among the living, imagining him instead as "hovering just out of sight on the borders of vision" (16). This is probably not an uncommon reaction amongst the poet's countless admirers throughout the world for whom he continues to be a vital presence.

This issue of *The Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* brings together six essays on the writer and his considerable literary achievements. It opens with two acts of remembrance and a poem composed in the immediate aftermath of the poet's passing. Helen Vendler's contribution starts and ends with responses to and details of Heaney's requiem mass, the plenitude and diversity of its interwoven elements, a right and just reflection of the gravity and grace his art embodied. Ever since their first meeting in the mid-1970s, Vendler had been a steadfast champion of his work. Whenever new poems or the inklings of a new collection slowly began to emerge, Heaney regularly sought her opinion for its acuity and authority, regarding her as one of his surest, most discerning readers. A particularly interesting aspect of her contribution to the issue is its focus on his uncanny capacity to "scan" people, grasping in an instant "their faculties of mind and temperament."

Despite its brevity, the piece offers incisive analysis of characteristic features of Heaney's language, in particular the breath-taking exactitude and appositeness of his word-choices and word-clusters. Even a poem as loved and well-known as "Mid-Term Break" gets to be scanned anew. She considers word by word, image by image, the acuteness of his observation and "convincing oddity" of his phrasing in a single line, where he describes how his mother coughed out "angry tearless sighs" following her four year-old son's death in an accident in 1953.

Bernard O'Donoghue was a colleague and companion throughout Heaney's tenure as Oxford Professor of Poetry from 1989-1994. His essay opens recalling the anticipation felt by so many readers learning that a new Heaney collection was on the way, and the delight in discovering the new work. He delineates in the course of his essay the factors that generated such reactions, not least how fully Heaney had absorbed lessons from his literary predecessors—the roll-call includes Wordsworth, Keats, Chekhov, Hopkins, Mandelstam, Kavanagh, Hughes, Miłosz—how to transmute "the

bits and pieces of Everyday" (Kavanagh, "The Great Hunger" 42), glimpsing the extraordinary in what seemed ordinary.

A core strength and strain in the corpus O'Donoghue identifies is Heaney's willingness to face up to appalling public events and the great ethical questions they pose, whether in his homeland or on the larger international stage. Whenever, wherever innocents became victims, during Iron Age or twentieth-century Europe, in Belfast or Derry, New York or Iraq, Heaney's poetry confronted atrocity with compassion. For O'Donoghue, it is not just "the seriousness of the subjects he dealt with, and the eloquent power he brought to the discussion of them" that "made him the outstanding poet in English of his time," but his ceaseless service to the cause of Poetry worldwide.

The four essays which follow, and which were commissioned especially for this issue, offer insights on different aspects of Heaney's work and legacy. As for each of these an abstract is available, it makes sense simply to offer a short outline of the ground they cover and allow the essays to speak for themselves.

In the year that marks the 150th anniversary of Yeats's birth, Edward Larrissy offers a highly original, timely exploration of the complex nature of the relationship between Heaney and his great predecessor. In the course of his wide-ranging discussion, Larrissy pinpoints areas where they appear to converge and diverge, not least in their reactions to political violence. Poems, such as Yeats's "Easter 1916" and Heaney's "Casualty" voice a deep distrust of, or, in Heaney's case, an antipathy towards political fanaticism, knowing all too well "the sacrifices" it produces; for Yeats, though not for Heaney, Larrissy notes, there remains a possibility that the sacrifice *might* be worth the pain.

Violence as a clear and present danger haunts "Heaney in Limboland," a documentary from 1970 directed by fellow-Queen's graduate, Derek Bailey, which provides the principal focus for Rosie Lavan's offering. An example of the illuminating scholarship undertaken in recent times on Heaney's work in radio, television, and film, Lavan demonstrates ably how interventions in other media often complement and illuminate the concerns of the poems. The acute analyses she offers of both the film and the poems contemporaneous with it cast fresh light on Heaney's ambivalent relationship with Belfast at a period before atrocities became near-daily events. As Lavan eloquently notes, Heaney's comments on screen reflect a current alarm at the increasingly ugly sectarian turn Northern Irish culture has taken in the preceding years, yet "gesture far beyond it: into history and allusion, and towards Heaney's own later poetic and theoretical realms in which the responsible, responsive conscience of the poet will be a key concern."

Like Lavan and other critics writing today, Stephen Regan makes judicious use of the invaluable archival resources made available over the decade or so, which have deepened our appreciation and understanding of the poet's aims and processes. Regan's essay exploring when, why, and how Heaney opted to translate the medieval Irish poem, *Buile Suibhne*, ranges over a period of twelve dramatic years in the poet's career. Tracing meticulously the substantial alterations Heaney's text passed through in the course of its composition, Regan argues convincingly that *Sweeney Astray* fulfilled a crucial role in Heaney's poetic development, serving as "a bridge" or "weight-bearing structure . . . enabling and sustaining his artistic transition from *Wintering Out* (1972) to *Station Island*" (1984). Towards the essay's close, Regan's extends its compass to include the "Sweeney Redivivus" poems in *Station Island*, and draws comparisons between Heaney and Yeats as possessors of imaginations which refused "to settle and be placated."

Finally, Michael Parker details some of the factors that helped shape *Human Chain*, in particular the impact of the stroke Heaney suffered in August 2006. He analyzes the thematic, formal, and aural links within the collection's opening, family-centered poems, in which many of his foundational literary influences, such as Wordsworth, Keats, and Hughes reappear. Given how frequently this part of the collection revisits moments of breach in his early life, it is not surprising that Heaney should employ echoes from writers associated with St Columb's, the place where his experiences of displacement, of "world-tilt," started.

As the volume unfolds, the recurrent use of adverbs of time alerts readers to the speakers' fears that time and circumstances may be conspiring against them, and that the deep wellspring of memory—so much a source and resource—may be drying out. The last of these anxieties seems clearly misplaced. *Human Chain* reveals an artist at the top of his game, deft in his handling of subject matter, form, rhythm, sound, and peerless in his mastery of metaphor.

In a celebrated elegy for another of literary giant, W. H. Auden writes of how "the death of the poet was kept from his poems" ("In Memory of W. B. Yeats" 80); that secret will be maintained for many decades to come as existing and new readers visit and revisit Heaney's work, and wonder at "the achieve of; the mastery of the thing" (Hopkins 132).

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Remembering Seamus Heaney

Helen Vendler

Seamus Heaney's funeral in Dublin was televised live, marking an event that occupied the front pages in Ireland for several days. In his eulogy of the poet, Paul Muldoon told the story of being asked at Customs, on his arrival for the funeral, what he did for a living; when he replied that he taught poetry, the Customs officer said, "You must be devastated." No need to say why: the loss of the poet was felt everywhere. He had visited schools and given readings in almost every corner of the country, often for nothing; thousands of people had seen him on television, or had read of the Nobel Prize. The bleak fact that there would be no next volume of his poetry was a grief to his readers, but even those who knew his work best were mourning the man as much as the poet.

Seamus established an immediate intimacy even with strangers. The eldest of nine children, he could be anyone's older brother. A quick understanding and quiet help arose naturally in him. He had a ready humor: I once took a cab in Cambridge a day after Seamus's departure to Oxford, and the driver said: "I had a very witty man in the cab yesterday." You couldn't meet Seamus without seeing how unusual he was in perception and how rapidly he took in another person. At Harvard, he and I had both taught an exceptionally gifted student who died young. His student friends asked me if perhaps Seamus could send some words to be read at the memorial service. I left the message for Seamus in Dublin, and in a few hours found a return message with a tender paragraph about the student. The kindness was typical; but what arrested me, when I heard that description on my voice mail, was its uncanny accuracy. He had taught the student several years earlier, but it was as though he could lift from memory a photographic scan of the student and, by a sort of alchemy, "read it off" into factual and touching statement. I realized then that Seamus "scanned" people in a clairvoyant way, realizing their faculties of mind and temperament instantly and deeply.

It was that scanning, putting feeling into words, which distinguished Seamus's portraits of human beings. In his poem "Mid-Term Break" (recalling, years later, the death of his four-year-old brother, hit by a car), he is an adolescent sitting at the wake next to his mother, who "coughed out angry tearless sighs." The phrase gives me, by its convincing oddity, the absolute joy that art provides. "Cough": an uncontrollable spasm of the

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throat; "anger": an outward-going fierce resentment; "tearless": a violent suppression of the body's natural response; "sigh": a declining volume of breath, yes, but when coupled with "angry" a self-propelling protesting ungovernable exhalation, rising upward again as soon as it dies away. Around the unforgettable past scan of his mother's anguished voicelessness, words—"cough," "anger," "tearless," "sigh"—begin to cluster in the poet's mind, translating the buried scan into language. Heaney's particular mosaic of words preserves the unique, complex, and unrepeatable contour of human emotion: "what we felt at what we saw," as Stevens put it. Such a run of words tells the human tale in the way it is lived: moment by moment. Forgettable poems cannot delineate the uniqueness of the moment: their language is half cliché, ruining itself as it goes.

And so, volume by volume, decade by decade, Heaney translated feelings in resonant word-clusters. For "the Troubles" in Northern Ireland: "neighborly murders." For early marriage: "the lovely and painful / Covenants of flesh . . . / The respite in our dewy dreaming faces." For expressing his chosen but unnatural distance from his native North when he moved to the Republic: "I am neither internee nor informer; / an inner émigré." After his mother's death: "A soul ramifying and forever / Silent, beyond silence listened for." For the destruction of the Twin Towers: "Anything can happen." And in the course of a long career, around the clusters there clustered more clusters, until a constellation, and then in time a galaxy, shone from the assembled poems, making up what we call a poet's style.

Heaney's own style went through many changes while remaining recognizable across time. Brought up a Catholic, he was no longer a believer as an adult, but he also remarked that one cannot forget the culture in which one was raised. He attended no church, but by his own wish was buried at a Catholic Mass: there is no other way to bury someone from the Catholic tradition in Ireland. The readings reflected the poet's multiple debts to foundational texts: the Hebrew Bible ("Let us now praise famous men," "a time to be born and a time to die," the twenty-third psalm); and the New Testament ("the greatest of these is charity"). The gospel of the day included Jesus's reassurances concerning the fall of the sparrow and the lilies of the field. The homilist of the removal ceremony the night before had invoked Irish legend, reading part of Seamus's poem on St. Kevin and the blackbird, a parable of saintly human kindness. The funeral music (except for the organ of the liturgy) was provided by Liam O'Flynn's uilleann pipes, playing minor-key melodies of Irish lament. A solo cello at the end played Brahms's lullaby. Although the sorry English of the new

Biblical translation of "The Lord is my shepherd" marred the reading of that psalm, the other Biblical texts were read in the traditional English of the Douay Bible, keeping the dignity of language in view. Peter Fallon read Heaney's beautiful poem "The Given Note," about a violinist composing an air: it concerns the aspect of art that seems not made but rather bestowed "out of the night":

> So whether he calls it spirit music
> Or not, I don't care. He took it
> Out of wind off mid-Atlantic.
>
> Still, he maintains, from nowhere.
> It comes off the bow gravely,
> Rephrases itself into the air.

Paul Muldoon gave a heartfelt account of the man and the poetry; Michael Heaney ended the ceremony with an offering of thanks to all mourners on the part of the family, and a eulogy of Seamus as husband and father.

In short, the readings were as mixed as Heaney himself, and the chosen music was secular (not liturgical or hymnic) played on two instruments—one from the folk tradition and one from the classical orchestra. It was a sober funeral, with the family—Marie Heaney, Michael, Catherine, and Christopher—in the first row of the pews, patiently shaking hands with hundreds of mourners at the end of the service. A public funeral, with the president and the Taoiseach in attendance, and the video cameras everywhere. A private funeral, with Heaney's two sons and two of his brothers among the pallbearers. An austere funeral, with a single spray of white flowers on the coffin.

All of this, too, seemed to match Heaney's poetry—so often private in family poems, but public in poems about the torment in the North; so often opulent in language (like the Biblical readings), so often plain (like the parables). Heaney spoke often about poetry, but his most memorable gloss on the function of poetry in public life comes from the account in the Gospel of John of the woman taken in adultery. When the crowd is about to take up stones to kill her, Jesus intervenes in a strange way: without saying a word, Jesus bends and with a finger writes something (never identified) on the ground. For Heaney, that gesture resembles the intervention that poetry, too, can make. A pause inserted in the violence

that redefines the situation: violence is silently averted and, as Jesus then says, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone," the scribes and Pharisees, "convicted by their own conscience," depart, one by one. Heaney comments, in an essay called "The Government of the Tongue":

> The drawing of those characters [by Jesus] is like poetry, a break with the usual life but not an absconding from it. Poetry, like the writing, is arbitrary. . . . [I]t does not propose to be instrumental or effective. Instead, in the rift between what is going to happen and whatever we would wish to happen, poetry holds attention for a space, functions not as distraction but as pure concentration, a focus where our power to concentrate is concentrated back on ourselves.

Heaney's remarks on poetry often draw the contrast between art and propaganda, but at least as often they insist that the motive of creation is joy in the play with language and rhythm. With Mandelstam, he believed that any achieved poem is a symbol of free will. The Eastern European poets writing out of a coercive political environment—especially Czesław Miłosz—heartened him in his central resolve to hew to the law of poetry, not to the law of political statement. But his clusters of constellated words became—in their exemplary refusal to coarsen morality—a political force nonetheless.

"My last things will be first things slipping from me," he wrote in "Mint." He chose to be buried in the North, near the graves of his mother and father in a country churchyard. Posterity will take care of the poetry.

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Notes

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Remembering Seamus Heaney II

Bernard O'Donoghue

In a *Sunday Times* review of one of Seamus Heaney's individual volumes of poems in the 1980s, John Carey memorably said "we are lucky to be alive while he is writing." It would be hard to think of a stronger accolade; it is one that most readers of poetry would agree with. To live through a critical lifetime from the 1960s to the first decade of the twenty-first century and watch Heaney's many books appearing was an exhilarating experience.

I want to consider briefly *why* exactly we were lucky to watch Heaney's corpus taking shape. Many things come to mind: the extraordinary exactness and rightness of his descriptive language, whether describing blackberries, or grains of corn flowing through your fingers, or fragments of burning paper floating in the wind, or a 56lb weight. A recent elegiac piece in *Time* magazine compared him to Chekhov in his capacity to say something extraordinary by simply describing ordinary things. There is the importance of his readiness to deal with public subjects, in Ireland and beyond: his readiness to face the "neighbourly murder" that occurred in his native province; his catching of the moment of 9/11 in his Horace translation, "Anything Can Happen"—a poem which generated immediately a worldwide set of translations of Heaney's version. The seriousness of the subjects he dealt with, and the eloquent power he brought to the discussion of them, made him the outstanding poet in English of his time. He was not a moralizer—he was too forgivingly alert to human frailty for that—but the moral sense is present in everything he wrote.

So it was not surprising that his poetry earned him the Nobel Prize for Literature, or that the Nobel citation praised his poetry's combination of "lyrical beauty and ethical depth which exalt everyday miracles and the living past." But we can recognize and admire these qualities—these facts about his writing—without exactly feeling *lucky* to be reading them as they appeared. So what was most extraordinary about him?

I think it was this: we expect the great writers—Dante, Milton, Yeats, and Joyce—to be overfacing. We expect to feel shy in their presence—to feel inadequate. We do not think of them as good company. But Seamus Heaney was the most wonderful company and made everyone feel good. How many people, of all capacities or limitations, have we met who said "I enjoyed meeting Seamus. I think there was a real understanding

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between us." And it was always Seamus—he was everyone's possession, something he put up with with great good humor.

How he managed to make time for everyone in this way is a mystery: to do that and, at the same time, to write some of the greatest poetry of the modern era. One of his most haunting poems is "Casualty," in which the poet talks in the pub with a local fisherman, feeling "shy of condescension" (*Field Work* 21). Here we meet the same gift—call it warmth, or empathy, or sheer human skill—that appears in one of the beautiful sonnets in memory of his mother in "Clearances" in *The Haw Lantern*. The mother shared the "Fear of affectation [that] made her affect / Inadequacy whenever it came to / pronouncing words 'beyond her.'" The son "governed [his] tongue / In front of her, a genuinely well- / Adjusted adequate betrayal / Of what I knew better" (*The Haw Lantern* 28). Mother and son are both playing the same subtle, wary, and socially accomplished game.

Seamus Heaney always spoke up for poetry: it is one of the countless reasons that his loss is so grievous. But he also always said that he could not have written his poetry if he did not know that poetry was not the most important thing in the world: a principle of reserve that he had inherited from his farming forebears. He could not have written the great tormented poems of *North* that faced the horrors of the time so squarely without that inheritance.

So he could deal with every situation and with every linguistic idiom and register that was wanted. I once heard him say he was built like a badger, square-shouldered. I would like to finish by quoting the end of his poem "Badgers," which begins with the poet "half-lit with whiskey" (whiskey with the Irish "e") and ends with another of his great questions:

> How perilous is it to choose
> not to love the life we're shown?
> His sturdy dirty body
> and interloping grovel.
> The intelligence in his bone.
> The unquestionable houseboy's shoulders
> that could have been my own. (*Field Work* 26)

Again, puzzle me the right answer to that one. We were lucky to live while he was writing because he posed all the great questions better than anyone else. And now we are left to pose them and attempt to answer them without him.

The Boat: *i.m. Seamus Heaney*

Bernard O'Donoghue

Take the case of a man in a boat
in deep water. The wind and the waves
and the craft's tossing cause him to stumble
if he makes to stand up, for, no matter how firmly
he tries to hold on, through the boat's slithering
he bends and he staggers, so unstable
the body is. And yet he is safe.

It's the same with the righteous:
if they fall, they are falling only
like a man in a boat who is safe and sound
as long as he stays within the boat's timbers. (*Piers Plowman* passus 8)

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Crossing Common Ground: W. B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney

Edward Larrissy

Because Seamus Heaney is generally recognized as the greatest Irish poet since Yeats, winner, like him, of the Nobel Prize for Literature, and since Heaney's education occurred in a context where Yeats's eminence was secure, it seems natural to examine the nature and extent of the influence of the older poet on the younger. Yet the question faces many immediate obstacles: chief among these are Heaney's disavowal of any early influence, and the less cut-and-dried but suggestive consideration of contrasting subject-matter, social setting, imagery, and expository manner. At school and university, claims Heaney, "Yeats wasn't really part of the air I breathed" (O'Driscoll 191). However, he goes on to state his position with regard to his literary forebears in a nuanced way: "Kavanagh was more important when I was getting started, Yeats more important when I had to keep going" (O'Driscoll 192). There came a point, he clarifies, when he started to appreciate "what Donald Davie called the 'articulate energy' of poetry, poems that packed their punch because of syntactical stamina, the distribution of argument over the line-ends and stanzas" (O'Driscoll 193).

By 1973, he had undertaken an "intensive study" of Yeats, and had come to respect him "as a poet, as a promoter of Celtic literature, as a propagandist for others, as a man whose 'purity of motive' and 'enormous creative energy' had inspired the Irish Literary Revival" (Parker 122). In this light, at the level of poetic technique, Heaney grew alert to "the big integration and vigour in Yeats" (O'Driscoll 193). Arguably, though, the sense of articulate energy in Heaney is by no means as marked as it is in some other students of Yeats: Derek Mahon, for instance, or even Philip Larkin, both of whom are indebted to Yeats for the organization and exposition of a complex argument over many stanzas. Equally important in Heaney might be the long sequence, such as "Singing School," which bears comparison with Yeatsian sequences, such as "Meditations in Time of Civil War"; the representation of association of ideas; or intense reflection, at the level of subject-matter, on the relationship of form and experience. Even so, Heaney's relationship to Yeats is by no means easy to pin down, nor is it a simple matter to specify and elucidate the parallels of style and handling which lead one to conclude that such and such a poem bears witness to it. Steven Matthews offers a not untypical example of the fugitive and equivocal traces which it falls to the critic to interrogate when pursuing this

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question. He takes as his example Heaney's sonnet, "Postscript," from the end of *The Spirit Level* (Heaney 70). The speaker, driving west into County Clare, and thus past Yeats country, encounters "the earthed lightning of a flock of swans," those birds that figure so often as symbol in Yeats's poetry, not least in "The Wild Swans at Coole." But Heaney's speaker remarks that it is "[u]seless to think you'll park and capture it / More thoroughly." Addressing himself, he states that "[y]ou are neither here nor there / A hurry through which known and strange things pass." Yet this sense of provisionality is anything but malign, for the "buffetings" that "come at the car . . . / catch the heart off guard and blow it open." Thus the thinking of the poem develops to the conclusion that anxieties about craft should not overwhelm the spontaneous movement of life, and furthermore toys with the possibility that art might be inadequate to "the task of rendering heightened moments of perception" (Matthews 160). Both of these points could also be illustrated from Yeats, and it seems appropriate that Heaney should look back to him in a postscript to the first volume he published after receiving the Nobel Prize (Matthews 160). But Matthews goes on to identify the salient problem with asserting a Yeatsian influence here: "[Heaney's] poetic form, for instance, in its lack of rhyme, would seem to want to avoid the sonorous declamations of the Yeats 'models' mentioned. Further, the relation of the speaker in Heaney's poem to the experience described in it is ambiguous [unlike in the Yeats 'models']" (160). Matthews concludes that, "[i]f we are to see the issues in 'Postscript' as referring back to Yeats, therefore, as the imagery suggests we might, we can only do so in a qualified and unratifiable way" (161).

Yet neither can we dismiss the possibility. Ronald Schuchard states an unavoidable fact, referring to a later generation than Heaney's, and specifically to Muldoon, McGuckian, and Carson: "There is no doubt that these and other contemporary poets draw much nourishment from precursors other than Yeats, but in spite of disclaimers and distancing techniques, eventually they all must negotiate their art with or play it against some of Yeats's several legacies" (285). He proceeds to extend the point to earlier Irish poets, including Heaney (Schuchard 285-87). Schuchard erects the unavoidability of Yeats into a principle that ratifies the discovery of rarefied influence, and in general terms the point has to be taken, even though it leaves the critic with the challenge of elaborating a cogent and adequate examination of particular cases. I believe that there is, in any case, heuristic value in making the general assumption he invokes. But if one is to go further than the discovery and elucidation of specific instances, it is

necessary to invoke a critical model that goes beyond author-centered theories of influence and seeks to identify those seams of literary and cultural history that both poets were mining, and thus suggest their joint participation, at different points in history, in a shared project. This is the "common ground" to which my title refers. In this way, the delicate traces of influence can be tested against the solid outlines of literary history. An approach such as this may occasionally yield another advantage: that it has the potential to shed light back onto Yeats, so that Heaney's work becomes a lens through which to understand Yeats better. It is with an example of this kind that my analysis will begin.

Many contemporary Irish poets and critics cling to the still widely-current notion that Yeats's work of the nineties was to some degree vague and vicious, and to some degree a misrepresentation of Irish tradition. The assumption is that Yeats displays some of the least admired characteristics of late nineteenth-century poetry, such as the use of a particular kind of post-Romantic poetic diction, in which adjectives, such as "dim" figure too frequently. The criticism can perhaps be summed up by the phrase "The Celtic Twilight," Yeats's locution, which is held to have misrepresented the "Celtic"—and certainly "the Irish"—in a manner too influenced by nineteenth-century Celticists, such as Ernest Renan and Matthew Arnold. Yet, while their influence is there, this criticism does not pay due heed to Yeats's work as a folklorist, and to the way in which this inflected his Celticism and provided matter for his work of the nineties. Nobody who turns to the 1893 collection of tales and anecdotes, *The Celtic Twilight,* would have much solid evidence of dim, half-realized perceptions and vague decadent verbiage. On the contrary, these tales are recounted in a straightforward, matter-of-fact manner, deploying plain, accessible diction, unadorned with rhetorical devices:

> [The knight of the sheep] was indeed once beaten; and this is his tale of how it was. He and some farm-hands were playing at cards in a small cabin that stood against the end of a big barn. A wicked woman had once lived in this cabin. Suddenly one of the players threw down an ace and began to swear without any cause. His swearing was so dreadful that the others stood up, and my friend said, "All is not right here; there is a spirit in him." They ran to the door that led into the barn to get away as quickly as possible. The wooden bolt would not move, so the knight of the sheep took a saw which stood against the wall near at hand, and sawed through the bolt, and at once the door flew open with a bang, as though someone had been holding it, and they fled through. (Yeats, *Mythologies* 33)

If one understands that "twilight" refers to the boundary between the everyday world and the denizens of dream and mythology, then one realizes that part of the very point of these stories is to convey the strangeness of the other world matter-of-factly, and thereby bring out its strangeness more surely. At the same time, this world also becomes more strange, since it is capable of revealing the marvelous in the midst of the humdrum. By telling stories which reveal these facts, and by telling them in this manner, Yeats is faithful not only to the people he met in Sligo and Galway, but more generally to the tradition of Irish story-telling and romance, in which he was well-versed. While he was intensely interested in the recurrent and unavoidable supernatural elements of the legends and stories he encountered, it is essential to realize the serious, scientific attitude of his folklore researches, not only near Sligo in the years leading up to *The Celtic Twilight,* but also in southern County Galway in 1897 and 1898, which issued in what his biographer, Terence Brown, calls "his most densely written, locally rooted series of reports on folk-customs and beliefs" (19). These, and a very wide range of writings from both earlier and later periods of Yeats's researches have been conveniently brought together by Robert Welch in one volume, *Writings on Irish Folklore, Legend and Myth* (1993).

A more academic essay in the study of Irish folk custom and beliefs was well known to Heaney from his years at Queen's University, Belfast. The rural anthropology of E. Estyn Evans, Professor of Geography at Queen's from 1945 to 1968, has long been cited as an influence on Heaney. Evans's *Irish Folk Ways* does not and cannot ignore the fairies, but its emphasis is on customs rather than folklore (304-05). Heaney himself has denied any direct influence on his poetry, while noting that Evans's work was "nice to know" (O'Driscoll 92). He stated that poems where an influence might be suspected—such as "The Forge" and "The Thatcher"—in fact grew out of "first-hand experience" (O'Driscoll 92). Yet, there is no need to set up an opposition between experience on the one hand and, on the other, the influence of writings that may have suggested ways of ordering it. Furthermore, it needs to be remembered how significant Evans's presence was in the Northern Irish cultural milieu. As early as 1952, he had been lined up by Louis MacNeice and W. R. Rodgers as a potential contributor to a collection of essays (which never came to fruition) on *The Character of Ireland,* alongside Elizabeth Bowen, Frank O'Connor, John Hewitt, Sean O'Faolain, and other luminaries (McDonald 37). In the light of Heaney's claim, it is not possible to go as far as Blake Morrison does in stating that he was able to "draw on" specific passages in Evans—about

thatching, churning, cattle-dealing, plowing, or forging—for his own poems (31). Yet, it is surely acceptable to see Heaney as engaged in an act of representation and preservation of a vanishing way of life in a manner parallel to what Evans achieves (Morrison 31).

Nevertheless, it is possible to overstate the matter-of-factness of Heaney. As Morrison goes on to explain, Heaney's rural characters possess "an almost mystical oneness with the natural world, they are intended to stand as models for the poet" (31). Morrison emphasizes Heaney's troping on the transformative powers of the rural operatives, the "alchemical" and mystical processes to which their procedures can be compared (31). Thus it is that, as early as *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*, the two books which figure in this part of Morrison's discourse, we can already discern the liminal theme of the boundary between the literal on the one hand, and the literal *transformed* on the other. This boundary bears a strong resemblance to the one in Yeats to which we have already referred. In later years, Heaney develops his treatment of the boundary trope in a direction that sometimes seems substantially Yeatsian, nowhere more so than in one of his most popular poems, the eighth in "Lightenings" from *Seeing Things*:

> The annals say: when the monks of Clonmacnoise
> Were all at prayers inside the oratory
> A ship appeared above them in the air.
>
> The anchor dragged along behind so deep
> It hooked itself into the altar rails
> And then, as the big hull rocked to a standstill,
>
> A crewman shinned and grappled down the rope
> And struggled to release it. But in vain.
> "This man can't bear our life here and will drown,"
>
> The abbot said, "unless we help him." So
> They did, the freed ship sailed, and the man climbed back
> Out of the marvellous as he had known it. (62)

Here we find that quality of strangeness, of uncanniness, conveyed and enhanced by matter-of-factness, which is to be found in Yeats's stories—a quality also present in the medieval tales of the Fenians on which Yeats drew in his poems. As we have noted, Yeats's recounting of Irish wonders is sometimes held in mild derision. Yet, as Heaney's reference to

the annals confirms, the world of medieval Irish romance and story is one where marvels are not unexpected. "Uncanniness," the quality of combining the familiar and the unfamiliar, so that what should be accustomed looks subtly strange, or what is strange also has something oddly familiar about it, is notably a property of the fairies, or *Sidhe*. Like Niamh in *The Wanderings of Oisin*, they may look and behave like our own true love, yet may possess an alien quality which raises the question whether they might be in fact malignant. Yet, one does not need the fairies to establish a kinship of Yeats and Heaney in a shared preoccupation with the proximity of the ordinary to the marvelous. *The Wanderings of Oisin* weaves the uncanny into its detail as well as according it the status of major theme. There are crucial moments in each of its three books when a token or sign of the human world enters the Other World and precipitates dissatisfaction in Oisin with the island where he then resides. In Book I, the discovery is described thus:

> When one day by the tide I stood,
> I found in that forgetfulness
> Of dreamy foam a staff of wood
> From one dead warrior's broken lance:
> I turned it in my hands; the stains
> Of war were on it, and I wept,
> Remembering how the Fenians stept
> Along the blood-bedabbled plains,
> Equal to good or grievous chance. (Finneran 371)

The fragmentary character of the discovery is itself worth noting: not only is it not the complete spear, it is not even the whole haft. As a fragment of a world that suddenly seems more comforting than the Other World, it underscores the alienation of Oisin's present existence. Yet, that very fragmentariness makes the world Oisin has left seem alien too, since the staff operates according to a common form of "making strange," like a quotation out of context. At the same time, its starkly presented quotation of "reality" serves to suggest also the "quoted" character of the Happy Isle where Oisin has wandered, and its otherness in relation to our world.

However, it is not just the encounter between two worlds, but also the liminal context which interests Yeats. In "The Song of Wandering Aengus," the speaker fishes in a stream, and the little silver trout he catches turns into a "glimmering girl"—not an unexpected outcome in the world of Irish romance, or indeed in folk narrative more generally. But it is significant that this happens at twilight and on the edge of a stream, for

Aengus is thus simultaneously placed on a temporal and a physical boundary. The symbolism surrounding this event is embodied in an intensely-wrought network of imagery: stars, moths, sun and moon, fire and water. The hints of alchemy carry great weight. But just as interesting is the plainness of phrasing and diction:

> I went out to the hazel wood,
> Because a fire was in my head,
> And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
> And hooked a berry to a thread. (Finneran 55)

Thus the language of the poem itself enacts the eruption of the strange into the ordinary.

Heaney's interest in liminal states has been noted on many occasions. For him, they may be found at that limit where one nation or tribe enters into dialogue with another, as well as where the ordinary meets the marvelous (Homem 290-95). Ultimately, there is a deep connection between these two types of boundary. But one should guard against the temptation to think that the liminal uncanny is a feature mainly of his work from the late eighties onwards, simply because it there becomes more evident. The very title of his second collection, *Door into the Dark,* seems appropriate to such a subject, and the poems corroborate the suggestion. The phrase comes from the first line of "The Forge": "All I know is a door into the dark" (Heaney, *Door* 7). The speaker is left to speculate on what the inside of a forge is like ("The anvil must be somewhere in the centre"), though there are hints in a "fantail of sparks" and the "hiss when a new shoe toughens in water." The anvil is "an altar / Where he expends himself in shape and music." The similarity with the priest at the Mass is not just a matter of this explicit reference, but also of the whole picture of a marvelous transformation wrought in a sanctuary apart, separated by a dark border which both conceals and reveals: a place of interchange. In the poem that faces it in the original collection, "The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon," it is the speaker himself who is transformed by his own actions and by the encounter with the salmon and the medium of water:

> Ripples arrowing beyond me
> The current strumming water up my leg,
> Involved in water's choreography
> I go, like you, by glean and drag. (Heaney, *Door* 6)

The speaker will "turn home, fish-smelling, scaly." While he has not been transformed into a fish, like Yeats's "glimmering girl" in reverse, the suggestion is certainly present, by way of hinting at a change of perception and being. Referring also to Heaney's poems about thatching, churning, and water-divining, Morrison speaks of "alchemical process" and concludes that "[a]ll these craftsmen are pantheistic go-betweens, establishing bridges between the known and unknown" (31, 32). In particular, he notices that "[i]mages of fluency, of water being released, are a feature of both [*Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*]. These images have their origin in Celtic myth, which reveres springs and wells" (Morrison 32).

Thus it will be seen that, even surveying the apparently unpromising terrain of early Heaney, one can find strong affinities between him and Yeats in terms of the anthropological rediscovery and understanding of ancient ways of life in rural Ireland; in terms of the fascination with liminal states, which lead to creative transformation and renewal; and even in terms of the connected matter of ancient Celtic sources. But there are other, and superficially contrasting, connections between the early Heaney and Yeats, for he shares with Yeats a specific debt to Blake.

Henry Hart subtitles his book on Heaney *Poet of Contrary Progressions,* and explains the relevance of this reference to Blake's statement that "Without Contraries is no progression" (34) to a reading of early Heaney: "Heaney has made sure that his surges are always complemented by equally powerful countersurges. His early pastoralism in *Death of a Naturalist* relied on an opposing antipastoralism for credibility and contemporaneity . . ." (Hart 119).

Yet there is a more palpable Blakean influence than is to be found in this broad structure, relevant though that is to our discussion. For many of the poems in *Death of a Naturalist* can be seen as moving from Innocence to Experience, the most important of Blake's pairs of "contrary states," the concept on which "contrary progression" is based. It is relevant that, when writing of another acknowledged influence on this volume, Patrick Kavanagh, Heaney had compared him with Blake, albeit referring only to Kavanagh's early work in *Plowman.* The comments, to be found in "From Monaghan to the Grand Canal," are critical of the visionary "weightlessness" of those poems: he speaks of "romantic clichés" and, in an ironic inversion of a line from Eliot's "The Dry Salvages," he complains that "we miss the experience even if we get the meaning" (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 119). But the word "experience," in the context of rejecting an uplifting Blakean vision, suggests the other side of Blake: the Blake who

writes harshly and sardonically of a fallen world of cruelty and fear. Interestingly, then, "The Early Purges" ends in the manner of some of Blake's *Songs,* with a disturbing motto derived from social consensus: "But on well-run farms pests have to be kept down" (Heaney, *Death* 23). Compare, for instance, the last line of the *Songs of Innocence* version of "The Chimney Sweeper," a poem in which the disturbing perspective of *Experience* is already being insinuated—in a book which contains some anti-pastoral elements. After an account of the miserable lives of chimney sweeps, the poem ringingly concludes: "So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm" (Blake 10). Of course, Blake's irony here is angry and politically self-conscious, whereas Heaney's line embodies a more straightforward awakening from illusion. Both lines, however, are conscious of transmitting a social consensus, and of quoting the discourse within which social consensus is encouraged. There are other phrases in Heaney's volume which work in a similar way: Miss Walls's teaching about frogs in the poem "Death of a Naturalist," for instance (*Death* 15). The book is every bit as much about the acculturation of the child as it is about pastoral or anti-pastoral, and in that respect it is comparable to Blake's *Songs.*

The reason for what may seem like a diversion into Blake studies is that Heaney's indebtedness mirrors Yeats's. Indeed, Heaney was not only aware of Blake's idea of contraries, but seems to have ascribed to Yeats the best-known aphorism about it. In a 2004 tribute to Czesław Miłosz, he defers to "the truth of WB Yeats's contention that without contrarieties there could be no progression" (Heaney, "In gratitude"). Yeats, of course, is known for his promotion of the virtues of Blake, while the same cannot be said for Heaney, though it must be remembered that in his later poetry Blake's stock rises again, because of Miłosz's great admiration for him. But Yeats's own admiration was converted into the adoption of Blakean imagery and strategies; and of the latter, the most evident is the use of the idea of "contrary states" to structure books and poems. The section known as *The Rose,* compiled for *Poems 1895,* contains, next to each other, "The Rose of Battle" and "The Rose of Peace" (Finneran 32-33), and also an individual poem, "The Two Trees" (Finneran 44-45), which, despite its title, presents one tree under two different aspects: one of spring-like life, figuring trust in the heart and imagination, the other of winter and death, symbolizing the domination of analytic reason and skeptical reflection. We have, then, a movement from *innocence* to *experience* within one poem, as we do in Heaney.

However, it is the progression from one style to another that offers the most substantial use of "contrary progression" in both Yeats and Heaney. Yeats's transition, in the early years of the twentieth century, from a style of suggestive symbolism to something far more direct and declarative was seen by him as an integral part of a spiritual development with intrinsic connotations of gender. Writing to George Russell (Æ) in May 1903, Yeats declared his loss of sympathy with the vagueness, the flight from definite form, which had characterized the nineties (Kelly and Schuchard 369-70). In a later letter to Russell, he looks back to his own work of that period: "in some of my lyric verse of that time there is an exaggeration of sentiment & sentimental beauty which I have come to think unmanly" (Kelly and Schuchard 577).

Heaney's movement, in the years between the publication of *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *North* (1975) is in what might be thought of as an opposite direction to that taken by Yeats. He is well known for having identified "masculine" and "feminine" poetic modes in his 1974 Chatterton Lecture on Hopkins, "The Fire I' the Flint"—though he qualifies his remarks by claiming that he does so without the "Victorian sexist overtones to be found in Hopkins's *and Yeats's* employment of the terms" (emphasis added):

> In the masculine mode, the language functions as a form of address, of assertion or command, and the poetic effort has to do with conscious quelling and control of the materials, a labour of shaping; words are not music before they are anything else, but athletic, capable, displaying the muscle of sense. Whereas in the feminine mode the language functions more as evocation than as address, and the poetic effort is not so much a labour of design as it is an act of divination and revelation; words in the feminine mode behave with the lover's come-hither instead of the athlete's display, they constitute a poetry that is delicious as texture before it is recognized as architectonic. (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 88)

The contrast expounded here is generally taken to illuminate the contrast between those aspects of *Death of a Naturalist* which are influenced by the tough, alliterative manner of his friend, Ted Hughes, and the ruminative, associative lyrics of which there are striking examples in *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975) for instance in the "Bog Poems," or in a poem, such as "Anahorish" which briefly and tellingly unfolds the speaker's associations with the name and the place, including the "after-image of lamps / swung through the yards" (Heaney, *Wintering* 16).

The comparison and contrast with Yeats are never linear and straightforward, as we have already suggested, and neither of these aspects of Heaney provides simple and obvious parallels with any stage of Yeats's work. Heaney's movement towards a more "feminine mode" has nothing whatsoever to do with a reversion to late Romantic models; and indeed, there is an aspect of all his work, but perhaps particularly from *Wintering Out* onwards, which has a more substantial connection with Yeats, and that is to do with the depiction of mental association. The publication of Cairns Craig's *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry* (1982) helped to remind readers of a tradition common to all the various "isms" (Romanticism, Modernism, and Symbolism) in terms of which Yeats is spoken: namely, the attempt to represent the "association of ideas," an effort pioneered by Wordsworth and Coleridge, but also a remote ancestor of "stream of consciousness." In Yeats, the results of working with this ambition can be seen pervasively in his mature work. "The Tower" provides an especially good example. It starts with a soliloquy which could hardly be more emphatic in its attempt to convey the workings of the mind "on the spot": "What shall I do with this absurdity— / O heart, O troubled heart—this caricature, / Decrepit age [. . .]" (Finneran 198). The second section continues in the present tense—"I pace upon the battlements" (Finneran 199)—and shows the poet unfolding his mental associations with each spot he surveys in the surrounding landscape: "Beyond that ridge lived Mrs. French [. . .]"; "Some few remembered still when I was young / A peasant girl commended by a song, / Who'd lived somewhere upon that rocky place [. . .]" (Finneran 199). He remembers his own creation, Red Hanrahan, and how he had risen in frenzy and followed a pack of ghostly hounds "towards— / O towards I have forgotten what—enough!" (Finneran 200). The expression of absent-mindedness within the soliloquy serves the purpose of representing mental processes realistically. While Yeats goes on to refer to the ghosts of men-at-arms in the Tower as being "images in the Great Memory stored" (Finneran 200), the poem is thereby confirming what Yeats in fact believed: that there is a difference, as well as a relationship, between the flow of mental association and the images stored in the Great Memory. But that phrase serves to remind us that a poetry of mental association will also, of necessity, be a poetry of memory in a more ordinary sense: the idea of remembering dominates the second section of "The Tower." These points offer some parallels with the work of Heaney. A sequence such as "Singing School" is composed of juxtaposed memories and reflections which together add up to an exploration of the roots and

lines of transmission of prejudice, coercion, and violence in Northern Ireland. This combination of technique and purpose is reminiscent of Yeats's sequences, "Meditations in Time of Civil War" and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen."

Not that, for Heaney, the violence is all on one side. One of the themes holding the Bog Poems together is, according to Heaney himself, the idea of a vengeful territorial goddess, whom he identifies with Ireland and uses to explain the violence of Irish republicanism:

> You have a society in the Iron Age where there was ritual blood-letting. You have a society where girls' heads were shaved for adultery, you have a religion centring on the territory, on a goddess of the ground and of the land, and associated with sacrifice. Now in many ways the fury of Irish Republicanism is associated with a religion like this, with a female goddess who has appeared in various guises. She appears as Cathleen ni Houlihan in Yeats's plays; she appears as Mother Ireland. I think that the Republican ethos is a feminine religion, in a way. It seems to me that there are satisfactory imaginative parallels between this religion and time and our own time. (Heaney, "Mother Ireland" 790)

Heaney mentions Yeats's Cathleen ni Houlihan; he might also have referred to "a terrible beauty," a phrase which Yeats borrowed for his own poem about Irish republicans. In fact, the phrase comes from a poem by Sheridan Le Fanu about a Munster goddess who demands the ultimate sacrifice from her devotees (Jordan 42). But in making such a compelling sequence partly on the basis of an image with strong Yeatsian overtones, Heaney inherits a tradition going back through Yeats to Mangan and, behind him, to the *aisling* poets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yeats also was looking back to these poets. Heaney, like Yeats, has entered into dialogue with a nationalist tradition of representing Ireland as a goddess while, at the same time, the forebear of whom he is most conscious in this connection is Yeats himself. And there is another link here which has to do with two levels of memory. When Heaney contemplates the body of the woman who has been sacrificed in "Punishment" (Heaney, *North* 37-38), he is reminded of the abuse of young Catholic women punished for going out with British soldiers. This is at the level of memories derived from his own particular experiences in contemporary Northern Ireland. But a reading of all of the Bog Poems, combined with the knowledge of Heaney's article on "Mother Ireland," makes it clear that he is digging into a deeper, more archetypal level of memory. The complete picture offers a

surprising parallel with Yeats's depiction of the everyday flow of association in dialogue with a realm of forms in the Great Memory.

Yeats's own poetic enactment of this dialogue is one way of representing the relationship of the individual mind ("Anima Hominis") to the world-soul ("Anima Mundi"). These Neoplatonic terms are intimately and essentially interwoven with his esoteric system, the grand outlines of which display a universe in which there is constant dynamic interplay between a world of Forms (or Images) and the mutable sublunary world of living experience. Yeats always accords power and efficacy to images. One of the passages in his work that is most explicit as well as passionate on this point is to be found in the well-known lines in the last stanza of "Among School Children":

> Labour is blossoming or dancing where
> The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
> Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
> Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
> O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
> Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
> O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
> How can we know the dancer from the dance? (Finneran 221)

The final lines are explicit about the important condition that the image is only creative when it is inseparable from the life. However, the poem appears in a volume (*The Tower*) in which the first poem, "Sailing to Byzantium," proclaims the proud and necessary separation of form from life: "Once out of nature I shall never take / My bodily form from any natural thing" (Finneran 198). The associated imagery, drawn from craftsmanship in metal, is calculated to emphasize their non-natural condition. It is tempting to think that the complete volume traces a progress in thinking, such that poems which come later in the book embody a pondered development. But the dates of completion ostentatiously printed at the ends of many poems show that the book has been substantially laid out in reverse order of composition, with one of the latest, "Sailing to Byzantium" (dated 1927), coming first, as if to allow the conclusion of the thinking to set the tone for the whole volume. By way of confirming his adherence to the non-natural status of images, Yeats subsequently wrote "Byzantium," a poem in which the supernatural quality of images is evident from the outset, most obviously in his presenting

images and ghosts as being of the same substance and nature, belonging in the same supernatural abode: this equation was indeed part of Yeats's beliefs.

Heaney confronts the same questions in the sequences which compose "Part II: Squarings" from *Seeing Things,* and does so in conscious dialogue with Yeats: "Where does the spirit live? Inside or outside / Things remembered, made things, things unmade?" (78). Could it be that a "marble bust" is proof of the spirit, being "perfected form"? He concludes that these are "[s]et questions for the ghost of W. B." Heaney's own tentative answer is certainly framed in terms that evoke the transcendent. He asks (in *xlvi,* "Mountain air"), "Was music once a proof of god's existence? / As long as it admits things beyond measure, / That supposition stands." It is not literally clear what the supposition is: that music was once taken as a proof or, alternatively, that music does indeed prove God's existence? The equivocation, if not deliberate, is at least in harmony with Heaney's conclusion, which is that there is something both within and somehow mysteriously beyond the music: "So let the ear attend like a farmhouse window / In placid light, where the extravagant / Passed once under full sail into the longed-for" (*Seeing Things* 106).

We have returned to the boundary between the ordinary and the marvelous which is also palpable in the poem about the annals of Clonmacnoise, from the same collection. Creative occupancy of this boundary is what Heaney strives to define in the very titles *Seeing Things* and *The Spirit Level,* which make ambiguous reference both to the perception of spirits or visions, and to the idea of accurate perception of things. On the one hand, one must (using a metaphor of building) "verify the plumb" and "[t]ake squarings from the recessed gable pane" (56). In the task of accurately and truly perceiving the universe, Heaney emphasizes the role of the human body and of the sense of physical situatedness and maneuver, as in "Lightenings" *iii,* which is about the game of marbles: "Hunkerings, tensings, pressures of the thumb / [...] / A million million accuracies passed // Between your muscles' outreach and that space / Marked with three round holes [...]" (57). On the other hand, it is equally true to say:

> Everything flows. Even a solid man,
> A pillar to himself and to his trade,
> All yellow boots and stick and soft felt hat,
>
> Can sprout wings at the ankle and grow fleet
> As the god of fair-days, stone posts, roads and crossroads [...]. (85)

The yellow boots identify the trade as that of a farmer, manual worker, or builder. Uppermost in Heaney's mind was his own father, whose boots and stick he had inherited (O'Driscoll 293), and with whose death he is coming to terms in *Seeing Things*. It seems that angelic perception is available to such a one, and that because of this gift of combining measure with the potential for seeing beyond measure, he is capable of being identified with a god of boundaries: fair-days would bring different clans together, stone posts would mark limits, crossroads lie between locations.

Heaney's poetry, like Yeats's, is full of ghosts, even if in Heaney they constitute a powerful figurative way of meditating on the dead, whereas Yeats appears to believe in their literal existence. As in this poem, the ghost is sometimes that of his father. The importance for Heaney of the ghost of the father lies in its capacity to awaken reflection on what is inherited through flesh and blood and daily intimacy in a specific environment, not just from some general idea of tradition. But as with Yeats, for instance in "All Souls' Night" (Finneran 231-34), death also concentrates the mind on the essential characteristics of another person. This is notably the case with a poem that also enters into dialogue with Yeats, namely "Casualty" (Heaney, *Field Work* 21-24), where Heaney employs the iambic trimeter Yeats used so memorably in "Easter, 1916" (Finneran 182-84). Like Yeats's poem, this remembers a traumatic historical event, in this case the Bloody Sunday massacre in Derry on 30 January 1972. Yet the event is largely displaced by the chief subject of the poem, the fisherman whom Heaney has met occasionally in his father-in-law's pub in Ardboe, and who was killed by an IRA bomb while drinking there during a curfew they had imposed. The poem emphasizes the mysteriousness of others by foregrounding the subtle and mute signs by which one may attempt to read character: "lifting of the eyes / And a discreet dumb-show"; "deadpan sidling tact, / His fisherman's quick eye / And turned observant back" (21). In these respects, it contrasts starkly with the terse but resonant epitomes Yeats delivers with such assurance in his own elegy. For that matter, Heaney remains mysterious to the fisherman: "Incomprehensible / To him my other life" (21). When Heaney asks "How culpable was he / That last night when he broke / Our tribe's complicity?", the answer is certainly not that he was culpable. Like Yeats's poem, this one finds that political dogma is destructive, and brings with it the sacrifice of human feelings, but unlike his, it does not balance the finding with the implication that

the sacrifice may be worth the pain. Rather, it finds a truer parallel in another part of Yeats's poem, in the lines about the "living stream" (Finneran 183). The watery mutability Yeats so beautifully evokes finds an echo in this fisherman's environment, and adds its own symbolic power to the idea of the human as transcending easy summary or assured elegy.

Another parallel (see Parker 164) can be found in Yeats's own poem, "The Fisherman" (Finneran 148-49), which also employs iambic trimeter. Here Yeats symbolizes his alienation from the public world by imagining the life of a fisherman whose element is the Connemara countryside. Yet, Yeats emphasizes the symbolic status of his figure: "A man who does not exist, / A man who is but a dream" (Finneran 149). Heaney's fisherman is real and exhibits the unknowable strangeness of reality.

There is a lesson for poetry in these ghostly poems about those who once lived in heedless intimacy with nature: product of history and tradition, inheritor of form and of the dialect of the tribe, the poet must work with these conditions, while celebrating and taking bearings from his or her bodily situatedness in the physical world. But, at the same time, the poet must never shut down the sense of the possible, of unforeseeable transformation, which lies beyond the limit of what is already known and gauged, and may indeed challenge the capacity for words. This perspective is represented in the poet's own experience in terms of the response to nature:

> when light breaks over me
> The way it did on the road beyond Coleraine
> Where wind got saltier, the sky more hurried
>
> And silver lamé shivered on the Bann
> Out in mid-channel between the painted poles,
> That day I'll be in step with what escaped me. (Heaney, *Seeing Things* 108)

The simple facts of nature harbor the possibility of a saving benediction, one that salves and solves for the poet. This benediction behaves as the transcendent should behave, yet its source is ultimately inexplicable. The fact that this landscape is a more expected setting for the poet should not allow us to forget that this is the same nature as the

one in which the builder must build, the farmer must work, and the boy playing marbles take his shot.

Heaney's answer to the questions he fancies being set by Yeats is not the same as Yeats's would have been, then. When he asks about proofs of God's existence, he appears, in a way that he does not develop, to concede the possibility. Yet the quest is brief and unfinished. On the other hand, traces of the sacred are everywhere. Heaney's poetry is full of attempts to balance measure and accuracy of perception, on the one hand, with a sense of possibility and transcendence on the other, and to present these aspects as co-existing and inextricably intertwined. His handling of poetic form tends to enact this co-existence: it assumes a thinking and feeling subject located in a specific physical context and capable of finding a benediction in that context precisely because of a responsiveness which fully sees. It proceeds to seek a language both meditative and richly responsive to the physical world. Gail McConnell, in her book *Northern Irish Poetry and Theology,* sees in this combination of form and thought the influence of a Catholic "structure of feeling" (2). Heaney is indebted to the new critical tradition of the verbal icon, and in his handling this assists the poem to become sacramental and akin to a religious icon (McConnell 76). The physical world may possess its own benediction, which in the Catholic tradition is derived from God. Yeats, on the other hand, wavers between a position broadly reminiscent of this (as in "Among School Children"), and one which states a Platonic dualism between the world of forms and that of nature. This dualism is more congenial to the Protestant tradition: Calvin did not admit any grace in nature. There is more of the discursive and argumentative in Yeats's exposition because there is more need to explain the occult philosopher's point of view, his access to a truth which must be explained, and which mere responsiveness to nature will never reveal.

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Screening Belfast:
"Heaney in Limboland" and the Language of Belonging

Rosie Lavan

HJEAS

Seamus Heaney rarely expressed any fondness for Belfast, and yet the city was of definitive significance in his personal and literary development. It was in Belfast that he studied as an undergraduate, trained and worked as a teacher and lecturer, and found both the personal confidence and the practical support he needed to commit to life as a writer. It was in Belfast, too, that he began to command the attention and interests of both the cultural and mainstream media: in his own right, as a writer and presenter for the BBC—a professional relationship which continued even after his move south to County Wicklow in 1972—and, of course, as one of many writers and artists living in, and called upon to respond to, the worsening violence in Northern Ireland.

This essay considers Heaney's relationship with Belfast by concentrating on a neglected source, a documentary called "Heaney in Limboland," made for British commercial television in 1970. The city in that film is indistinguishable from the violence being played out there, but Heaney's broader ambivalence towards its avowedly urban identities is clearly conveyed on screen too. The documentary can therefore be read as a companion piece to equally uneasy representations of Belfast in the early years of the Troubles which are familiar from Heaney's poetry and prose of this period. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to suggest that Heaney never admitted any tenderness into his writing about Belfast, and it is salutary to preface this discussion with acknowledgement of later, more positive recollections of the city as he had known it before the Troubles. In a piece written for the Belfast-based magazine *Fortnight* in 1984, Heaney offered an affectionate retrospective on Botanic Avenue, a popular south Belfast street which runs from the university to the city center. In this good-humored essay he was conscious of one characteristic he recognized in the whole city: its impatience with, and leveling of, pretension. "It [Botanic Avenue] was almost self-consciously *déclassé*, but too self-consciously Belfast to admit a word like *déclassé* to its vocabulary. It was still more a place for catching yourself on than for being carried away, where it was all right to carry the *New Statesman* but a bit risky to be caught with the *New Yorker*" ("The Boule Miche" 19). Heaney is recalling the mid-1960s, when he was working as a teacher in Belfast, and the Saturday mornings he spent on Botanic Avenue,

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translated here into his "*Boule-Miche* of the North," a reference to the Boulevard Saint-Michel in the Latin Quarter with connotations of liberal intellectualism from Paris to Belfast. It also suggests an allusion to Stephen Dedalus's self-deflating recollection of his time in Paris in the "Proteus" episode of *Ulysses*: "Just say in the most natural tone: when I was in Paris, *boul' Mich'*, I used to" (Joyce 38).[1] Heaney's essay shares that tone of self-deprecation in its own depiction of an intellectual coming-of-age. In *Human Chain* (2010), his final collection, fondness for another specified area of the city returns. The "Route 110" sequence sets forth in elegiac recollection a hurried Saturday walk from the bookshop in Smithfield Market to the bus home. The purpose of the journey in the poem has been literary: he has gone to purchase a copy of *Aeneid* VI (48).

In both these instances, Heaney places himself in the city as a self-conscious young reader and thinker, participating in its cultural economies and developing his own intellectual profile and identity. Properly speaking, they are autobiographical vignettes—scenes which have Belfast as their setting, revealing more about the poet, perhaps, than the place. When Heaney reads the city itself, and seeks to represent it, matters become more complicated. In a 2003 essay on Belfast in poetry, Eamonn Hughes observed that "Heaney can approach Belfast only through mediations" ("'What Itch of Contradiction'" 111). Focusing on Belfast as it is represented in Heaney's early poems, from *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) through to *Wintering Out* (1972), Hughes finds that Heaney is constantly, and problematically, representing Belfast "at a distance." Heaney's engagements with the city in the handful of poems which address it are consistently filtered through other texts: in "Docker," Hughes finds Louis MacNeice's "Belfast"; the dedicatory poem to *Wintering Out* begins with graffiti Heaney read on a wall in Ballymurphy; and Enlightenment Belfast in "Linen Town" is approached via "civic print" (Hughes, "'What Itch of Contradiction'" 111; Heaney, *Wintering Out* 38). While Hughes points out that in "A Northern Hoard," the sequence which immediately follows "Linen Town" in *Wintering Out*, "the city is more explicitly represented as a place of violence and death," and Heaney appears to be confronting these contemporary features of the city "in a poem of directness and topicality," still he is working at one remove: "Even here [in "A Northern Hoard"] . . . we are dealing with a kind of second-order representation for such descriptions of the city, far from being directly topical in their response, are in fact profoundly conventional." Convention soon begets critique, as Hughes reminds us: "Heaney will, indeed, in his next volume, *North*, make a

poem—'Whatever you say say nothing'—from the criticism of the conventional language of the Troubles. (He will also in that later poem move the graffiti from a 'wall downtown' to the more marginal 'in Ballymurphy')" ("'What Itch of Contradiction'" 111). These engagements are poised—staged, even—and the shift of the graffiti reminds us of Heaney's own movements at the time. The "wall downtown" is almost self-consciously American English, part of the linguistic legacy of his year away from Belfast, as a visiting academic at Berkeley in 1970 and 1971. "Ballymurphy" signals with precision the return to Belfast.

Hughes's sustained point about Heaney's mediated experience of Belfast resonates significantly, and no less uneasily, in Heaney's own prose. Writing of Belfast at Christmas 1971, Heaney observed: "We live in the sickly light of TV screens, with a pane of selfishness between ourselves and the suffering" (*Preoccupations* 30). Through that "pane," inflected with the hurting force its homonym carries, Heaney is indicting himself along with all those who watch. Declan Kiberd, approaching that most representationally vexing of the bog poems in *North*, "Punishment," concedes that "the worst that can be said against Heaney always turns out to have been said already of himself by the artist within the poems" (594-95). In "Heaney in Limboland," too, critique and self-critique are thrown into sharp relief. The discussion which follows works from and extends Hughes's crucial observations to consider the ways in which Heaney approached, responded to, and represented the city on television. Here those questions about mediation are intensified. On screen, Heaney is constantly encountering, and surrounded by, language in and about Belfast. Gable-end graffiti provides an emotive visual backdrop; and scripted voiceovers and readings of Heaney's own poems create a highly literary aural environment. Heaney's television engagement as presenter and subject of "Heaney in Limboland" commits to the screen a complicated relationship with the city which he will subsequently work through in poetry, notably in that contested poem towards which Hughes gestures: "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," from part II of *North* (1975).

Importantly, in his essay, Hughes also identified Heaney's different encounters with and representations of violence in rural as opposed to urban settings. "Heaney in Limboland" also engages with that opposition, offering us both rural and urban—the poet is also shown in various settings in his south County Derry, as well as in Belfast—allowing us to measure his ease in one environment and discomfort in the other. It is a reminder, as if one could ever be needed, that Heaney's own places are famously and

predominantly rural: the worlds around Mossbawn and Glanmore are country worlds. In representing and valorizing them he was, of course, paying his sympathetic dues to literary tradition, mindful of the exemplars he found in Classical, Romantic, and post-Romantic poetry. However, as Hughes observed, not only has the thematic approach to place in Heaney tied in with the unwavering attention to place in Irish writing more generally, it has also been made at the poet's invitation: from "The Sense of Place" to "The Place of Writing," Heaney's engagements with literature in his critical prose have often been deliberately located ("'What Itch of Contradiction'" 108; Heaney, *Preoccupations* 131-49; *Place* 1989). The importance of place in Heaney's writing, then, hardly needs to be restated, but a reappraisal of it is both timely and necessary. One new approach has been advanced by Richard Rankin Russell, in *Seamus Heaney's Regions* (2014), which posits three distinct but interrelated regions through which Heaney's work can be understood: the first, the actual historical and geographical Northern Ireland; the second, an imagined future of reconciliation; and the third, the spirit region where the life beyond this one is led. Another, which strives to reconvene the varied aspects of Heaney's working life through a historicist framework applied across different media, is offered by this consideration of Belfast as a crucial center for Heaney's development. While this collocation has been overlooked, and Heaney himself never stressed it, by examining his engagements with the city, new vantage points are gained on both the poet and the place, at a crucial moment in their histories, distinct and overlapping, and personal and collective.

It was the lived and living experience of Belfast, the shared conditions of communal urban life, to which Heaney most struggled to relate. He expanded on this in discussion of "Docker" with Karl Miller:

> I was preoccupied—as anybody born in Northern Ireland was preoccupied—with the sectarian subject, and, at the same time, not quite clued-in to Belfast working-class life. Whatever it was that marked me for writing came from my first twelve years outside Belfast, came from a hermetically-sealed childhood, which I now think, at this distance, was preserved by the seal of boarding-school [. . .]. (18)

Class-marked urban experience is utterly foreign to Heaney, the singular naturalist displaced in the city. Heaney was, by his own admission, not streetwise—not "clued-in" to the codes and conventions of social exchange in the city. This is further evidenced when he is tasked with representing the

city on television: a public, visual medium which presumes and implies the attention of thousands, if not millions, of viewers. Yet in "Heaney in Limboland," Heaney retains, safeguards even, isolated perspectives within these urban spaces: he achieves this partly through language, but the visual medium itself supports him.

To date, "Heaney in Limboland," which was made by Derek Bailey for the ITV arts series Aquarius, has not been considered in major studies of Heaney's work. It is the kind of source which can easily slip through the cracks: like Heaney's radio work, there is no place for it in the *Bibliography*, compiled by Rand Brandes and Michael J. Durkan. But again, like the radio work, it has recently been recovered: clips from the program, accompanied by reflections from Bailey, were featured in a BBC documentary directed by Johnny Muir to mark Heaney's seventieth birthday in 2009, and then screened again on BBC Four in September 2013 as part of a series of programs in his memory. The present attention to Heaney on television therefore complements and extends recent work on Heaney and the radio, notably inaugurated by Russell in 2007. Quite apart from its immediate interest and significance for Heaney scholars, "Heaney in Limboland" is by any reckoning a remarkable piece of television. Formally experimental and generically plural, it is at once an (auto)biography of the young poet and a brilliantly observed account of the social and cultural experience of both rural and urban life in the North. It is brief—only twenty-five minutes long—but its polyphonic play with readings of Heaney's poetry, music, and sound effects, and its collage of archive and original footage, are arranged to great effect. It presents Heaney on home ground, walking across the fields beneath Slieve Gallon, and abroad, an uneasy *flâneur* on a walk of witness through Belfast's broken and abandoned streets.

As Bailey has explained, it was impossible for the film to ignore the situation in Northern Ireland, and one of the central lines of narrative is Heaney's own commentary on the atmosphere of the time. While the imagery and implications of some of his remarks are familiar from his writing of this era, notably the second and third pieces gathered in "Belfast" in *Preoccupations*, they are utterly translated by the medium of television. The difference it makes when Heaney turns to speak to the camera and address the viewer must not be underestimated. At other moments he does not acknowledge the camera: when he stands on waste ground watching a young man beat a lambeg drum, for example, or in the uncanny sequence at a parade in Ballymena, as he stand and watches Ian Paisley roll past in a

loyally bedecked Land Rover. At those points, the camera's eye is aligned with Heaney's: we see these things literally from his perspective.

Also a graduate of Queen's, Bailey was, like Heaney, at the beginning of his career in 1970 when he proposed to colleagues at ITV that the young Faber poet might make a suitable subject for an edition of the new arts series Aquarius. The film constitutes something of a spiritual autobiography, as David Hammond's "Something to Write Home About" (1998) would nearly thirty years later. Heaney is shown in various settings in the country and the city, a number of his poems are read in voiceovers by Heaney and Bailey, and both provide some voiceover commentary and reflections. The beginning of the film locates Heaney in the County Derry countryside, but then attention shifts to Belfast: in this the film follows the narrative arc of *Death of a Naturalist*, and indeed, the two city poems from that collection, "Poor Women in a City Church" and "Docker," are featured in the film as the vehicles for removal from the country. The contrast between rural and urban is made starker by the fact that Derry city does not feature: Heaney's life there, as a boarder at St Columb's College, is not mentioned. In a sense, this reflects Heaney's own conceptualization of the urban and the rural, but Derry, towards which he always extended a tender affection in his work, complicates this division. If he wrote protectively of Derry, it was perhaps because the period he spent at St Columb's became a protective time in itself: as he explains to Miller above, "the seal of boarding school" preserved his childhood life "outside Belfast."

In addressing the situation in Belfast in 1970, Bailey's film was obviously dealing with a running news story, and he incorporates extracts from contemporary reportage and news footage. This accounts for what would seem now to be the rather unexpected contribution of Max Hastings, then a young journalist, to the film: he reads in voiceover an extract from his "eyewitness account" of the August 1969 riots in the city, as given in his book *Ulster 1969: the Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland* (1970). In the conclusion to that book, Hastings had reflected on the role and agency of the media in the reporting of Northern Ireland during 1969 and 1970. His remark on television seems self-evident and yet it casts valuable light on the present discussion: "Television, by its very character, can only fit a tiny fraction of reality on to its screen, and yet make that fraction appear to be the whole" (Hastings 201). Hastings has the news media in mind, but that "character" of the medium is inevitably shared by Bailey's more subjective and exploratory documentary, too. "Heaney in Limboland" is framed—literally, as all television is; figuratively, because it is angled from Heaney's

perspective—and its "reality" is partial, selected, and determined by Bailey and Heaney. It is in the nature of any representation to be partial, and it is the very partiality of "Heaney in Limboland"—both what the film leaves out and how it presents what it includes—which makes it so compelling and significant a response to Northern Ireland in 1970, and continuous with Heaney's other confrontations of that time and place.

The extract from *Ulster 1969* comes roughly half-way through the documentary, and from that point a discernible shift occurs. Suddenly, we are closer to Heaney: rather than the externalized subject of a biographical film, he becomes our interlocutor, addressing the viewer directly. He is also the viewer's guide in voiceovers which accompany the rest of the visual material. His commentary is set between contributions from Bailey, but the director's narrative becomes notably more elliptical, even poetic, in its prose observations on the atmosphere in the North. Stylistically, these passages of the film recall the BBC radio feature in its heyday, breaking away from verisimilitude to offer commentary in a heightened and self-consciously literary mode; we might think of Louis MacNeice's radio plays for the BBC's wartime series *The Stones Cry Out*. But in "Heaney in Limboland," word works with image: what we hear must be interpreted in relation to what we see.

Hastings's contribution ends with the observation that Ulster became, with the 1969 riots, "the focal point for universal fascination." Bailey's voiceover picks up this point rather drily: "Ulster may be of universal fascination to the journalist and the historian, to the uncommitted outsider, but what's it like to live in the place, to belong to it?" Heaney is established by implication as the counterpart to the "uncommitted outsider" and he is shown in profile, standing on a hill looking down across Belfast. His words at this point are a response to the questions set within the imposed narrative of Bailey's film, which focus on Heaney and how he feels about the changes which violence has wrought to the place, but they gesture far beyond it: into history and allusion, and towards Heaney's own later poetic and theoretical realms in which the responsible, responsive conscience of the poet will be a key concern. Heaney says:

> People often ask me, now that the violence and twistedness of this place have come to the fore again, people often ask me, would I never think of writing about it. And they mean, would I not think of describing events, or would I not think of enlisting myself in the cause of protest, or in the cause of conciliation between the communities here. And, in fact, I have

> written some journalism about what's happening. But the quick of the problem lies much deeper. Whatever's wrong in Northern Ireland, and whatever its origins and history, and whatever its symptoms—the ugliness of the extreme Protestantism, the deprivation in the ghettoes, and the very real injustices that civil rights people have been working to redress—whatever's wrong behind all these things is more like a polluted atmosphere that people are breathing in, rather than an ugly townscape that they can change overnight. It shrivels people's trust, and grows a shell on their generosity, and makes them very alert for the mote in the eye of their brother. We're a society if you like that has fallen from grace. This is limboland at best, and at worst, the country of the damned.
>
> (Bailey, "Heaney in Limboland")

That tone of fatigue with yet resistance to imposed expectations is continuous with Heaney's remarks on the situation in Northern Ireland at this time. Notably, it anticipates the opening of his article for the *Listener* in December 1971, headlined "Belfast's Black Christmas" in the magazine, and then included in *Preoccupations* as "Christmas 1971," part 2 of "Belfast." Again, he begins his observations with "[p]eople," a generalized, expectant group:

> People keep asking what it's like to be living in Belfast and I've found myself saying that things aren't too bad in our part of the town: a throwaway consolation meaning that we don't expect to be caught in crossfire if we step into the street. It's a shorthand that evades unravelling the weary twisted emotions that are rolled like a ball of hooks and sinkers in the heart. (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 30)

This article belongs to the corpus of "journalism" Heaney refers to in "Heaney in Limboland," the generically specified writing he has done (and will do) about the place. In the film, his phrase "in fact" suggests a corrective—he *has* written about the Troubles—but it also emphasizes the distinction he wishes to assert between his different kinds of writing. Belfast, the Troubles, "the violence and twistedness of this place," are more the stuff of "journalism" than they are of poetry: when they do make it into the poetry at this period, notably in "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," form and prosody assert the poet's unease with making such comment.

The lexis of these two extracts suggests other allusions. The "twistedness" of the place in 1970 is bound up in the "twisted emotions" of 1971; the conflicting roles he could play for various parties are paraded

again in the "continuous adjudication" between conflicting feelings and loyalties which "Christmas 1971" enacts. The "redress" sought by the "civil rights people" will sound again much later, albeit within a different, literary argument, in "The Redress of Poetry," the first of his Oxford lectures, delivered in 1989. The "mote in the eye" of the brother carries us to Christ's Sermon on the Mount, a canonical treatise against the narrow-sighted and judgmental. But the allusion might also be personalized, via *Hamlet*, for Heaney living and writing under these circumstances. "A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye," says Horatio of the old king's ghost (Alexander 1082). The return of an unsettled history and its haunting possibilities vex the poet now called upon to respond.

Most significant in this passage from "Heaney in Limboland," and among all Heaney's remarks in the film, is the range of words he finds to refer to place. When he says "this place" we know where he means, but in this film even deixis is evasive. The uncertainty is emphasized because of the form of Heaney's address: the television images pull against what we might take his words to mean, and thus the gestures of word and image are in tension. In this section, we presume because he is shown standing on a hill above Belfast, that when he says "this place," he means that city. It would be consistent with his relationship to the city, to propose it, as many did, as a metonym for the whole unsettled province, and indeed, he proceeds to refer to "[w]hatever's wrong in Northern Ireland." The analogies he finds for the situation are urban: the "polluted atmosphere" and the "ugly townscape"—the former suggestive of both the air shot through with CS gas during rioting, and the heavy, dirty air of an industrial city, like Belfast. That pollution also anticipates his resistance through subversion of ways of talking within and about Northern Ireland in "Whatever You Say Say Nothing": sectarian, political, and media discourses are the linguistic components of the "polluted atmosphere," and those which most trouble the poet called upon to claim words of his own in which to respond. But Heaney speaks as if he is himself outside these places, reporting on them. It is as if those "symptoms" of the problem belong not to his world: "people" are breathing in that pollution, and it has shriveled the trust in "them"; "they" could not change things overnight. Then there is an important change: "We're a society, if you like, that has fallen from grace." Suddenly, Heaney is involved: he speaks in the first-person plural, and he shares those things which are common to the people around him. He expresses that commonality not solely in terms of place and history, but in terms of society, implying a civic bond between that "we."

There is more hope in that collectiveness, despite the fall. But the final sentence is resistant: at best they/we—it is not clear any more—are in "limboland," confined in a state of uncertain fate, and at worst they/we are in "the country of the damned." The rhetoric reinforces the conclusion, and the rhyme of "-land" and "damned" seals the point.

In the next sequence, Heaney is seen walking along a terraced street, but the image reaches us through a barricade—the camera is filming him through a pile of wood, fortified with barbed wire. It might be very early morning: the street is entirely depopulated, save for a stray dog which crosses Heaney's path. Graffiti demanding "IRELAND FOR THE IRA" locates and characterizes the scene, but when Heaney's voiceover begins, the positional uncertainty inaugurated by his preceding address is compounded. "And this, of course, is where we all grew up," he says. The effect of hearing Heaney saying this and watching him walk down that street prompts a double-take in our recollections. "This" is the street in Belfast, broken and barricaded; "we" includes Heaney too; but "this" is not his place and he knows it. So do we: acquaintance with Heaney on the basis of this film alone has made that plain. Clearly, he is speaking of the northern "we," and not exclusively of the population of Belfast. Reinforcing this grammatical formula at another level, the inclusive address serves subtly to divide the viewing audience: Heaney's "we" is by implication the local, home audience in Northern Ireland, made distinct by that pronoun from the full potential audience this program, commissioned from London for nationwide broadcast, was expected to command.

However, almost immediately an expression of retreat follows this implied unity, and again we are led by Heaney's words to an ambiguous place: "It would be wrong to imply that the viciousness and sectarianism and ignorant bigotry of the ghetto is the usual atmosphere in which the Ulster child grows up. Protestant or Catholic, Sinn Féiner and Orangeman, *can* live together, farm together, drink together in the country still" (Heaney's vocal emphasis). He is shown here "in the ghetto," walking the streets of West Belfast in the Falls Road area. In consequence, the unhappy attributes are located in a place that is not his. Heaney may have been living on a terraced street at the time—Ashley Avenue, just off the Lisburn Road—but he remains a stranger in the city's built environment. Despite his detailed account of the menace the local B Specials posed in his boyhood County Derry, when the film returns to show him among the farmers in the cattle fair, we remember the ease and affection with which that "country" was evoked.

In a later sequence, a deliberately jarring contrast of the aural and the visual is offered in the staged confrontation of the apocalyptic diction of Paisleyite conviction and the imagery of Catholic devotion. Both are held apart in equal irony. Then the contrast is reversed: Heaney observes "King William glorious as an archangel in triumph. These are our roadside shrines." The King William we are shown is rendered with almost poignant naivety, prompting one to wonder what he would look like to an eye that was properly naive to the art and iconography of Northern Ireland. "Hell is the absence of possibility," Heaney continues; and then a series of shots finds him leaning against various inscribed walls. The performativity of life in the North frustrates him:

> Relationships are ritualized, elaborate, understood. Whether it's the sectarian slanging between children, or the club conversation in the golfers' bar, where you're told "religion's never mentioned in here." Whether it's the ignorant vituperation from Paisleyite platforms or the insulated and heroic boasting that has passed for politics. In all these cases, spectator and participant share a similar sense of déjà-vu, have no illusions about the effect of their actions. There is no dynamic. The fixed postures and procedures of community division allow for little originality.

Northern Ireland is a set stage. Spectator and participant cannot be easily distinguished. Through "déjà-vu," Heaney adds to the rehearsed pageantry of the North another note of the uncanny. What has been ritualized is the compulsion to repeat. He will soon repeat himself, with some modifications: it will be "*déjà-vu*" in "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," where "religion's never mentioned" (Heaney, *North* 55, 54).

Heaney's prolonged borrowing from the language of performance opens out into a discussion of the role of the citizen and, as might be expected, of the writer. In voiceover which accompanies images of a nationalist parade, he says: "Much successful local comedy on and off the stage plays in the orange and green subcultures, but in such a way as to confirm rather than challenge them, and worse than this is the tendency by the more articulate citizens to look away altogether." This is an implicit plea for an audience; an affirmation of the "articulate" citizen's duty to watch and to confront the performances which surround them. In a film which consistently challenges expectations, it is the following sequence for which the viewer is least prepared. Heaney is shown at dusk, watching another parade as it makes its way down the road. A Land Rover draped in red,

white, and blue rolls past, and standing up in it is Ian Paisley. The film draws no attention to his presence, nor is he named: he is recognized by his contemporary renown alone. Heaney and Paisley are paces apart. Paisley is curiously muted—he utters none of the trademark rhetoric—and he is oddly contained by the vehicle which moves along at carnival-float pace in the dim light of the Ballymena evening. Heaney simply watches. Beyond the frame, the menace that was identified in Paisley's most committed adherents from the late 1960s onwards was made very real for the poet as a direct result of his appearance in this film: the night it was aired there was a "threatening phone call," because "in those days threatening phone calls were all the rage, if you know what I mean. Any half-visible Catholic was liable to be rung up" (O'Driscoll 149). Paisley himself addressed Heaney two years later in his *Protestant Telegraph*, when the paper's "Observer" bid him a barbed "Cheerioh" in September 1972, marking his removal to "the Pope's colony" south of the border (4).

The film concludes with Heaney walking across a hill in County Derry. We see him leaning on a gate and looking towards Slieve Gallon before he turns to look at the camera, and so at the viewer, to tell a final story. One Christmas Eve his father told the children that if they were very good and very quiet, they might hear Santa Claus coming over Slieve Gallon. Seamus, the big brother, knew better but wished he did not: "So there I was standing at the end of the lane, not really believing in Santa Claus, yet not wanting to admit to myself that I didn't believe in him. Half-way towards shedding the illusions of childhood, you might say, and half refusing the responsibility of growing up." The camera comes into a close-up on Heaney's face, as he extends the story into an analogy for people and place, and current circumstances:

> And that's more or less the way people feel here nowadays. They are living in a kind of shell, a kind of hiatus or limbo. They feel their old secure mythologies are crumbling away from them, and yet they refuse the responsibility and the strain and the pain of changing their way of thinking and feeling and living. But I suppose people themselves must change. They must crawl out of the bog of their history.

These words are the last in the film, and Heaney comes to an abrupt end before turning and walking away from the camera. After this tender Christmas Eve story, Heaney shifts back to the third person: the analogy is all on them, not on us. You come to me for answers, he seems to imply, but

I can only "suppose." "They" must crawl out of the bog of "their" history—just at the moment, of course, that the poet Heaney is going to enter the bog of other histories, to seek not answers but "symbols adequate to our predicament," notably reclaiming the possessive pronoun in the first-person plural (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 56).

It might seem that the first nine years of Heaney's career as a published poet, from *Death of a Naturalist* to *North*, have been exhausted by the critical pressure that is applied to text and context as mutually responsive entities, each serving to illuminate the other. Recovering "Heaney in Limboland" and securing its replacement in his work of this period resists that. It helps clarify Heaney's ambitions and achievements as a writer at the beginning of his career, under circumstances which were, at both the personal and the social levels, difficult in the extreme. It reminds us of the diversity of forms and media in which he worked, and it refreshes the possible approaches we might then take back to the poetry. Points of comparison have been noted between the film and "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," a much discussed poem of disputed success from part II of *North*. In 1990, Hughes pointed out that the second part of *North* is "often dismissed," and attention has tended to concentrate on the final poem in the book, "Exposure" ("Representations" 78, 91n). Hughes's particular interest is in "Singing School," but in the present analysis it is instructive to return in conclusion to "Whatever You Say Say Nothing."

The first version of this poem was published in the *Listener* in 1971, a year after "Heaney in Limboland" was made (Heaney, "Whatever you say" 496-97). There has been a persistent tendency for readers of the poem to hedge their reservations about its achievement by using "public" words in their appraisals. Neil Corcoran describes it as "Heaney's most 'public' poem," with inverted commas which allow for some debate about the merits of that adjective (80). Bernard O'Donoghue finds that both "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" and the "Singing School" sequence are "manifestoes of a kind," aligning the poems with statements of political intent (73). Russell has been openly skeptical: "unfortunately this poem is marred by an incorporation of phrases that gives it a reportorial air" (*Poetry* 232). But the poem's participation in different linguistic registers, pulling in contrary generic directions, should open out the possibilities for interpretation, not shut them down. For Jahan Ramazani at least, it is in that very "incorporation" that the achievement of the poem lies: he sees it as part of Heaney's strategy for "resisting journalism": the poem "journalistically incorporates journalism as ambivalent other against which

poetry defines itself" (95). His observations might be extended to "Heaney in Limboland." Working skillfully with and through the public medium of television, and subverting the public diction of journalistic convention, Heaney achieves in each work a complicated independence from the expectations of others. In his reading of "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," Ramazani calls attention to the linguistic mechanics—Heaney's grammar—to illuminate the poem's supreme, deictically located moment of resistance. After the impatient drive of the first stanzas, spoken in the wake of the encounter with "an English journalist," in the line "Yet I live here, I live here too, I sing," Ramazani finds the poet "[s]uddenly breaking free from satire" as he "defiantly reclaims lyric voice" (96). That bardic verb, "sing," stands for liberated oral expression in a place of which so many words have been written. On the evidence of "Heaney in Limboland," "I live here" is a complex assertion for Heaney to make. If this film puts Heaney in the uncertain space of limboland, within the film that uncertainty is at once skillfully compounded and confounded by the free movement of Heaney's grammatical first person, and fixed in the vague, yet definite zone of deixis.

When Heaney represents Belfast, he is locating himself in it, and in relation to it. By its very nature as a television program, "Heaney in Limboland" offers the utmost confirmation, and complication, of those features of Heaney's Belfast writing so valuably identified by Hughes. From Heaney's mediated city, it is a short distance to Paul Muldoon's discussion of the Irish writer and the variant roles of medium and mediator, in *To Ireland, I* (2000):

> One way or another, it does seem that Irish writers again and again find themselves challenged by the violent juxtaposition of the concepts of "Ireland" and "I". Irish writers have a tendency to interpose themselves between the two [. . .] either to bring them closer together, or to force them further apart. It's as if they feel obliged to extend the notion of being a "medium" to becoming a "mediator." (35)

In the more local juxtaposition of "Belfast" and "Heaney," we find the poet working through these same problems of interposition, across different media. In "Heaney in Limboland," his confrontation of these problems is recognizable in the most fundamental linguistic terms. In the film, Heaney's use of pronouns shifts between the first and third persons, so that it is never quite clear where he places himself in relation to the people who live in the city he walks through; the pronouns "approximate to [his] shifts

between solitariness and solidarity," as Edna Longley said of Yeats's in "Easter, 1916" (188). Deixis shifts too, so that those words which should locate us surely in time and place augment our uncertainty about Heaney's role and position. "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" adopts these techniques in a bravura performance which, in extending the range of diction and temperament in Heaney's poetry, and disrupting expectations about them, has been perennially provocative. But these effects are intensified in "Heaney in Limboland" by what Stanley Cavell described as "the fact of television" itself (75). In the documentary, Heaney is positioned in relation to his implied viewers, but the television screen conspires with his grammatical and linguistic perambulations to define and redefine the audience, and then to draw it in, or to shut it out.

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Notes

[1] I am indebted to Marianna Gula for alerting me to this possible allusion.

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Seamus Heaney and the Making of *Sweeney Astray*

Stephen Regan

In August 1972, very soon after leaving Belfast and settling in Glanmore, Co. Wicklow, Seamus Heaney began work on a version of the medieval Irish romance, *Buile Suibhne*. The fantastical story of the cursed King Sweeney, maddened in battle, transformed into a bird and exiled from the north, had a striking appeal for a poet who had recently uprooted himself and his family in the midst of worsening political violence. In a notebook which he used for draft translations of the eighty-seven verse and prose sections of *Buile Suibhne*, Heaney wrote at the top of a page: "Left Ulster myself / allegory" (Notebook). Reflecting on this critical turning point in his career years later, he noted that "Sweeney had been turned into a bird, a roamer of the countryside, after the noise of battle," and he recalled how he himself came "out of the clash of arms in the North" and ended up "living among the hedges" in Wicklow (Heaney, "A Raindrop on a Thorn" 34-35).

The allegory envisaged at the outset had powerful possibilities, and Heaney's manuscript jottings suggest that he initially planned a translation that would be vibrantly responsive to contemporary political events. Some of this allegorical material proved intractable, and Heaney was dissatisfied with the style, as well as the scope, of his first attempt at translating *Buile Suibhne*. It would be another seven years before he brought the project to fruition. What persists in the chastened allegory eventually published as *Sweeney Astray: A Version from the Irish* (first published by Field Day in 1983) is a sharply poignant contrast between the bleakness of isolation and the potential artistic reward of rural solitude. A renewed engagement with the land fostered a renewed idea of poetry as restorative and sustaining, a way of writing about nature that Heaney later characterized as "this beautiful, specific entangling of the imagination with the landscape itself" ("A Raindrop on a Thorn" 35). Even so, the "entangling" here suggests a complicated, self-conscious attitude, carefully distancing itself from any hint of sentimental indulgence. The prolonged composition of *Sweeney Astray* would prove to be vitally important in clarifying Heaney's own poetic ideals in the 1970s and 1980s. Far from being a stand-alone "translation" from the Middle Irish, it would come to have an integral role in Heaney's work, challenging and transforming his ideas about poetic voice and vision. Although a good deal of critical attention has concentrated on the linguistic and metrical accomplishments of *Sweeney Astray*, very little consideration has

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been given to its crucial role as a bridge—a weight-bearing structure—enabling and sustaining the artistic transition from *Wintering Out* (1972) to *Station Island* (1984).

Heaney had begun reading short lyric extracts from *Buile Suibhne* in Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson's *Celtic Miscellany: Translations from the Celtic Literatures*, published by Harvard University Press in 1951, but released in what was to become a highly popular paperback edition by Penguin Books in 1972. Jackson's organization of the lyrics in sections titled "Nature" and "Elegy" had a lasting influence on Heaney's reading and understanding of the work, especially his high valuation of its topographical and elegiac qualities. However, like other translators of *Buile Suibhne*, including Flann O'Brien, Heaney was indebted to J. G. O'Keeffe's translation and commentary for the Irish Texts Society in 1913, based on a manuscript from the early 1670s. Stories and poems relating to the onset of Sweeney's madness in the battle of Magh Rath (AD 637) were in circulation as early as the ninth century, but the larger narrative sequence probably took shape in the twelfth century.

O'Keeffe's English title, *The Frenzy of Sweeney*, aptly captures the prolonged manic behavior and wild energetic excursions of the mad king. In contrast, Heaney's title, *Sweeney Astray*, has a gentler apprehension of madness. It has the advantage of suggesting both mental derangement and geographical displacement, and it draws attention to Sweeney's anguished wandering and estrangement from family and friends. Heaney composed his own versions of the eighty-seven sections in O'Keeffe's translation, beginning with the lyric pieces and adding the prose commentaries as he went along, though not in strict numerical order. The strongly subjective emphasis in some of the early notebook versions of the lyrics adds weight to the supposition that Heaney did, indeed, envisage an allegory that drew on his own pained sense of exile and displacement. "Sweeney is rhymed with Heaney autobiographically as well as phonetically," as he joked in the *Stepping Stones* interviews with Dennis O'Driscoll (154). An early draft of Section 19 strikes a strongly personal note that was later toned down:

> I am homesick for the old days:
> a bottle open, food on the table,
> a welcome
> for generous friends.

Similarly, an insistent longing for the landscapes of home shapes the lyrical evocation of summertime in an early draft version of Section 45:

> I remember Ulster: Loch Cuan
> trembling in the heat
> at harvest time,
> a summer in Tyrone. (Notebook)

As Heaney admits in his account of translating the Sweeney story in the essay "Earning a Rhyme" (1989), he initially "went at the work speedily and a little overbearingly," trying to "keep up an animated rate of production" (62). Earning a rhyme was also a matter of earning a living, and Heaney (having just become a freelance writer) hoped that his translation might enjoy a second life by being broadcast on radio. The first *Sweeney* notebook also served as an accounts book for the end of 1972, and manuscript drafts appear alongside a careful record of expenditure, including £4 for felt pens and typewriter ribbon. If the pace of production was partly a practical matter, it was also spurred on by Heaney's enthusiasm for Robert Lowell's *Imitations* (1961), which encouraged artistic freedom and confidence in adapting and manipulating the original text. If, at one level, Heaney clearly admired the way in which Lowell's versions of poets as different as Villon, Racine, Montale, and Baudelaire were "offered as bridges to link up with an undemolished past" ("The Impact of Translation" 9), he was also impressed by Lowell's "unabashed readiness to subdue the otherness of the original to his own autobiographical neediness" ("Earning a Rhyme" 63). Seventeen years later, the perspective was chastened and self-critical:

> I began to inflate myself and my situation into Sweeney's, to make analogies between the early medieval Ulsterman who rocketed out of the north as a result of vehement squabbles there among the petty dynasties, and this poet from Co. Derry who had only recently come south to Co. Wicklow for purposes of retreat and composure.
>
> (Heaney, "Earning a Rhyme" 63)

Although Heaney was initially elated by the velocity of his loose Lowellesque translations, he later rebuked his earlier efforts in "using *Buile Suibhne* as a trampoline," adding: "I should have been showing it off but instead it was being pressed into service to show me off" ("Earning a Rhyme" 63). It is clear from Heaney's own candid account of the

composition process that his first attempt at rendering a version of the Middle Irish text was a highly energetic performance, but one that lacked cohesion and integration of individual lyrics within the larger narrative. At the same time, the allegorical and autobiographical framework that he envisaged was to prove unwieldy.

In the notebook in which Heaney first acknowledged the allegorical potential of *Buile Suibhne*, there are scattered outlines and brief commentaries accompanying the draft translation. Some of these are prompts or momentary reflections, while others are more formal discursive statements written as part of a draft introduction. From the outset, Sweeney is associated with place names and identified as "Tongue of the landscape" (Notebook). The reference here is to John Montague's recently published collection of poems, *The Rough Field* (1972), in which the tongue is a powerful metaphor for language, speech, and identity in poems that are strongly preoccupied with topography. Montague's short article, "A Primal Gaeltacht," published in the *Irish Times* in July 1970, had already exerted a strong influence over Heaney's awareness that the physical contours of the land were also linguistic contours. As Michael Parker notes, Montague alerted Heaney to "the residual and potential poetry locked in etymology and landscape," lighting on prominent features of the Irish landscape "like some latter-day Sweeney" (*Northern Irish Literature* 162).

Sweeney is also depicted in the notebook as a forefather of the "Tinker Sweeneys," the family of travellers who, Heaney later tells us in the introduction, "used to camp in the ditchbacks along the road to the first school I attended" (*Sweeney Astray* n.pag.). In that respect, the name provided an important connection with Heaney's rural upbringing: "Sweeney became a medium through which I could bring back that childhood intimacy with hedges and tinkers" ("A Raindrop on a Thorn" 35). Two other vitally significant concerns emerge as Heaney's notes take shape. How should Sweeney be represented in relation to war, and is he principally a comic or a tragic figure? The notes present him as both antagonistic and passive, as "Guerilla / Truce Breaker," but also as "Survivor of war, as victim." In the process of composition, numerous literary archetypes and political figures surface as possible analogues for Sweeney. If the prolific comparisons reveal how fertile the Sweeney story was for Heaney, they also demonstrate how easily the story could be overburdened by too much allegorical freight. The pressing image of Sweeney as outcast, exposed to the elements, inevitably takes Heaney to Shakespeare, and more than once he notes: "He is Lear and poor Tom." At

the same time, an urge to give the story an acute contemporary relevance and political significance prompts him to add: "He is a Brookeborough and a Bernadette" (Notebook).

Prime Minister of Northern Ireland from 1943 to 1963, Lord Brookeborough was one of the hardline anti-Catholic leaders of the Ulster Unionist Party. The ministerial role that he had formerly occupied came to an end in March 1972 with the British Government's decision to suspend the Northern Irish Parliament and impose direct rule from Westminster. Bernadette Devlin, a passionate Catholic civil rights activist, was the youngest MP at Westminster during some of the most troubled years in Northern Irish politics (1969-74), and served a prison sentence in 1970 for alleged incitement to riot. Heaney's association of both of these key political figures with the mad King Sweeney is clearly problematic, but nevertheless revealing. He appears to have wanted a translation that carried both universal and local significance, and one in which the hero spoke eloquently of struggles and aspirations that might be understood on both sides of the sectarian divide. As Heaney's notes expanded, they began to fill out an allegorical scheme in which Sweeney might plausibly be associated with both King Lear and Lord Brookeborough: "He represents the self-reproach of a fallen establishment, tormented by hindsight" (Notebook). At the same time, part of Heaney's initial plan was to represent the voice of the underdog and the voice of implacable outcry against injustice.

To give the voice of complaint sufficient *gravitas* was a technical, as well as a thematic, challenge and one that Heaney was clearly alert to, especially given the tendency in earlier adaptations to depict mad Sweeney as the "hilarious clown" of a comic epic poem. Not surprisingly, Heaney acknowledges that "Sweeney is part of the comic apparatus of O'Brien's masterpiece [*At Swim-Two-Birds*]" (Notebook). Meditating on O'Brien's example was to prove beneficial to his gauging of the tonal qualities of his own translation:

> O'Brien seems to have responded in particular to the frequently ridiculous phraseology of O'Keeffe's literal translation, and his stylistic high-jinks constitute a kind of erudite leg-pulling. Yet he also complicates our reading of Sweeney by allowing [. . .] pathos and lyricism in the original to reveal themselves also. . . . It is this elegiac quality which emerged as the dominant note in my version. (Heaney, Notebook)

Noting the fine balance between "the laconic and the lugubrious, between farce and fairytale" in the original narrative, Heaney moves towards a decisive consideration of the mood of his own work, declaring that "the overall conception is tragicomic." If Flann O'Brien helps to shape the tragicomedy in Heaney's version, so too does Samuel Beckett. One of Heaney's most startling insights (not recorded in the printed introduction) is that *Buile Suibhne* is an intensely powerful rendering of pain in words, a self-conscious performance that seems to anticipate the strange collusion of aesthetics and anesthetics in the writings of the Irish modernist. "The original poem," he claims, "is an insulation of words . . . an instrument of fantasy that distances Sweeney's pain . . . Sweeney, in fact, has something of Molloy or Malone's resourcefulness of complaint, something of their compulsion to read their predicament as a starting point for artful utterance" (Notebook). It was not lost on Heaney, of course, that Sweeney in the original narrative is figured as a maker of songs and stories, a fabricator of fine words, and this was an identification that he returned to and elaborated in later drafts.

By April 1973, Heaney had arrived at a conception of *Sweeney Astray* as an allegorical work that might function on multiple levels: biographical, topographical, and political. It was a work of tragicomedy that shuttled deftly between the ludicrous and the lyrical, between tongue-in-cheek playfulness and sombre pathos. He worked quickly and produced a draft translation, which he then set aside for over six years, feeling both uncertain about the weight of allegorical significance he had given it, and uneasy about his technical and stylistic handling of the Middle Irish. In his notes towards an introduction, Heaney stated that, while employing the full resources of the English language and English literary tradition, he was "consciously making a few anachronisms" (Notebook). As in Lowell's "translations," these anachronisms function effectively in building bridges and suggesting continuity between past and present. However, sometimes they appear too starkly as reminders of sectarian conflict in the 1970s, closing down rather than opening up analogies, as with this speech by St. Ronan in an early draft of Section 6:

> and that was my moment,
> a pivot of history.
> A snap of Donal's fingers
> called off the bully boy. (Notebook)

Heaney later admitted that he had a strong sense of overloading his translation of the text when he first embarked on the project, and that the resulting work was "infected with the idiom of the moment" (Corcoran 255). There were further difficulties, too, of a stylistic and technical kind. The free verse that Heaney tried his hand at in the first version was powerfully liberating, but it perhaps encouraged too much imaginative license and linguistic exuberance. Heaney conceded in notes accompanying his first attempt at translation that "one loses the metronome of the original metre," and his later inclination was to be more faithful to the original (Notebook).

What remained as a fundamental conviction throughout Heaney's sustained engagement with *Buile Suibhne* was the idea that Sweeney was a type of the exiled artist, a sorrowful singer and poet. He listed in his notebook the names of prominent Irish musicians and composers, including Edward Bunting, Thomas Moore, John Field, and Seán Ó Riada. At the top of this list, however, is "Keats in Ireland" (Notebook). Intriguing as it seems, the association of Keats with Sweeney is compelling. Keats is, after all, the supreme poet of imaginative flight, acutely responsive to the movement, as well as the sound, of birds. Heaney's reference is also to the brief but disturbing letter written by Keats after his visit to Ireland in the summer of 1818, in which he speaks of having had "too much opportunity to see the worse than nakedness, the rags, the dirt and misery of the poor common Irish" (Keats 151). The tragic sensibility in Keats, that quality of his thought and feeling that readily responded to *King Lear*, combines with what Matthew Arnold identified as a Celtic "natural magic" in his sensuous descriptions of landscape (163). Heaney's instinct is to mitigate the sorrow and melancholy of Sweeney's predicament with the pleasures of sensuous, natural beauty. Even though the later version of *Sweeney Astray* is generally less exuberant and more disciplined in its handling of language and imagery, the voice of Keats is strongly pronounced at times. The difference can be seen in a brief comparison of Section 73 with a draft version written in 1972. The second stanza in the early draft excitedly declares a miracle:

> Here's a green miracle
> of oak-mast and ivy,
> where the loaded branch
> bends over windfalls. (Notebook)

The later, printed version is more controlled, but the landscape description is sensuous and ornate, with the fruited branches of apple trees bearing close comparison with those in Keats's "Ode to Autumn":

> Ivies green and thicken there,
> its oak mast is precious.
> Fruited branches nod and bend
> from heavy-headed apple trees. (Heaney, *Sweeney Astray* 76)

In addition, the loose quatrain of the original is given a firmer metrical shape, aided by the subtle rhyme of "precious" and "trees," as part of Heaney's declared intention to bring the translation closer to the Irish metrical and rhythmic qualities of the original in the process of revision.

In 1979, after his first semester of teaching at Harvard, Heaney returned afresh to the Sweeney translation. In an interview with Robert Druce that year, he candidly confessed his unease that he had not "dealt with the Irish" and that his method of working meant that he had paid more attention to the English crib than the Irish original. He claimed that, as he came towards the end of the manuscript, he became more interested in the Irish and in the formal properties of the language, and that his version became "more metrical and rhymed." Having "hesitated on that brink," it was towards the challenge of capturing the Irish qualities of the original that Heaney would now move stylistically (Druce 35). He was already determined that his translation would avoid the kind of Hiberno-English associated with Douglas Hyde and the Irish Revival: "I didn't want it coloured with the picturesqueness of Irish idiom" ("A Raindrop on a Thorn" 36).

Even so, the final version does not altogether escape the influence of the occasional stiff formality in the Hiberno-English of Yeats and Lady Gregory, with its many emphatic "indeeds." Sweeney's lament, "Indeed I have suffered great trouble and distress" (66) sounds very like Cathleen ni Houlihan's sore but dignified line, "I have had great trouble indeed" (Regan, *Irish Writing* 426). Overall, though, Heaney strives to produce an English version that embodies what he sees as the chill clarity and purity of the Irish original. His account of this process in "Earning a Rhyme" is impressionistic in recalling the moment of inspiration but beautifully elaborate in its attention to the craft:

> I cannot remember when I got the idea that the stanzas should be recast in a more hard-edged, pointed way; that they should have the definition of hedges in a winter sunset; that they should be colder, more articulated; should be tuned to a bleaker note; should be more constricted and ascetic; more obedient to the metrical containments and battened-down verbal procedures of the Irish itself. (Heaney 63-64)

A different kind of engagement with the text was to follow, involving a steadier, less hurried movement in the verse, and a greater concentration on the energies of individual words. Instead of giving freedom to "lanky enjambed propulsion," Heaney now attended more carefully to the quatrain, producing a metrical pattern that was "more end-stopped and boxed in" ("Earning a Rhyme" 64). Once again, the effects of Heaney's revision can be seen in Section 73. In response to O'Keeffe's restrained and simple depiction of the monastery at Alternan, "Cliff of Farannan, abode of saints," Heaney had originally composed a "resplendent" picture of saintliness:

> O the tabernacle of the hazel wood
> on the cliff of Farannan,
> and the cataract glittering
> like the stem of a chalice! (Notebook)

In rewriting the stanza, Heaney eliminated the apostrophizing "O" and reined back the leaping lines, steadying the quatrain with a subtle half-rhyme:

> Sainted cliff at Alternan,
> nut grove, hazel wood!
> Cold quick sweeps of water
> fall down the cliff-side. (*Sweeney Astray* 75)

These later lines are closer to the original (and to O'Keeffe's translation), as well as being more naturalistic and less exuberant than what Heaney had previously written. As he confides in "Earning a Rhyme," he felt a different kind of achievement and satisfaction in executing the later version of *Buile Suibhne*—"a sense of accumulation rather than of truancy"—and by 1979 it seemed that the social and political motivation, for all its power and urgency, did not require the kind of explicit allegory that he had previously tried to give it. Heaney goes so far as to admit that in the final reworking of

Buile Suibhne he had "forgotten about the political extensions that were originally intended." What is implied here is not some casual indifference towards the political conflict in the north, but rather a shift of priorities, involving a different evaluation of the "otherness" of *Buile Suibhne* as "a poem from beyond," and a different sense of what translation might entail (Heaney, "Earning a Rhyme" 65).

Sweeney Astray: A Version from the Irish was first published in Derry by Field Day in 1983. Heaney had become a director of the Field Day Theatre Company two years earlier, and had given his assent to the idea of "creating a space in which it might be possible to contemplate a settled existence beyond the brutal realities of the past twenty years"(Regan, "Ireland's Field Day" 26). Although he might have scaled down the original "political extensions" of the work, there are some telling indications of Heaney's commitment to the cultural and political ambitions of Field Day in his introduction to *Sweeney Astray*, especially in his meditations on history and place. The idea of accessing the Gaelic past through the land recalls the work of Montague (who had influenced Heaney's *dinnseanchas* poems, including "Broagh" and "Anahorish," in *Wintering Out*), but it also brings to mind a similar preoccupation in the work of the playwright Brian Friel, whose *Translations* Heaney had reviewed in 1980. Heaney recalls having lived on the verges of Sweeney's territory, recreating that topography through remembered place names: "Slemish, Rasharkin, Benevenagh, Dunseverick, the Bann, the Roe, the Mournes." If there is a strong sense of territorial possession here, there is also an equal recognition of competing and alternative ideas of attachment, evident, for instance, in the way that Heaney lights upon "Sweeney's easy sense of cultural affinity with both western Scotland and southern Ireland as exemplary for all men and women in contemporary Ulster." There is a shrewd alertness to the ironies that sometimes attach to debates about origins and identities in Heaney's admission that this "Irish" invention may well have been a development of a British original, vestigially present in the tale of the madman called Alan" (Introduction, *Sweeney Astray* n.pag.).

What is most evident in the introduction to *Sweeney Astray*, however, is a strategic rethinking of the earlier allegorical framework. There is no attempt now to find explicit contemporary political equivalents for Sweeney and his experiences. Instead, the meaning and value of the work are given a much broader cultural and historical scope. The primary significance that Heaney attaches to Sweeney derives from his understanding of what the mad king and bird-man might have represented for poets and storytellers

centuries earlier, and from his conviction that "the literary imagination that fastened upon him as an image was clearly in the grip of a tension between the newly dominant Christian ethos and the older, recalcitrant Celtic temperament" (Introduction, *Sweeney Astray* n.pag.). What survives of Heaney's earlier musings on the allegorical possibilities of *Buile Suibhne* is his insistence on regarding Sweeney as "a figure of the artist, displaced, guilty, assuaging himself by his utterance," along with his carefully tempered suggestion that "it is possible to read the work as an aspect of the quarrel between free creative imagination and the constraints of religious, political and domestic obligation" (Introduction, *Sweeney Astray* n.pag.). Heaney's idea of the displaced artist owes much to James Joyce (placed so strategically at the end of the "Station Island" sequence in the volume of that title), but his thinking about the modern relevance of Sweeney perhaps owes something to T. S. Eliot, as well. There are glimmerings of how he would come to identify with Sweeney as a type of the artist in an interview with Seamus Deane for the *Crane Bag* journal in 1977: "Maybe here there was a presence, a fable which could lead to the discovery of feelings in myself which I could not otherwise find words for, and which would cast a dream or possibility or myth across the swirl of private feelings: an objective correlative" ("Unhappy and at Home" 65). That concluding allusion to Eliot's "objective correlative" (Eliot 451) suggests the extent to which Heaney had, by this time, begun to move away from the allegorical schema towards a more subtle and versatile response in which the nature of artistic intelligence is, itself, a principal concern. In the process, *Sweeney Astray* became a work of valuable self-exploration and redirection, a sounding board for Heaney's own poetic impulses, as well as a crucially important work of transition, prompting and enabling the difficult crossing from the poems of *Wintering Out* and *North* in the 1970s to the penitential *Station Island* (1984), and on to the strange, fantastical, and visionary poems that would eventually appear in *The Haw Lantern* (1987) and *Seeing Things* (1991).

Heaney's return to *Buile Suibhne* and the new emphasis he gave to the work as an imaginative product of both "the newly dominant Christian ethos and the older, recalcitrant Celtic temperament" were prompted by a radio broadcast on early Irish nature poetry that he was commissioned to write for Raidió Teilifís Éireann in 1978. Noting the "unique cleanliness of line" that has often been praised in early Irish nature poems, Heaney opens the broadcast with a positive appraisal of the delight of these poems in the elemental: "The tang and clarity of a pristine world full of woods and water and birdsong seems to be present in the words." Acknowledging O'Brien's

admiration of the "steel-pen exactness" of early Irish verse-craft, he goes on to cite O'Brien's translation of the lines beginning "Scel lem duib" ("Here's a song"), which Heaney claims have "all the brightness and hardness of a raindrop winking on a thorn." The icy climate of this early Irish lyric leads him to dwell on the contrasting weather systems in English and Irish poetry, and he recalls a prominent line in *King Lear*—"still through the sharp hawthorn blows the cold wind"—noting that its wintry chill is unusual in English verse (Heaney, "The God in the Tree" 181-82). That *King Lear*, which had shaped and informed Heaney's earlier thoughts about King Sweeney in 1972, should come to mind once more is highly significant, since the line he quotes suggests to him not just cold weather but painful exposure. It has, he says, "the *frisson* of the bare and shivering flesh about it." Several times in *Sweeney Astray*, Heaney employs the word "bare" to suggest not just nakedness, but exposure and vulnerability, too. In Section 6, for instance, he extends his translation of Ronan's curse, "sirfidh Éirinn 'na gheilt glas" ("He shall roam Ireland mad and bare"), to suggest a more profound existential exposure: "Bare to the world . . . bare to the world he'll always be" (Heaney, *Sweeney Astray* 6). O'Keeffe, in contrast, translates the uncertain "gheilt glas" as "stark madman" (in the sense of "stark raving mad"), then cleverly exploits the possibilities of "stark" by translating the Irish "lomnocht" four stanzas later as "stark-naked" ([1913] 9). O'Keeffe's near literal translation of line 108 gives emphasis to the temporal effect of the curse in its suggestion that Sweeney will "ever naked be," while Heaney's "bare to the world" has a more powerful archetypal resonance. Allusions to Shakespeare's "accommodated man . . . a poor, bare, forked animal" in *King Lear* (2519) bring with them intimations of Christ's suffering, and Heaney's "bare" is made to carry suggestions of "bearing pain" and "bearing the cross," as in Sweeney's imploring cry, "I am the bare figure of pain" (70).

The strong characterization of Sweeney as a man of infinite sorrows finds striking justification in Heaney's exploration of early Irish nature poetry in "The God in the Tree." He detects in Celtic Christianity two different imaginative tendencies: the *pagus*, which he associates with delight in pagan wilderness, and the Christian *disciplina*, which he identifies as a spiritual principle and religious vocation. If early Irish nature poetry is a poetry of praise, it is also a penitential verse. It is in the context of explaining the double nature of "the god in the tree" as both pagan spirit and Christian deity that Heaney introduces *Buile Suibhne* and offers his own translation of "Sweeney's praise of the trees," which he considers to be an

exemplary instance of the Celtic imagination. Although he offers lavish appreciation for the way in which these lines show the "imagination beautifully entangled with the vegetation and the weathers and animals of the countryside," he strangely omits any mention of the extent to which the closing stanza also aptly displays the aforementioned Christian *disciplina*:

> But what disturbs me
> more than anything
> is an oak rod, always
> testing its thong. ("The God in the Tree" 188)

The point is all the more pertinent, as Heaney later amended these lines, toning down the note of discipline and punishment in "rod" and "thong," and seeking to evoke instead the swaying movement of the oak suggested in the original Irish:

> But what disturbs me most
> in the leafy wood
> is the swishing to and fro
> of an oak rod. (Notebook)

Not convinced that the "swishing to and fro" sufficiently lightened the verse, perhaps only serving to amplify the sound of punishment (as it does for Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), Heaney later eliminated the "swishing" and replaced it with an additional "to and fro" ("the to and fro and to and fro"), gently mimicking the movement of the oak branch (*Sweeney Astray* 38).

If Heaney felt in retrospect that he had weighted Sweeney's praise of the trees with too much Christian *disciplina*, he had no such reservations in emphasizing the penitential qualities of Sweeney's suffering elsewhere in the translation, far exceeding any suggestion of this kind in O'Keeffe's version. The close association of Sweeney with trees makes possible numerous allusions to Christ's crucifixion. The painful description of Sweeney "prickled and cut and bleeding all over" among "thorny twigs" is followed by a description of his flight to another "station," recalling the stations of the cross (13). In Section 21, Sweeney presents himself as "wind-scourged, stripped / like a winter tree," and speaks of his suffering in crypto-biblical imagery:

Hard grey branches
have torn my hands,
the skin of my feet
is in strips from briars . . . (*Sweeney Astray* 18)

A later reference to "my cut feet, my drained face" in Section 61 is followed by the more explicit outcry, "I am crucified in the fork of a tree" (*Sweeney Astray* 67). Long before the piercing of his side with a spear, Sweeney in this translation gives notice of his sacrificial role in the prophetic idiom of the Gospels: "I have no place to lay my head" (50), echoing the words attributed to Jesus in Matthew 8.20 and Luke 9.58.

Heaney does not distort *Buile Suibhne* in highlighting its penitential qualities in his translation. As Conor McCarthy, Henry Hart, and others have pointed out, the idea of penitential exile was already deeply embedded in the early Celtic culture out of which the story arose. Nora Chadwick, one of the writers on the Celtic world acknowledged by Heaney in "The God in the Tree," observes that early Irish Christians practiced a particular kind of spiritual discipline known as *peregrinatio*, a penitential "peregrination" or pilgrimage (qtd. in 88). Paul Muldoon was no doubt alluding to this idea when he titled his review of Heaney's *Station Island* and *Sweeney Astray* "Sweaney Peregraine," neatly metamorphosing Heaney into the bird-man of Irish legend (20). Hart notes that peregrination had both voluntary and involuntary forms; it might be chosen as a way of seeking God, or it might be imposed as a punishment for sin (142). It is possible, as McCarthy suggests, that the more explicit elements of Christian moralization, the curse on Sweeney by Ronan at the beginning and the ritual forgiveness and burial by Moling at the end, are additions to an earlier narrative in which the principal cause of his madness is the fury of battle (26). However, the structural function of the journey as penance, with the poetry of nature as consolation, does seem to be pronounced throughout the text.

Heaney's translation is sensitively attuned to the structural patterns of sin and expiation in Sweeney's story, emphasizing the series of purgatorial adventures that the mad king undergoes. It maintains the *in medias res* opening of the original, connecting the onset of Sweeney's madness at the Battle of Magh Rath (Moira) with the events that preceded it: "We have already told how Sweeney, son of Colman Cuar and king of Dal-Arie, went astray when he flew out of the battle. This story tells the why and the wherefore of his fits and trips . . ." (*Sweeny Astray* 3). Sweeney's offences are multiple, but they appear to be initiated by territorial claims. He

is angered, to begin with, by reports of Ronan marking out the site of a new church on his land. In anticipatio of his later outcast state, though with a touch of comedy, both Heaney and O'Keeffe have Sweeney racing "stark naked" to confront Ronan, after Eorann, Sweeney's wife, tries to hold him back by clutching his crimson cloak. As Ronan is praying, Sweeney seizes his psalter, "a beautiful illuminated book," and hurls it into "the cold depths of a lake nearby" (4). Miraculously, the psalter is returned by an otter, and Ronan then issues his first curse on Sweeney, that "he shall roam Ireland, mad and bare. / He shall find death on the point of a spear" (5).

Sweeney's second offence against Ronan occurs at the Battle of Moira, where he violates "every peace and truce which the cleric had ratified" (6). When Ronan and his psalmists bless the soldiers with holy water, Sweeney believes he is being mocked and kills one of the psalmists with a spear. He throws a second spear, which pierces the bell around the neck of Ronan. The bell (which had first announced Ronan's arrival in Dal-Arie) functions in the narrative as a powerful symbol of Christian calling and sainthood. The outraged Ronan now issues a second curse: "may the mad spasms strike / you, Sweeney, forever" (8). Heaney follows both the original and O'Keeffe's translation in making clear that the "dark rending energy" that now overcomes Sweeney is a fulfillment of the curse, and not just madness induced by battle. Where Heaney introduces an important innovation, however, is in rendering the impending madness in Section 11 in verse rather than prose. He maintains the strong topographical interest in the narrative, memorably capturing Sweeney's sudden disgust for places he once knew and his desire for places still unknown: "he was revolted by the thought of known places / and dreamed strange migrations" (9).

If the title *Sweeney Astray* does not have the oscillating energy of O'Keeffe's *The Frenzy of Sweeney*, it does effectively signify, as has been noted, both mental impairment and physical displacement. Heaney, in any case, gives ample recognition to the Irish *buile*, which O'Keeffe defines as "frenzy, ecstasy, madness, vision" (*Buile Suibhne* [1931] 98). His vivid description of Sweeney's senses being "mesmerized" is in keeping with this lexical field, even if Denis Donoghue objects to it as "too modern" (270). As early as the ninth century, however, there are references not just to "Buile Suibhne" but also to "Suibhne Geilt," and variations of *geilt* occur in the original text. Sweeney refers to himself as Suibhne Geilt in Section 23, an appellation that O'Keeffe retains but Heaney translates simply as "Mad Sweeney" (19). O'Keeffe elsewhere takes *geilt* to be madman, but he registers a more specific set of meanings in his glossary to the 1931 edition

of *Buile Suibhne*: "the word appears to have been applied specially to a crazy person living in woods; also endowed with the power of flying" (102). McCarthy offers a detailed and plausible account of the close links between the early Celtic *geilt* and the wild man of the woods in medieval English texts, and he notes that the Old English *gylt, gelt* (modern English *guilt*) possibly derives from the Irish and Scots Gaelic *geilt* (21). Within this historical context of the early Christian *geilt*, an outcast living in the wilderness, doing penance for sins, Heaney's description of Sweeney as "a figure of the artist, displaced, guilty, assuaging himself by his utterance" takes on a new resonance. Hart, too, is persuaded of the strong association between *geilt* and *guilt*, so much so that he claims "*Geilt* encapsulates most of *Buile Suibhne* in one syllable, and most of the compulsions and deeds that Heaney found so relevant to his own experience" (146).

Heaney's critics have not been slow in identifying guilt as both a powerful motivation and as a possible inhibition in his work. Deane, to whom Heaney spoke candidly of Sweeney as an objective correlative for his own inner promptings and artistic preoccupations, conducted a probing examination of "the source of guilt in Heaney's poetry and the nature of his search for it" (175). In his *Celtic Revivals* (1985), Deane speculates that Heaney emerges from the struggle with his influences—Frost, Hopkins, Hughes, Wordsworth, Kavanagh, and Montague—"with a kind of guilt for having overcome them," and he goes on to claim that "[t]his sense of guilt merges with the general unease he has displayed in the face of the Northern crisis and its demands upon him." Deane is forthright in his analysis of the biographical and cultural origins of this sense of unease: "His guilt is that of the victim, not of the victimizer. In this he is characteristic of his Northern Irish Catholic community" (175). The Catholic guilt that Deane identifies manifests itself in the poetry not in an obvious or expected obsession with sin and confession, but rather in a complex psychological predisposition towards appeasement and reconciliation. Although published in 1985, Deane's study was written a good deal earlier, and concerns itself mainly with the poems up to and including *Field Work* (1979). Even so, he makes a brief but telling reference to *Buile Suibhne* as "a story of a poet caught in the midst of atrocity and madness" (Deane, *Celtic Revivals* 186).

Since the publication of the penitential *Station Island* in 1984, other critics have fastened on Heaney's self-declared guilt as a hinge between poetics and politics in his work. Terence Brown speaks for many readers when he notes that "from the start Seamus Heaney has seemed oddly guilty about being a poet at all," and he acknowledges the double bind that

Heaney faced, especially in the 1970s, in balancing the aesthetic impulse with the ethical and social demands of the political crisis: "in Heaney's poetry of that difficult decade there are suggestions of guilty fear that he has betrayed his art to the gross conditions of a squalid conflict, and, conversely, that he has stood idly by as others have suffered, his only contribution the telling of a species of poetic rosary beads" (182-85). Bernard O'Donoghue, in his wide-ranging and illuminating introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney* (2009), helpfully draws out the issue of guilt beyond what "seems like the inevitable confessional product of a Catholic upbringing" (5), reminding us of the guilt that Yeats, too, was inclined to suffer, especially in the aftermath of Easter 1916. What is especially valuable in O'Donoghue's account is the recognition that guilt becomes increasingly linked to self-commentary and self-interrogation, so that poems in *Field Work* ("The Strand at Lough Beg" and "Casualty," most obviously) continue to address the questions of guilt and involvement earlier raised in *North*, in poems such as "Punishment." Emphasizing a strong element of continuity, despite the apparent thematic and stylistic changes in Heaney's work across the 1970s and 1980s, he claims that *Station Island* and *Sweeney Astray* are "again deeply concerned with issues of public answerability and guilt" (O'Donoghue 5-6).

Among those issues, the treatment of political prisoners in Northern Ireland weighed heavily on Heaney's mind. He was acutely aware of the deepening crisis in the prison system during the six-year interval between abandoning and restarting his translation of *Buile Suibhne*, and there is no doubt that he relentlessly questioned his own conduct with regard to the prison protests and the hunger strikes of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The denial of special category status to paramilitary prisoners sentenced after 1 March 1976 led to the wearing of blankets rather than prison clothing and precipitated the so-called "dirty protest" in 1978 and 1979, followed by the hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981. In that highly charged political context, both *Sweeney Astray* and *Station Island* would acquire a powerful resonance as dramatic explorations of suffering and endurance.

Parker has shown how the title sequence in *Station Island* incorporates the dramatic speech of a hunger striker and alludes to the crisis through its vocabulary of imprisonment, punishment, and betrayal. He argues persuasively that the anger and anguish felt by Catholics in the North had a decisive effect on Heaney's revaluation of the role of the poet (*Seamus Heaney* 180). Although Heaney had written much of *Sweeney Astray* by 1980, the outcast Sweeney, "stripped" and "bare," was a poignant reminder of the

protests of Republican paramilitary prisoners. Section 21 of *Sweeney Astray* is a painful cry of hunger in which Sweeney wakens at dawn "with a fasting spittle" (18), and Section 43 shows him "hungering" (a word not used by O'Keeffe in his translation). In Republican circles, the very name "Sweeney" would have summoned the memory of Terence McSwiney (Toirdhealbhach Mac Suibhne), writer and hunger striker, who died in Brixton Prison in 1920 during the War of Independence. If not allegory, *Sweeney Astray* nevertheless invites a reading that emphasizes both its antiquity and its contemporaneity. For all that Heaney sought to let go of the political "extensions" of the work, it carries with it the undertow of a troubled political consciousness.

Any final assessment of what is, after all, a "version" of *Buile Suibhne* also needs to take into account the artistic means by which Heaney manages to be faithful to the energies of the original work while making it distinctively his own. Heaney's decision to abandon his first attempt at translation had as much to do with his uncertain handling of rhythm and meter as with the overwhelming allegorical possibilities of the narrative. Looking back on *Sweeney Astray* from the end of a poetic career that would span another thirty years, however, it becomes clear that Heaney's prolonged work on the book was crucially important in distilling his ideas about the role of the poet in a time of unnerving political crisis, and in providing a vital catalyst for change and redirection.

It is worth taking a final look at Heaney's notebook to draw attention to the high degree of self-questioning and self-quotation that is evident from the very beginning of the project. In November 1972, just three months after he arrived at Glanmore and began to consider the *Buile Suibhne* translation, *Wintering Out* was published. His third major collection of poems, with its oblique suggestions of surviving the hostile elements, and with its distant echo of Shakespeare –"Now is the winter of our discontent" (516)—was very much on Heaney's mind as he prepared the ground for new work. In one of the first lines he wrote in the notebook, he imagined Sweeney "[w]intering out among wolf-packs." The line survived and found its way into Section 27 of *Sweeney Astray*. On the page where he jotted "Left Ulster myself / allegory," dated September 1972, he also wrote "Last Mummer," alluding to one of the most mysterious and unsettling poems in *Wintering Out*. As Parker has noted, "The Last Mummer" is one of a number of poems in *Wintering Out* in which Heaney "employs a persona to examine and renew his vocation as a poet" (*Seamus Heaney* 97). In the cold setting of the poem, Heaney imagines the last mummer emerging from "the long toils

of blood / and feuding" (*Wintering Out* 19). Like the mummer, Sweeney is an outcast performer whose words and actions carry an undertow of resentment and complaint. The association with this strange, outlandish figure suggests that at an early stage Heaney envisaged Sweeney as victim rather than victimizer, a sacral king but also an underdog. As with "The Tollund Man" in *Wintering Out*, Heaney presents him as an internal exile: "lost, / Unhappy and at home" (48).

What greatly eased the transition from *Wintering Out* to *Sweeney Astray* was Heaney's adeptness in handling the thin quatrain form he had developed for several poems, including "The Tollund Man." It was serendipitous that the principal verse form in *Buile Suibhne* was the rhymed quatrain. Heaney set about emulating this in free verse quatrains, initially disregarding the rhymed heptasyllabic lines of the Middle Irish, but later emulating the original with a smoother metrical basis, even introducing the Irish *deibidhe* rhymes (the rhyme of a monosyllabic word with a disyllabic word, stressing the non-rhyming syllable, as with "wall / downfall"). He carried on using the quatrain in the poems of *North* (1975), deploying it with powerful effect in "Punishment" and "Exposure." If *Sweeney Astray* in some ways grew out of *Wintering Out*, it also anticipates some of the main preoccupations in *North*, aiming like that volume for a poetic style as clear and as brilliant "as the bleb of the icicle" (Heaney 20). "Exposure," the powerful self-questioning meditation with which Heaney ends *North*, is clearly of a piece with *Sweeney Astray*, and appears to have emerged from it. The notebook drafts of *Sweeney Astray* contain the searching line, "How did I end up like this?" and a modified version of the line ("To end up like this!") accompanies a stanza from Section 19, in which Sweeney, having "lived among trees," complains of being "[a]stray, alone, / dogged by these memories" (Notebook). "Exposure" recalls Heaney's first winter in Wicklow, and its opening stanza is remarkably consistent with the Sweeney lyrics that he was composing at that time:

> It is December in Wicklow;
> Alders dripping, birches
> Inheriting the last light,
> The ash tree cold to look at. (*North* 72)

The poem is purposefully ambivalent in its moods and attitudes, and it dwells on exposure in all its complex forms: vulnerability to the elements (rain, wind, and snow, especially); public scrutiny by friends and enemies

alike, as well as by the media; and perhaps even writing itself as a laying bare of personal thoughts and feelings. Heaney considers the idea of the poet as an "inner émigré," weighing his own "responsible *Tristia*" within a long tradition of literary exile and political dissidence from Ovid to Osip Mandelstam. At the same time, he also characterizes himself in terms much closer to Irish political conflict, as "a wood-kerne / Escaped from the massacre," vividly recalling the flight of Sweeney: "Taking protective colouring / From bole and bark, feeling / Every wind that blows" (*North* 72-73). Reading *Sweeney Astray* in dialogue with *North*, we can appreciate it all the more as a profound study of exposure that served to concentrate and redirect Heaney's imaginative energies in the 1970s. It also gave tremendous impetus to the elegiac qualities in his writing, affording him an opportunity to write about loss and suffering through the voice of an *alter ego*, while reminding him that, in the words of Robert Graves (recorded in Heaney's notebook), "the poetic life has its redemptive moments" (Graves 456).

Heaney's decision to return to his translation of *Buile Suibhne* coincided with the publication of his next book of poems, *Field Work*, in 1979. One of the most powerful and imposing elegies in that book, "The Strand at Lough Beg," was written in memory of Heaney's second cousin, Colum McCartney, the victim of a random sectarian killing in 1975. Tracing the journey McCartney took to his death, having strayed from the area he knew, Heaney imagines a road beyond the Fews Forest:

> a high, bare pilgrim's track
> Where Sweeney fled before the bloodied heads,
> Goat-beards and dogs' eyes in a demon pack
> Blazing out of the ground, snapping and squealing. (*Field Work* 17)

The word "bare" effectively links the poem to Heaney's composition of *Sweeney Astray* and suggests that the idea of *peregrinatio*—Sweeney as penitential pilgrim—was very much on his mind at the time he composed the elegy. By the same token, his involvement with the translation clearly stimulates and sharpens his poetic instincts as an elegist. The grotesque vision recounted in "The Strand at Lough Beg" has its parallel in Section 67 of *Sweeney Astray*, in which Sweeney recalls walking "across the Fews," and being confronted by "five severed heads, / five lantern ghouls." The section closes with a quatrain that Heaney appears to have composed as early as March 1973. Without being overtly allegorical, the lines resonate with

contemporary significance, while also giving voice to the guilt and suffering that would be stressed in the final composition of *Sweeney Astray*:

> I have deserved all this:
> night-vigils, terror,
> flittings across water,
> women's cried-out eyes. (73)

A further instance of how intricately and profoundly the Sweeney translation permeated Heaney's imagination can be found in "The Wanderer," one of the meditative prose poems in *Stations* (1975), which closes with this rueful reflection on winning a scholarship to college: "That day I was a rich young man, who could tell you now of flittings, night-vigils, let-downs, women's cried-out eyes" (*Opened Ground* 88). That rich young man reappears in the last of the "Sweeney Redivivus" poems in *Station Island*.

The Faber edition of *Sweeney Astray* was published simultaneously with *Station Island* in 1984, and the deliberate pairing of these volumes is a reminder that both are fundamentally concerned with pilgrimage and penance in ways that strongly impact upon Heaney's consideration of the role of the poet. Sweeney lives again in *Station Island*, spurring on the imagination, especially in the twenty poems that form the intriguing third and final part of the book, "Sweeney Redivivus." In a note to *Station Island*, Heaney explains that these poems are "voiced for Sweeney," and that they act as "glosses" to *Sweeney Astray*, even though many of them are "imagined in contexts far removed from early medieval Ireland" (*Station Island* 123). Having dutifully completed his translation, it is almost as if he now revives mad Sweeney in a freewheeling act of imaginative daring. With "Sweeney Redivivus" we move from translation to impersonation. As Neil Corcoran points out, "'Sweeney' in 'Sweeney Redivivus' is the name for a personality, a different self, a congruence of impulses, a mask antithetical to much that the name 'Seamus Heaney' has meant in his previous books" (128). One of those impulses is an obsessive revisiting and surveying of the poet's own early life and work, as if from the distant, aerial perspective of a bird, combined with a new determination to fly beyond it. If the poems are sometimes surprisingly skeptical and self-critical in looking back, they are also remarkably defiant and resourceful in looking forward. "The First Flight" obliquely recalls Heaney's move to Glanmore and the struggle for equanimity, with his "point of repose knocked askew." At the same time,

there is a confident declaration of having "mastered new rungs of the air" (*Station Island* 102-03), a brilliant refiguring of Yeats's determination to "lie down where all the ladders start" (Yeats 181). At the same time, Heaney's portrait of the artist takes shape from the words spoken earlier in the "Station Island" section of the book by the shade of Joyce: "Let go, let fly, forget" (93).

After some cautious preliminary flittings, then, Sweeney would take flight and determine the direction of Heaney's poetry towards a new aerial authority and vision. While *Sweeney Astray* moved from exposure towards reconciliation, the "Sweeney Redivivus" poems served as a counterpointing energy, the imagination refusing to settle and be placated. The closing poem of "Sweeney Redivivus" (and of *Station Island*) is titled "On the Road," and it ends with the word "exhaustion." Like Yeats's "foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart," however, Heaney's "font of exhaustion" also suggests new beginnings born of a restless self-scrutiny (Yeats 181). In composing his version of *Buile Suibhne*, Heaney discovered that Sweeney was already a familiar part of his imaginative world: "One way or another, he seemed to have been with me from the start" (Introduction, *Sweeney Astray* n.pag.). It was entirely natural, then, that Sweeney should be there at the end.

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"Now, and ever / After": Familial and Literary Legacies in Seamus Heaney's *Human Chain*

Michael Parker

HJEAS

Back in 1991, Hugh Bredin, an old friend since their days at St Columb's College, wrote a letter to Heaney following the publication of *Seeing Things*, in which he said that the poems struck him as

> in part reflections on, or caused by, the . . . fact of death, which is now nearer to us than birth. Death makes us try to identify ourselves. The death of parents first, then our own, coming mildly and blindly towards us every day. I find it revivifies memory and sensation; it gives a kind of life back to us retrospectively.[1]

He might almost have been describing Heaney's mindset as he composed the poems in *Human Chain* (2010), a collection which documents transitions in his and his family's long history, and which testifies to the poet's sharpened apprehension of his own mortality. In the decade and a half preceding its publication, the poet was confronted with a series of keen losses amongst close family members and inspirational literary colleagues and friends, such as Joseph Brodsky (d. 1996), Ted Hughes (d. 1998), Czesław Miłosz (d. 2004), David Hammond (d. 2008), and George Watson (d. 2009).

A significant feature of the period in which many of the poems were composed and the collection assembled was the number of retrospective ventures and collaborations in which Heaney was willing to engage, almost certainly with the intention of consolidating his literary legacy. The richly informative, illuminating interviews conducted by Dennis O'Driscoll between 2001 and 2008, which became *Stepping Stones,* were clearly partly a stratagem to pre-empt and delay attempts at a biography, which he justifiably feared might distract attention from the work itself. With his seventieth birthday approaching, he supported several key projects, including the publication of the Rand Brandes-Michael Durkan bibliography in 2008, the RTE/ Lannan audio recordings of the *Collected Poems* (2009), and two outstanding documentaries, Charlie McCarthy's *Out of the Marvellous* (2009) and *The Boys of St Columb's* (2010) directed by Tom Collins and written by Maurice Fitzpatrick, in which he featured alongside

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Paul Brady, Phil Coulter, Cahal Daly, Seamus Deane, John Hume, James Sharkey, and Eamonn McCann.

The years preceding these timely, celebratory, worthy endeavors had witnessed major crises in his own and then his wife's health, and which undoubtedly contributed to the intense lyrical charge and meditative power of *Human Chain.* In August 2006, Heaney suffered a stroke while attending birthday celebrations in Donegal for Brian Friel's wife, Ann. In an exemplary interview with *The Observer*'s Robert McCrum in 2009, the poet recounted for the first time publically what had happened, how at around eight o'clock in the morning, he realized something was seriously amiss when he endeavored to get out of bed: "I made to move, but I couldn't move" (McCrum). His distraught wife, Marie, quickly summoned two highly experienced medics, Desmond and Mary Kavanagh, fellow guests from the night before. Following a swift diagnosis, they stressed the need for immediate hospitalization. With considerable difficulty, Desmond Kavanagh and Peter Fallon carried the stricken poet downstairs to await the ambulance; within an hour it arrived and bore Heaney and his wife off to the hospital in Letterkenny at high speed. With an intimacy that suffuses so many of the collection's beautifully-modulated lyrics, Heaney spoke of how those critical hours intensified and renewed the love they felt for each other, which left him with "one of the strongest, sweetest memories I have." Pressed by journalist on the "darker side of his experience"—McCrum had himself been laid low by a stroke back in 1995—Heaney confessed to the terrible sense of helplessness that engulfed him: "I cried, and I wanted my Daddy . . . I felt babyish" (McCrum).

A strong reason why Patrick Heaney would have been much in his son's mind was that the thirtieth anniversary of his death was approaching. In addition, for some time prior to the stroke, Heaney had been working on a translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* Book VI, where famously the hero journeys to the underworld in a quest for one last meeting with his father. That longed-for encounter had figured hugely in Heaney's imagination ever since *Seeing Things* (1991), and re-surfaces at several junctures in *District and Circle* (2006) and *Human Chain.*

To facilitate the process of recovery, Heaney withdrew from all scheduled public commitments in the coming year, which sparked a surge in creative activity. An early manifestation was the poem "Miracle," published in a Gallery Press limited edition shortly before Christmas 2006. In this he re-writes an incident from Luke's Gospel in which the loyal friends of a paralyzed man lower him down on a stretcher into Christ's presence in the

hope of a cure. Heaney had previously alluded to this biblical narrative in "Glanmore Revisited" VII (*Seeing Things* 37), where he pictures himself as an observer at the scene. At the outset of "Miracle," however, attention is fixed not on "the one who walks away," but on "those ones" who made his restoration possible. The narrating voice stresses the strain their burden exacts on them, shoulders, backs, and hands aching with no respite,

> Until he's strapped on tight, made tiltable
> And raised to the hot tiles, then lowered for healing (*Human Chain* 16).

Alliteration and assonance are densely packed in this stanza, a continuing effect of his immersion in Anglo-Saxon and Middle English poetry in his first year at Queen's University Belfast,[2] and of the muscular sounds and rhythms he relished in Gerard Manley Hopkins's, Dylan Thomas's, and Ted Hughes's verse. Note the repetitions in the lines above of "l," "t," "p," "r," the vowel pairing in "tight"/ "tiles," "made"/ "raised," and triple movement evoked by "tiltable," "raised," and "lowered."

Reminders of Heaney's multiple literary legacies feature strongly at the close of "Miracle." The speaker instructs the reader to be "mindful" of the service given by those who "stand and wait," an allusion to Milton's "Sonnet XVI" (330). Whereas the gospel writer emphasizes how all those witnessing the miracle were "seized" with "amazement" and "awe" (Luke 5.26), Heaney's version foregrounds the "slight light-headedness and incredulity" of the sick man's companions. What he celebrates instead, in understated style, is a completely secular marvel, the salvaging rather than salvation of a life. In his poem it is the miracle that he has "such friends" (Yeats 440) that moves him, not wonder at the intercession of Christ.

Eventually placed seventh in *Human Chain*, just before the title poem, "Miracle" anticipates the collection's emphases on the ties of love and loyalty that bind, or ought to bind humankind. With its depiction of dependency and interdependency, it sheds light on one of many meanings in the title, "the capacity of our species" through acts of solidarity "to transcend the boundaries of pettiness and self-interest" (Montale qtd. in Heaney, "Writer and Righter" 3).

Heaney's primary attachments are strongly familial in the opening section of his twelfth collection. By settling on the chain motif, he is able to examine successively relationships between parents and children, husbands and wives, grandparents and grandchildren, living and past generations, and the connections linking them to the home locale around Mossbawn and

Bellaghy. This comes across in an interview with BBC Radio Ulster, in which he links his new book's title to an insight about the "human thread," proffered by his daughter, Catherine, when she was five or six: "'Aren't poems like your toys, Daddy?' Catherine said / 'And didn't you and Mummy make me and God made the thread?'" (Muir).

This particular essay will examine some of the key thematic, formal, and aural threads within the collection's opening, family-centered movement, in which some of his earliest literary influences are a frequent "presence." Many of the allusions and analogies one discovers in this part of *Human Chain* derive from canonical writers from "the other island." Balanced against the prominence of *English* literary traces at the beginning of *Human Chain* is the focus towards its close on the extensive contributions to European culture made by Irish artists and writers in sequences and individual poems ("Loughanure," "Wraiths," "Sweeney Out-takes," "Colmcille Cecinit," and "Hermit Songs").[3] It is worth drawing attention to this clustering not least as a mild corrective to the way in which, *pace* Robert Lowell, academics, journalists, and readers from beyond Ireland and Britain too often classify Heaney unproblematically as an "*Irish* poet," when it might be much more accurate to designate him as a "*Northern Irish* poet," someone whose sensibilities were forged in a culture and a history distinct from that of his contemporaries in the Republic and mainland Britain. Any label, however, can tend to simplify matters. What was already apparent from *North* (1975) onwards, that this was a poet whose work, though deeply embedded in a particular contested place, had a reach extending far beyond its borders. Collectively, his poetry, prose, drama, and translations exhibit a power and a spirit that transcends a single national identity. They reveal the workings of an imagination which constantly sifts and synthesizes, renews and reconfigures itself through interactions with texts and cultures derived from multiple sources, perspectives, histories, and places.

***

Human Chain's opening poem, "Had I not been awake" (3), exemplifies the collection's central concerns with the mysterious creative energies that course through the natural and human worlds, but also the poet's continuing dialogue with English, especially Romantic tradition. A far cry from the "gentle breeze" and "sweet breath of Heaven" (41), with which Wordsworth's *The Prelude* begins, or indeed, the "uncontrollable" "Maenad" that flashes through Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" (578), the "courier blast" which inspires Heaney's lyric visits momentarily, yet leaves a lasting imprint—the poem itself.

Written in the period following his stroke, "Had I not been awake" registers the impact of his brush with death. Like "the heavy thunderclap," the "*greve truono*" with which Canto IV of *The Inferno* begins (Dante 66), it shocks the poet into a new alertness and sharper ways of seeing. Responding to a draft of the poem in late 2006, Helen Vendler remarked on how "the air current of the Reaper's scythe . . . is felt namelessly and ominously" (9 Dec. 2006), yet there seems also something Pentecostal in this wind. The word "courier" implies it bears a message, and its arrival and departure are treated as a marvel of a kind. Even so, the "blast" leaves the speaker questioning the solidity of the known physical world of roofs, trees, fences, and confirms the existence of unaccountable, "unseen presence(s)" (Shelley 577) capable of generating change.

Structure, rhythms, sounds, imagery, and diction are all finely orchestrated within a poem whose dynamic owes much to the use of the tercet form and the recurrent use of *enjambement*, driving the reader on from one stanza to the next. Consisting almost entirely of monosyllables, the opening lines release a sudden discharge of energy, and pivot initially around the stressed second syllable in "awake." Iambs and alliteration quicken the momentum, capturing the gyre-like quality of "A wind that rose and whirled until the roof," before another variation in stress patterns takes hold in line three starting with the trochaic "Pattered." Repetitions of consonants ("h," "k," "n," "w," "s," "r," "l," "f"), and the "I" vowel in the opening stanza alert us to the poet's aural receptivity. The wind's galvanizing effects quicken lines four and five, setting the narrator "a-patter" and "ticking like an electric fence." That last choice of simile is significant, harking back as it does to the poet's agricultural, ur- and earth-life in Mossbawn; like Wordsworth's "correspondent breeze," it exemplifies the connectivity between the human and the elemental. Or, as Vendler acutely observed, it left him "involuntarily attuned to it like an Aeolian harp" (Letter 9 Dec. 2006).

Stanza three emphasizes the fleeting, unpredictable, menacing nature of the gust, which metamorphoses "unexpectedly," "dangerously," first into a wild animal and then in line ten into a "courier." The imagery and diction seem Hughesian in provenance, recalling as they do the doubling of adverbs in the "The Thought-Fox," whose principal character is described as "Brilliantly, concentratedly" intent on "its own business" (Hughes 14). Lacking the sustained, pitiless force of Hughes's "Wind" (40), Heaney's "blast" dies down suddenly. The insistent, closing references to transcendent time negate the idea that this visitation could be deemed as

what he terms an "ordinary" occurrence. In the poet's memory, and "now" and "ever / After" on the page, it constitutes a moment commingling epiphany and anxiety, which he has endeavored to translate into creative verification.

The lyrics that immediately succeed "Had I not been awake" link back to it structurally, aurally, and verbally. A kind of "kaleidoscopic autobiography" (Heaney, *Giant*), incorporating snapshots, objects, actual and imagined scenes from before the poet's birth right through to his father's final days, "Album" picks up the "now" with which "Had I been awake" ended. It initiates what he describes elsewhere as a kind of "pilgrimage through the conscience and memory," an "entire flowing back into the very life from which it took its first nourishment" (Montale qtd. in Heaney, "Writer and Righter" 3). What fires his recollections here and triggers the first poem's time-shifts into motion is a noise from a mechanical, non-sentient entity, which suddenly "comes to life." The boiler's lurching into action resembles the sound made when a sawn tree collapses, an acoustic associated with primal loss and dispossession in Heaney's mind.[4] That the scene which follows contains fictive elements is made explicit in lines three, four, and five, where the speaker informs us that the family tableau he presents is a construction, and goes on to express uncertainty as to the time and likely location:

> I imagine them
>
> In summer season, *as it must have been,*
> And the place, it dawns on me
> *Could have been* Grove Hill before the oaks were cut (*Human Chain* 4; emphases added).

An earlier published version of the poem (Heaney, "Now the oil fired heating boiler comes to life" 75-77) refers to "trees" rather than a particular genus being axed; Heaney's decision to switch to the more specific "oaks" is a sound one, since its long "o" and sharp "k" link it to "Grove" and "cut"; additionally, it anticipates the sequence's second poem's focus on the oak as an emblem of Derry.

Invention gives way to what seems like authentic memory at the start of stanza three, however, when he avers that Grove Hill was a place where he and his parents would "often stand" together. The description of them "[s]hin-deep in hilltop bluebells" (4) is distinctly Keatsian, and so a

product of Heaney's "exile" and literary apprenticeship at St Columb's. In Keats's *Hyperion*, Apollo is sighted "[f]ull ankle-deep in the lillies of the vale" (240); bluebells appear in "I stood tip-toe upon a little hill," (4), "Bards of Passion and of Mirth" (215) and *Endymion* (60, 66, 70), all of which Heaney would have encountered in his A-level years at St Columb's. Taken together with the distant vista of Magherafelt's four spires,[5] the profusion of flowers conjure a vision of a beautiful, ordered, and stable world. Line nine's full stop, along with the voiced regret at the start of line ten, break the spell of the past, and the speaker is forced back into the parentless present. That "Too late, alas, now" at the start of the final stanza functions like "forlorn" and "adieux" at the close of "Ode to a Nightingale," tolling the speaker back "to my sole self" (Keats 200).

Despite lamenting that it is "[t]oo late for an apt quotation," he goes on to employ one; it is from Antoine de Saint-Exupery, as *Stepping Stones* (O'Driscoll 331) reveals.[6] While the reference to his parents' commitment, tested over time ("a love that's proved") is unambiguously affirmative, there is an unsettling element in the closing line since the figures do not look at each other. Despite their "steady gazing, / . . . in the same direction," none of the three have any inkling of what lies ahead, what "the distance" holds. Time and again in *Human Chain*, in recreating scenes from his early life, Heaney—like the retrospective Wordsworth of *The Prelude*—adduces an element of "portent," as Vendler puts it: "Heaney's portents were unconsciously stored away in childhood, youth and the more recent past; they were not seen at the time as portents of what the poet would become" (*Breaking* 42-45). Though neither the poet's younger self nor the individuals depicted may be aware of what the moment means, in due time its import will be revealed.

The second lyric in "Album" records what happened when the eleven-year-old Heaney left Mossbawn, and recreates—visually through the italics, linguistically the foreign words (*Quercus, Quaerite, columba*), aurally the harsh, clustered "k" sounds—his initiation into another culture, world-view, and sound-system. Arrival at St Columb's is figured as a move into a symbolic, enduring order, away from a natural, mutable one. At the college, "oak" and "dove" exist as "indelible" signs, the one an emblem for Derry, the other a composite symbol for both St. Columba and the Holy Spirit. Allusions to the area's pagan past ("grove") and pre-colonial Gaelic tradition ("*A grey eye will look back*") (*Human Chain* 5) remind the reader of Derry's multiple heritages and histories, though it is the college's officially Christian ethos that the poem foregrounds.[7] Repeated in two tongues and

two fonts, the college's injunction to its students that they "seek" unceasingly, left a deep impression on Heaney, though his questing led to a vocation very different, yet not completely disconnected from the one his family had anticipated. Line six's ellipsis is indicative of a turn in the lyric, back to a past withdrawing. Framed in the "Junior House hallway," on the threshold of experiences that will change him utterly, the speaker's child self undergoes a secular revelation, an awareness "for the first time" of his parents as a couple, rather than separate entities. Yet it seems that only "now," in mature years, can he sense *their* desolation as they "walked down the path to the gates" and away (Heaney qtd. in Fitzpatrick 59). He concludes that the shared grief his parents felt at the "loss" of their first-born may have equaled or—the quiet parenthesis shockingly implies—exceeded the closeness achieved at his "getting." Like the Latin words with which "Album II" began, this archaism, which occurs ten times in Shakespeare's plays, testifies to the St Columb's legacy.

Halting the preceding sections' forward movement, the third poem transports the reader seven decades back in time, to what appears to be an occasion some time after its speaker's own conception. Set in the seaside hotel in winter to which a newly-married couple have repaired for their honeymoon, it conveys with chilling accuracy the painful disconnection between them. Rather than the happiness that one might have expected to find at the wedding table, the unborn narrator meets with mute distress:

> A skirl of gulls. A smell of cooking fish.
> Plump dormant silver. Stranded silence. Tears.
> Their bibbed waitress unlids a clinking dish
>
> And leaves them to it, under chandeliers. ("Album" III, *Human Chain* 5)

Every succinct, distinct detail in the tableau above has the effect of diminishing the "presence" of the newlyweds. The gulls' shrieking outside and the dish's clinking inside amplify the grim silence. Not simply a wry reminder of the hotel's location, the adjective "Stranded" captures the pair's beleaguered, isolated, but now intertwined state. The scene is analogous to that of Matthew Arnold's poem, "To Marguerite," whose speaker questions why lovers' longing "[s]hould be, as soon as kindled, cooled," and concludes with a haunting image of division, beside the "unplumbed, salt, estranging sea" (720). The rare luxury surrounding them in the form of "[p]lump dormant silver," "chandeliers," and waitress service is something

they are unable to savor. Even the air they breathe is soured by the pungent, unromantic odor given off by cooking fish. What increases the vividness and irony of this disharmonious scene are the heightened musical effects. As well as containing the poem's only full rhymes ("fish"/ "dish," 'tears" / "chandeliers"), they make intensive use of alliteration ("s," "k," "l," "p," "d," "b") and assonance (the "ʌ" in "**gu**lls," "Pl**u**mp," "**u**nlids," "**u**nder," and the "ɪ" in "**fi**sh," "**si**lver," "**bi**bbed," "**u**nlids," "**cli**nking," "**di**sh," "**it**").

Pivotal in the lyric is line seven's ambiguous phrase, which informs us that the waitress "leaves them to it." Whereas the third person singular pronoun occupies the immediate present—"it" refers equally to the dish, the silence, and possibly imminent recriminations—the verb "leaves" serves as a vehicle for a flash-forward in time. What the extended future holds is further protracted silences. None of the anniversaries "to come" will be celebrated or alluded to, the narrator reveals. A draft of "Album III," which can be found in the National Library of Ireland, suggests that the parents responded with "misplaced vagueness" whenever questioned about their wedding anniversary; its speaker goes on to make the ambiguous comment that "I never had the nerve / To let her know I knew" (Literary Papers).

In a poem of thwarted anticipations, bathos offers an appropriate mode of ending.

> And now the man who drove them here will drive
> Them back, and by evening we'll be home (*Human Chain* 6).

Again, grammar performs a crucial part in conveying meaning. The driver, like the waitress, is the subject of an active verb, which relegates the married pair to object status, and so compounds our sense of their passivity. Significantly, they are last glimpsed as passengers, conducted on a circular, not a forward journey; whatever drives and desires brought them together are strangely "absent" now. Despite the speaker's attempt to inject an upbeat note at the prospect at arriving home, readers may well wonder how homely this will be, having witnessed how inauspiciously the marriage has begun.

The inability and/or belated ability of adults to articulate feeling haunts the sequence's concluding lyrics, which focus exclusively on the father. They incorporate the first of many allusions to Virgil's *Aeneid* within the collection, and introduce one of *Human Chain*'s most significant locations—that of the riverbank at Broagh—and tropes, that of a longed-for, but unfulfilled filial embrace.[8] Although it is not until the fifth and final

poem of "Album" that Heaney specifically cites Aeneas's "three tries" to clasp his dead father in Elysium,[9] it is this episode that generates the narrative frame for Poem IV. There the speaker recalls three missed opportunities, spaced over a lifetime, when he *might have* held his living father in his arms.

Its opening stanza begins in subjunctive mood, and with a construction redolent of translation from the Latin. Heaney is acutely conscious that the very means he deploys to voice grief, guilt, and love, and so lessen the gulf opened up by his father's death—classical literature, a classical tongue—was in itself a prime agent in their estrangement. Aural features play, as always, an important role in articulating the poem's multiple emotions. Enfolding the poem's key participle, at the exact center of the opening line, are a succession of consonants ("w," "r," "h," "v," "m," "b") which will also dominate the poem's close:

> Were I to have embraced him anywhere
> It would have been on the riverbank
> The summer before college, him in his prime (*Human Chain* 7).

"Too late," the speaker grasps what the father's actions and silence point to, an apprehension that the bonds that he had struggled to forge with his eldest son will soon be sundered. In contrast to the father-figures of "Digging" and "Follower" (*Death of a Naturalist* 13-14, 24-25), who embody physical strength and skills, this is a man credited with discernment, sensitivity, a capacity to read ahead, and interpret the future.

Stanzas two and three, however, chart a falling-off from prime to decline, recording instances when close physical contact between father and son *did* occur, though in neither case could what happened be "properly" called an embrace, as he terms it in "Album" V. The narrator recalls a night of heavy drinking in New Ferry, to the north-east of Bellaghy when, in a reversal of the usual parent-child role, he had to help his father with his trouser buttons. The third and, by far, most affecting incident relates to his father's final illness, how "during his last week" he depended on his son's support to get himself to the bathroom. The poem concludes with a poignant close-up of the pair, arm in arm, the younger man taking on "the webby weight of his underarm" (*Human Chain* 6). An apt description of the loose folds of skin the old accrue, "webby" also has associations with the riverbank. In emphasizing the father's near-dead weight, Heaney differentiates him from his prototype, Anchises, described in *The Aeneid* as

"sifting through" Aeneas's "fingers, / light as wind, quick as a dream in flight" (Virgil VI 810-11).

In what is humorously likened to a case of smash-and-grab, a child launches himself onto his grandfather in the opening frames of the final poem of "Album." Succeeding where his father could not, the boy's act of unrestrained affection generates multiple effects which ripple across time. When it initially occurred, it disarmed and delighted not just the old man, but also those observing; for them action and reaction were revelatory, disclosing a previously unimagined truth about him. Viewed retrospectively and self-reflexively, that instant becomes for the poet an *objective correlative* for the creative process, which often involves a "sudden, one-off" charge of inspiration, followed by a "steady dawning" in the course of which the artist determines the material's shape and direction.[10] As further proof of the veracity of this insight, the speaker cites a transformative experience from "a moment back," when he was seized, possessed, and overpowered by an encountering in Virgil "a son's three tries / At an embrace" which "[s]wam up into my *very* arms" ("Album" V 7). The unusual, somewhat archaic usage here initiates what seems at first a purely linguistic switch in the lyric, a reflection on the substrata of language, how it can embody "presence," yet not hold off "absence."

In this last poem, in the sequence and indeed in the collection as a whole, one detects an acceptance of mutability alongside an impulse not just to sustain, but also to renew linkages and lineages of all kinds, "the communion between the living and the dead" (Haven 61). Though the speaker depicts "*Verus*" as a phantom, his intention is not to treat the word as a curiosity from a dead tongue, redundant but for its relationship with the English word "very." Rather, "truth" is held up as a life-force at the very heart of culture and of the creative project. It resides in and animates personal memory and the texts he most cherishes, exists as *the* value that the artist has to continue to strive to embrace.

Separations haunt the next cluster of lyrics, "The Conway Stewart," "Uncoupled I and II," and "The Butts," the first a reliving of that traumatic, defining moment in Heaney's childhood, the day his parents delivered him to St Columb's. Before departing, they left him with a gift, a Conway Stewart, a means not only for achieving success in this new sphere, but also for maintaining contact with the family. Its opening signifier, "Medium," refers to much more than a nib's width. To the parents, the pen expresses a depth of love they have difficulty verbalizing; for the son, it is a "dear" resource enabling him to encrypt and reciprocate that intensity, whether

writing home then or memorializing decades later losses yet-to-come. It is likely that Heaney recalled lines from one of his greatest mentors when he chose one of the poem's key signifiers:

> Who can tell from the sound of the word "parting"
> what bereavements await us . . . (Mandelstam 46).

With its references to acts "due that evening" and "next day" (*Human Chain* 8), the future-oriented, closing tercets of "The Conway Stewart" depict with tellingly simplicity the imminent opening of a breach, the birth of a new phase in the parent-child relationship. The dearness of the price paid in achieving the scholarship at St Columb's is signaled grammatically; stanza five's first person plural possessive pronouns ("us," "our") are superseded in stanza six by a singular first person and third person plural possessives ("my," "them").

Although joined by facing pages in the British Faber edition, husband and wife occupy utterly distinct spaces in "Uncoupled" (*Human Chain* 9, 10). However, it is not their disconnection from each other, but their children's apprehension at being "uncoupled" from them that generates the poems' emotional charge. Both parts begin with an interrogative phrase ("Who is this coming to the ash pit?", "Who is this not much higher than the cattle?") which echoes that of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "Who are these coming to the sacrifice? / To what green altar . . . " (210). However, unlike Keats's narrator facing a cultural text he cannot decode, Heaney knows the answer, and can now as an adult read the signs. Patriarchal ideology has determined that the mother bears up, accepts her burden, and shows a commitment to the family which is "unwavering." That word's placing at the start of line nine intensifies its weight; it is her defining, enduring, steady, and steadfast quality. Heaney's speaker confers a dignity on her, but is cognizant also of her subject status, the sore she suffers, the worn path she treads.

The use of the present continuous tense ("coming," "walking," "bearing," "blowing") and the simple present ("proceeds," "turns") adds to the vision's vividness, though at the close the past tense ("have lost") signals a loss which the unidentified, collective "we" share. Chains of recurring sounds—"w, "b," "s," "f," "p," "h," the short "i" vowel in "is," "if," "in," "with," "brim," "bib," "still," "grip," "until"—constitute a kind of aural frame which sustains the visual elements. References to dust and ash in mouth and eyes, along with the final image of the mother disappearing from

the children's view make this another poem of portents. As Heaney revives her and her spirit through a willed act of imagination, he does so knowing what is to come, her future uncoupling from her husband and children.

"Uncoupled" II (*Human Chain* 10) presents a sketch of the father as a younger man. It differs in several ways from its companion-piece, not least in recording—at least initially—a movement *towards* the focalizer by the parent-figure. From his vantage-point, "perched" insecurely on "a shaky gate," the boy never takes his eyes off his father, who is busy and at ease at the cattle-fair, away from the domestic terrain. Like his wife, he bears in his hands the instruments of his office: his ashplant or walking-stick. Again, to lend the impression that we are witnessing "live" action, present participles punctuate the narrative, and applied most often to the father ("[w]orking," "pointing," "calling," "waving"), but also to his fellow dealers ("shouting"), their vehicles ("revving"), and the cattle ("lowing," "roaring"). Ultimately, however, it is this cacophony which blocks communication between father and son, as the boy cannot catch his father's words above the noise, and the father, momentarily distracted, drops his gaze. It is tempting to see that turning-away as highly symbolic. In conversation with O'Driscoll, Heaney remarks on how his father regarded cattle-dealing "as a calling and would have known that I hadn't been called" (*Stepping Stones* 57). The lyric ends with an acutely poignant observation on lost innocence: "I know / The pain of loss before I know the term." The lines are Blakean in their simplicity and directness, their intimate entangling of knowledge and loss, their consciousness that possessing the linguistic means to articulate suffering does little to diminish its affect. What enhances their impact is the late introduction of an iambic rhythm, stress falling on the reiterated verb, the nouns, as well as on that centrally-placed, critical conjunction of time.

The collection's early emphasis on family and filial history comes to a close with "The Butts" (*Human Chain* 11-12), another poem of late mourning, which, at its dénouement portrays a father's final days. Heaney's literary papers in the National Library of Ireland reveal that among earlier titles considered for the poem were "A Restitution" and "As Close as We Got" (Literary Papers 14-20). Much of the poem is taken up with a close inspection of the old man's suits, "layered stuffs," pervaded with his traces and his absence. They become successively a means of conveying his physique ("broad / And short"), and his self-effacing character ("Flattened back / Against themselves / A bit stand-offish"). Though noting also the unfresh smells his father habitually exudes ("Stale smoke and oxter sweat"), the speaker likens their effect on him as a "[t]onic." Despite his best

efforts—not least lyrically—delving into the recesses of his father's wardrobe to find clues as to who he was, the mystery remains intact; the narrator is left "empty handed," or with nothing more than "chaff cocoons," residue from the cigarette butts of the title. The reference of "paperiness" in stanza eight is, of course, self-reflexive, but equally anticipates the fragile state of the dying man and the insubstantiality his surviving children feel in themselves as they "lift and sponge" his shrunken frame. Although words like *pièta* and *pièias* spring to mind as we visualize these scenes, they are resisted in a text which repeatedly stresses the hardness of a task he and his siblings are compelled to undertake, learning "to reach well in," "[h]aving to dab and work," "having . . . /To keep working" (*Human Chain* 12).

In another illustration of the Yeats-like care and perspicacity with which he had constructed each of his principal collections since *Wintering Out* (1972), Heaney returns at *Human Chain*'s close with oblique allusions to the source of the "world-tilt" with which the book began. Airiness is the motif that binds together the last lyrics, whose ageing narrators admit to a growing light-headedness and, in their quest for stability, align themselves closely with past and present generations of their family. Operating in two time zones like so many of its predecessors, "In the Attic " (*Human Chain* 82-84) dwells on a core exchange between a child and his grandfather, one which yielded intuitions about the frailty of memory which "only now" the adult speaker is capable of putting "into words" (qtd. in O'Driscoll 27). Its framing narrative and source for its core images is Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, a book Heaney relished in his time at Anahorish School, near Mossbawn. At some point between 1948-1950, he saw a film adaptation of the story in a hall close to his grandparents' Castledawson home.[11] On his return, Grandfather McCann enquired whether Isaac, rather than *Israel*, Hands had featured in the film. This instant of misremembering leads Heaney to speculate that though certain narratives embed themselves in our memory-banks, the sheer "fleetness" of life causes slippages to occur as we get older, hence this poem's and *Human Chain*'s preoccupation with preventing the "memorable" lapsing into the "irretrievable" (84) in the continuing aftermath of the stroke.

By means initially of an epic simile, but subsequently through a series of locations involving high, exposed places, the poem rigs up comparisons between Jim Hawkins, the child-hero of *Treasure Island*, "aloft" in the *Hispaniola*'s "cross-trees," and the speaker "marooned / In his own loft." From this "coign of seclusion" ("The Master," *Station Island* 110) or vantage-point, the

man-boy / boy-man looks out at a birch-tree planted decades earlier, placing himself imaginatively in its uppermost branches. He proceeds—as now Heaney's readers must in retrospect—to scan a life and literary career that left him at times feeling "[a]irbrushed," "wind-drunk," "braced," (82) but, above all, incredulous at the heights scaled.

Succeeding sections transport narrator and reader back to the *terra firma* of late 1940s Ulster, and then forward into his post-stroke present. Redeploying the ghost motif from part one in which the face of the dead Israel Hands re-appears, the poem resurrects the grandfather in part three. Though previously to the child the grandfather seemed the embodiment of solid, indisputable authority, following his minor memory lapse that aura drops away. Suddenly, he appears frail and fallible, his voice, then his memory as "a-waver," his error "perpetual" (83), as final as the splash into which Hands disappeared.

Voiced by a speaker far less judgmental than his ten- or eleven-year-old self, the poem's last section notes all too well affinities between his grandfather's state then and his own now, framing life in terms of its circularity rather its verticality:

> As I age and blank on names
> As my uncertainty on stairs
> Is more and more (*Human Chain* 84).

Once again, he identifies strongly with the "lightheadedness / Of a cabin boy" facing his first time "on the rigging." Anxious about his current state, fearing that what had seemed an inexhaustible store of memories might have "bottomed out," he cannot *not* recall that sudden, "slight untoward rupture" with which the volume began. No stranger to change, to adversity and the "world-tilt" they effect, Heaney ends the poem with a come-what-may assent, "As a wind freshened and an anchor weighed" (*Human Chain* 84).

One is reminded of that tense moment in Charles McCarthy's film, *Out of the Marvellous*, when he asks the seventy-year-old, smiling public man a "now" and "after" question, a subject which recurs in Heaney's voice-over accompanying the documentary's austere but beautifully lyrical closing frames. What poem of his might serve as a fitting epitaph? After a laugh and a "slight untoward" pause, Heaney rights himself and, with characteristic *humilitas*, tilts the answer away from himself. Instead, he cites a name and recollects a work by two other poets:

> I remember when Czesław Miłosz died, I translated a bit out of *Oedipus at Colonus*. Where the old king is called by a mysterious voice to come up the hill and he disappears into the ground, out of the ground, into the ground. The Messenger tells the story and says, "Wherever that man went, he went gratefully." (McCarthy)

In my memory, the quotation's final word was "gladly." When double-checking Heaney's rendering of the line, however, I discovered not only that Heaney had indeed used the word "gratefully," but also that, exactly two years ago to this day, at the start of his obituary to the poet, Neil Corcoran had recalled that selfsame segment in McCarthy's film.

Corcoran's, Vendler's, Roy Foster's, and Bernard O'Donoghue's estimations of Heaney, the man and his legacy, testify eloquently to what made him exemplary and extraordinary as a human being and an artist. In innumerable great lyrics, translations and elegies, he voices his wonder and delight, empathy and compassion at the world, but also at times a disconcerting honesty and modesty about his own position as an observer within it. What will make his work endure is the richness and subtlety of his language, his mastery of form and metaphor, the variousness and complexity of his work which dwells not just on and in his own, but embraces so many distant, different cultures and times.

Fittingly, presciently, Heaney ends *Human Chain* with a perfect example of all these qualities in "A Kite for Aibhin" (85), a celebration of the latest addition to the Heaney-Devlin lines, his second granddaughter, and a *homage* to a great Italian poet whose work is too little known in the Anglophone world. The image at its heart, the kite itself, embodies multiple significations, triggers diverse emotions, as does Keats's nightingale. With its frail frame, it is analogous to the human body, but also, like its predecessor, represents the "soul at anchor" ("A Kite for Michael and Christopher," *Station Island* 44). Is it an emblem of transcendence, a reminder of the spirit's capacity to move beyond the material world? The allusions to a spindle and broken thread, however, link it to the Fates in Greek mythology, and so function as augurs of death. The kite's release in the closing line may thus reflect that "letting go" of which *Human Chain*'s title poem speaks, a willingness on the poet's part to break with the earth "once. And for all" (18). Like the poetic "windfall" that contains it, like the poem's dedicatee, the kite is an object of remarkable and delicate beauty, intimately linked to, and yet somehow "separate" from its point of origin.

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Notes

[1] A friend from St Columb's days, Hugh Bredin, shared a Belfast flat with Heaney in the early 1960s (O' Driscoll 67). He went on to become an eminent academic in the field of scholastic philosophy and the translator of works on aesthetics by Umberto Eco.

[2] A notebook from his first term at the university can be seen in Queen's University Library Archives, MS 20/7/1 (Box 7), with entries on the Anglo-Saxons dated 14 and 21 October 1957.

[3] In previously published essays on *Human Chain*, I have discussed in detail Heaney's translations of Guillevic and Pascoli, the central presence of Virgil, and the Ireland-focused poems at the book's end. See, for example, "'Back in the Heartland': Seamus Heaney's 'Route 110' Sequence in *Human Chain*' and "'His Nibs': Self-Reflexivity and the Significance of Translation in Seamus Heaney's *Human Chain*."

[4] In the opening chapter of *Stepping Stones*, Heaney recalls how soon after Mossbawn's sale the "beech trees were cut down" (O'Driscoll 24), while in "Clearances" VIII, he remembers the day when the "chestnut tree" that adorned the Heaneys' front hedge "lost its place" (*The Haw Lantern* 32).

[5] In Judaeo-Christian tradition, the number four is associated with the divine. Genesis 2.10 refers to the four rivers of Eden, while St. John in Revelation 7.1 talks of seeing "four angels, standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds," just before those destined for salvation are identified (*Douay-Rheims Bible*).

[6] In *Dante in Love*, A. N. Wilson notes the Italian poet's fondness for *occupatio*, a rhetorical device which involves stating that "you are not going to mention something in order to mention it" (263).

[7] Several contributors to Fitzpatrick's *The Boys of St Columb's* highlight the less than Christ-like features of life there—the atmosphere of fear, the sadistic cruelty, the injustice, and class prejudice.

[8] See "Route 110," Poem XI, *Human Chain* (58), which pictures father and son united again, almost "commingled" on the riverbank field. This imagined reunion transposed itself many years earlier in *The Cure at Troy*, Heaney's translation of Sophocles's *Philoctetes*. There the hero alludes to memories "[o]f the day I left," and consoles himself with the thought that after death "We'll be on the riverbank / Again" (64).

[9] "Three times he tried to fling his arms around his neck / three times he embraced—nothing" (Virgil VI 808-09).

[10] John Peter Kenney, in *Contemplation and Classical Christianity: A Study in Augustine* (159), notes how Augustine in *Confessions* IX uses the term "*momentum intelligentiae*" (x) to refer to such moments of sudden illumination.

[11] A very full account of the poem's origins can be found in *Stepping Stones* (O'Driscoll 27-28). It may be that the seventy-year-old Heaney might himself have underestimated his age in stating that the incident occurred when he was "nine or ten." While it is feasible that he might have watched the first-ever sound version of *Treasure Island* made in 1934, it seems most likely that he saw the 1950 Disney adaptation, starring Robert Newton as Long John Silver.

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(Self-)In-Mourning: Paul Muldoon's Early Elegies

Wit Pietrzak

HJEAS

In his study of elegiac verse, Jahan Ramazani shows the variety of uses that the genre of elegy has been put to, from the lofty detachment of Thomas Hardy to the self-questioning and self-validating elegies of Seamus Heaney. Ramazani is quick to observe the sudden swerves of emotional attitude and versatility with which poets have handled the theme of death, for "the genre of elegy, however 'un-get-roundable' its codes and tropes, however 'out of its time' it appears to be, can still be reclaimed and remade by a master of the craft" (360). As he finishes his exploration of the twentieth-century elegy discussing Heaney's work up to *Seeing Things* (1991), Ramazani does not comment on Paul Muldoon, one of the contemporary "masters of the craft," who has breathed a new lease of life into elegiac verse. Perhaps, unlike any other contemporary poet, Muldoon has managed to infuse his elegies as much with the nearly unspeakable sadness as with a genuine extolment of life, however fragile and uncertain, turning his mourning poems into a joint effort of sensibility and sensitivity.

The theme of death has featured heavily in Muldoon's poetry since his first official volume, *New Weather* (1973). In "A Cure for Warts," the speaker demonstrates the futility of poetry and his own frustration at not being able to help his mother to overcome cancer: "Had I been the seventh son of the seventh son / . . . / I might have cured by my touch alone / That pair of warts nippling your throat" (*Poems* 16). He reveals himself to have attempted all kinds of primitive rituals, as he implicitly chastises his mother for her lack of faith in magical remedies to which his only art seems to belong. Throughout his oeuvre, Muldoon tries to fuse the theme of mourning for the dead who were close to him with a deep consideration of the rifts that tainted their relationships and unrelenting self-analysis. The inexorable pull of death, the ineluctable end of one's life, gives grounds to the ineradicable outpouring of words; poetry becoming a stream of images and thoughts "of something else, then something else again" (*Poems* 173), as he puts it in reference to his own reaction at the recollection of the circumstances of Gérard de Nerval's suicide.

Paying particular attention to the two longest poems of *The Annals of Chile* (1994) that may be viewed as a culmination of his experimental treatment of mourning verse, the present essay seeks to show that Muldoon's elegies represent an attempt to withstand death as the deceased

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and/or decaying flesh is being revived in an ongoing act of incorporation into the living body of poetry; it is demonstrated here that, rather than extoling the deceased or claiming that they will find an adequate reward for their earthly deeds in some otherworld, the poet and the mourned meet within the space of the poem, which is conceived as an ever-changing and meandering flow of text. While Muldoon has continued to write remarkable elegies (notably for Warren Zevon in "Sillyhow Stride" and Seamus Heaney in "Cuthbert and the Otters"[1]), I focus on the poems written up until the mid-1990s, for they appear to follow a similar logic—as opposed to Muldoon's mourning verse after *The Annals of Chile*, which seems to depart in a variety of directions—lifting the deceased onto a textual plane where the speaker and the dead can re-establish contact.

In the Oxford lecture devoted to Eugenio Montale's poem "The Eel," Muldoon concludes by observing that

> [A]s a reader, I am standing in for the "writer" of the poem. I am shadowing him or her in that first process of determining, from word to word and from line to line, the impact of those words and those lines. To the extent that I might be described as a "stunt-writer," the person through whom the poem was written was a "stunt-reader," standing in for subsequent readers, foreshadowing them, determining the impact of those words and those lines. For both stunt-reader and stunt-writer there's a strong sense of the poem as an autonomous creature, one that has a life beyond them, one which, as it bucks and bounds and comes into being under them, remains intact. (*End* 218-19)

This insight is characteristic for Muldoon as both a poet and a critic, as his works comprise massive allusions to other works to the extent that what might be called *intentio auctoris* is spirited away in the process of writing-reading. Despite his whole-hearted approval of the theory of belated poetic individuation advocated by Harold Bloom, Muldoon does not seem to subscribe to Bloom's orthodox idea that a poem is a record of a tormented self that rebels against what appear to him to be the sublimely omnipotent precursor poets. For Muldoon, the poem—though no doubt authored by an individual so that "all reading is . . . involved with speculation on what's going on, consciously or unconsciously, in the writer's mind" (*End* 361)—is a record of experiences in language. Those experiences are in no way fixed, for just as the meaning of words is dependent on the contextual tension with other words, so experiences "buck and bound" in a perpetual vortex that is up for the reader to arrange into a coherent, if transient, whole. In

the final remarks of his Oxford Lectures, Muldoon, having at length dwelt on the idea of the end of the poem, suggests that "to carry itself forward in the world—testing itself, and us, against a sense of how it itself 'was / In the beginning, is now and shall be'—*is* indeed the end of the poem" (*End* 395). The autonomous, living poem enters the world and, like all living organisms, seeks to endure; but unlike the living organism that first unleashes it, the poem never dies, not for good. It may sleep, buried in the abyss of memory, but there is no saying whether it may return to life at some future time.

This idea must appeal to Muldoon, an inveterate elegist, for it begs the question of what becomes of the departed person when he or she is mourned in verse. A paradox appears in that the deceased is bodily gone, as an individual there is no more any access to him/her, but within the other body, the body of verse, (s)he is endowed with a spectral life in language. This paradoxical revivification is by no means a task to be lightly accomplished. Traditionally elegies have sought to reclaim at least a part of the departed person; and whereas this reclamation has generally consisted in acknowledging that their existence is prolonged in the elegy, Muldoon looks for a more intense act of revivification. In his most celebrated elegies, particularly the two from *The Annals of Chile*, which are of central interest here, Muldoon contrives to breathe textual life into the images of two women close to his heart, his mother, Brigid, in "Yarrow," and the painter and his former partner Mary Farl Powers in "Incantata." This is no longer an appeasement of personal grief, like in Tennyson, "Though missed with God and Nature thou, / I seem to love thee more and more" (Ferguson 1004); or of national sorrow, as in Milton's call that "the shepherds weep no more" (Ferguson 415). Muldoon indicates that the task of elegizing consists in an attempt at a restitution of the language that the people, when they were alive, made possible in the poet. Thus his elegies investigate the possibilities of discovering the unique mode of idiom that came to exist in the shared space between the persons, one of whom is now gone. Yet, the process whereby in "Incantata" and "Yarrow" the two women are won back from death, reclaimed as projections of language that they used and that is used to evoke them, was forged over years of poetic practice.

In "The Mirror" (*Quoof*, 1983), the speaker appropriates a poem of a late nineteenth-century Irish activist Michael Davitt to imply his fear of death. When approaching the poem, however, the reader is informed that it is "In memory of my father," and it is only later that we discover that it must refer to the father of Davitt, for back in 1983, when the collection

containing the poem was published, Muldoon's father, Patrick, was still alive. Therefore, "The Mirror" reads as though it were a genuine elegy on the poet's father. The feelings of unaccepted loss: "He was no longer my father / but I was still his son," and the image of a raucous wake: "A great day for tears, snifters of sherry, / whiskey, beef sandwiches, tea" (*Poems* 108) both record the not-unusual rites of passage, until the second part of the poem. The speaker realizes that "it was the mirror took his breath away." This "monstrous old Victorian mirror" scares the speaker, who "was afraid that it would sneak / down from the wall and swallow me up," as it did his father when "he was decorating the bedroom" and "had taken down the mirror / without asking for help," and "soon he turned the colour of terracotta / and his heart broke that night" (*Poems* 109). The mirror becomes a mythical monster that is set on destroying the Muldoon family; Muldoon, or Máile Dúin as in the eighth-century "voyage tale," *Imram Curaig Máile Dúin*, "a story of a voyage 'westward' undertaken by a young man bent on avenging his father's murder by some pirates" (*To Ireland* 87). In the poem, the speaker also sets out on a quest, but not so much for vengeance as for alleviation of his own fears: "There was nothing for it / but to set about finishing the job." It is at this moment of taking up his father's task and conquering his dread that he finds solace and can complete the job:

> When I took hold of the mirror
> I had a fright. I imagined him breathing through it.
> I heard him say in a reassuring whisper:
> *I'll give you a hand, here.* (*Poems* 109)

The father returns in the poem and, even though he is shown to be a projection of the speaker's imagination, the possibly fictive presence suffices to alloy the son's dread. Eventually, as the speaker "drove home / the two nails," the father seems to fade away. Still, the sudden visitation of his spirit indicates what has traditionally been regarded as the function of elegiac poetry: to revive the dead so they can continue to yield us their strength. This idea is aptly embodied in Shelley's excellent "Adonais," where in the last stanza, the poet exclaims: "The breath whose might I have invoked in song / Descends on me" (891). Muldoon is similarly led by the ghost, even if he does not travel "fearfully, afar" like Shelley's speaker.

"The Mirror" tolls a note of closure in the last stanza, emphasizing that the father's ghost has come to fulfill his function and is now free to

leave for the afterlife even though the implications of his unexpected manifestation are varied. Such portraits that, finished in themselves resist interpretive closure, are characteristic of Muldoon's poetry of the 1980s. However, the elusive suppression of personal life that he practices in, for example, "The Mirror," where we are beguiled into believing he is speaking of his own father, relinquishes the hold over Muldoon's imagination. In "The Soap-Pig," an elegy for Michael Heffernan, Muldoon's friend of the BBC days, the speaker coaxes us into identifying him with the poet, as the biographical references deliberately advert to Muldoon's days spent with Heffernan. Similarly to "The Mirror," in which the father is evoked through an everyday object, in "The Soap-Pig," when the poet is informed that

> Michael Heffernan was dead.
>
> All I could think of
> was his Christmas present
> from what must have been 1975.
> It squatted there on the wash-stand,
> an amber, pig-shaped
> bar of soap. (*Poems* 167)

Once the information is brought home to the speaker, he consciously begins to recollect his friendship with Heffernan. We go back to the times when they worked for the BBC, we learn that Heffernan had "undergone heart- / surgery at least twice / while I knew him" (*Poems* 168), and that "His favourite word was *quidditas*" (*Poems* 167), with its unmistakably Dedalusian implications: "I could just see the Jesuitical, / kitsch-camp slip- / knot in the tail / of even that bar of soap" (*Poems* 168). In just a stanza, Heffernan becomes a composite-Stephen Dedalus figure, embracing the famous "whatness of the thing" theory from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and the opening scene of *Ulysses* with Buck Mulligan's nickname for Stephen: Kinch. This allusiveness is a harbinger of Muldoon's playful intertextuality of his later volumes but, already here, it transpires that he seeks to summon up not necessarily the most adequate image of the late friend but the most vivid one. By recasting Heffernan in turn as Stephen Dedalus, a lover of Chopin and a notorious pub-frequenter, Muldoon creates a figure of multiple, eclectic frames of reference none of which can be taken for granted, for

he liked to play
Chopin or *Chop-*
sticks until he was blue
in the face; be-bop, doo-wop (*Poems* 168).

The train of thoughts set off by the soap-pig duly returns to the soap-pig, stating flatly towards the end, "It's a bar of soap" (*Poems* 170). The poet seems to downplay the importance of the present, dismissing it as a trifle. Yet, this gesture appears to be a last-moment attempt at gravity that this willful celebration of Heffernan has shunned. Indeed, Muldoon fitly calibrates the emotional charge of the poem in that the once-disregarded "soap-pig" comes back in a powerful evocation of Heffernan's admission to the poet's circle of closest family:

now the soap-sliver
in a flowered dish
that I work each morning into a lather
with my father's wobbling brush,
then reconcile to its pool of glop,
on my mother's wash-stand's marble top. (*Poems* 170)

The inclusion of the soap-pig among the objects associated with the parents endows it with strong feelings of familial fealty; it is almost as though the soap together with the brush and the wash-stand are some mock-heirlooms that were bequeathed to the poet and now become metonymies suggesting the deceased. Moreover, the image invokes how "stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed" (Joyce 3). In lieu of the mirror and razor, infused with male symbolism as they are that Joyce has arranged to resemble the cross, Muldoon employs the more gender-ambiguous brush and wash-stand, but an implication of a derisive ritual is called up in both cases. As a result, the image of Heffernan that the poem projects is infused with complexity and multi-dimensionality, saving him for a new life in verse. The poem does not come to sing praise and declare that the deceased will henceforth enjoy a better life in the otherworld or will dwell inscribed in the poem, but seeks to deploy a space of linguistic play in which the dead can be encountered again as a textual self with its humor and idiolect.

The derision that in "The Soap-Pig" offsets the sorrow over Heffernan's demise remains present to some degree in "Incantata" but is re-directed at the speaker himself, this time manifestly identified with Muldoon

himself. Powers died of cancer in 1992; however, in the poem she is revived not only to be mourned but also to indicate the decisive influence that she exerted on the process of change that Muldoon as poet went through over the decade between their break-up and her death. Both "Incantata" and "Yarrow" may be termed *bildungselegien* in that they are poems of mourning and simultaneously of the growth of the poetic mind. In "Incantata," the poet remembers himself as an inane poetaster, though the judgment that he passes on himself may seem harsh at times, as opposed to the aesthetically mature Powers. Already at the outset, he shows himself to be an embarrassing figure, "I can hardly believe that, when we met, my idea of 'R & R' / was to get smashed, almost every night, on sickly-sweet Demarara / rum and Coke" (*Poems* 331). She, on the other hand, is a refined and independent mind:

> Again and again you'd hold forth on your own version of Thomism,
> your own Summa
> Theologiae that in everything there is an order,
> that the things of the world sing out in a great oratorio:
> it was Thomism, though, tempered by *La Nausée*,
> by His Nibs Sam Bethicket,
> and by that Dublin thing, that an artist must walk down Baggott
> Street wearing a hair-shirt under the shirt of Nessus. (*Poems* 332)

The speaker of the poem is Muldoon at forty one, already grown into his power, which increases the contrast between the Muldoon of the early 1980s in the poem and the accomplished lyricist of a decade later. Powers's formidable intellect can only now be given its due; she believes in a divine order but what Jefferson Holdridge calls her "natural piety" (125) depends on Thomas Aquinas only to some extent, the line break emphasizing that it is *her* Summa. The association in one intellectual frame of Thomism and the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Samuel Beckett shows Powers's syncretic approach to religion and philosophy, which is also echoed in the rhyming of "Theologiae" and "*Nausée*."

For Powers, however, this is no modish shorthand for smartness, as it might be for the inebriated so-called artists of Dublin, in that she has well absorbed Beckett's lesson: "To live in a dustbin, eating scrap, / seemed to Nagg and Nell a most eminent domain" (*Poems* 332). In the 1950s, Beckett was among the first writers to have noted the collapse of the elitist conception of culture promoted by high modernism, what Richard Ellmann so aptly described in his essays on Yeats in relation to Wilde, Joyce, Pound,

Eliot, and Auden, a most *Eminent Domain*. Powers realizes that this path, the "Sing[ing] of whatever is well made" (Yeats 327), is no use now, neither are "a High Cross at Carndonagh or Corofin / and *The Book of Kells*" (Muldoon, *Poems* 333). With hindsight, the poet summarizes her understanding of art:

> I thought again of how art may be made, as it was by André Derain,
> of nothing more than a turn
> in the road where a swallow dips into the mire
> or plucks a strand of bloody wool from a strand of barbed wire
> in the aftermath of Chickamauga or Culloden
> and builds from pain, from misery, from a deep-seated hurt,
> a monument to the human heart
> that shines like a golden dome among roofs rain-glazed and leaden.
>
> (*Poems* 335)

Art must embrace the consequences of catastrophes on everyday life, not the battle of the American Civil War or of Jacobite Rising but a swallow discovering blood-sodden pieces of torn garments. Simplicity and honesty to one's own vision, like Derain's fauvist paintings, are the goal for Powers, which shows why she is so quick to see through Muldoon's facetiousness: "you detected in me a tendency to put / on too much artificiality, both as man and poet, / which is why you called me 'Polyester' or 'Polyurethane" (*Poems* 334). It is this artificiality that she taught him to unlearn, as he admits in "Mary Farl Powers: Pink—Spotted Torso," *(Quoof)* which was written back at the beginning of the 1980s:

> You . . . saw, never more clearly,
> him unmanacles
> himself from buckled steel, from the weight of symbol,
> only to be fettered by an ankle. (*Poems* 114)

It was partly her doing that the budding poet gave up the symbolism of the early "Hedgehog" in favor of the down-to-life directness and intellectual complexity on a par with the reality he comes to depict.

Half-way through "Incantata," Muldoon brings himself to image forth his sorrow: "The fact that you were determined to cut yourself off in your prime / because it was *pre*-determined has my eyes abrim" (*Poems* 336). Powers's belief in pre-determination made her "rely on infusions of hardock, hemlock, all the idle weeds," rather than "let some doctor cut you open" (*Poems* 335). This constitutes a pertinent contrast to Muldoon

declaring he would like to heal "by his touch alone" in "The Cure for Warts;" now reposing trust in herbal medicine and ritual becomes tantamount to choosing death, hence the loss strikes one as even more terrible. As John Lyon argues, "in 'determined' as both 'fated' and 'willed,' Muldoon realizes the intolerable impasse of tragedy as inevitability, something inescapable, and tragedy as waste, something all too easily avoided" (117). This harrowing howl leads the poet, assisted by Beckett's characters, Belacqua from *More Pricks than Kicks* and Lucky, as well as Pozzo, from *Waiting for Godot*, to recall "all that's left" of Powers.

The following twenty two stanzas bring together private memories of Powers intertwined with references to mythology, history, and various anecdotes. In this tour de force of personal memory and imaginative faculty, Muldoon goes to great lengths to summon Powers back to life, even if the recurrent "all that's left" seems to underline the insufficiency of all that the poem can accomplish. Yet, in the ending he speculates on the possibility that she might "take in [her] ink-stained hand my own hands stained with ink" (*Poems* 341). While the last line invests some hope in the revivifying power of poetry, the convoluted syntax—sentences unraveling for several stanzas—suggests "the furrows from which we can no more deviate / . . . / than that you might reach out" (*Poems* 341). Muldoon ends on an ambiguous note, both coming to terms with the fact that Powers is gone and accepting that her death has taken her body, but he has managed, once more, to transport her into the body of verse. As Holdridge observes, "the gestures towards the transcendental, seen in the image of Hermes and the Irish Hermes Lugh," both of whom re-appear throughout the poem, "and the transmigration of souls they represent, come down to the enchantment of Powers's being on earth, which has transmogrified into the text as into Muldoon's life" (129). "Incantata" is as much an elegy as it is a song of life renewed in verse. In this sense, Muldoon recuperates the triumph of Shelley's great elegy for Keats, since Powers is shown to gain life like Adonais, who "is a portion of the loveliness / Which once he made more lovely":

> The splendors of the firmament of time
> May be eclipsed, but are extinguished not;
> Like stars to their appointed height they climb,
> And death is a low mist which cannot blot
> The brightness it may veil. . . . (Shelley 560)

Love and life in Powers, her assertive mind and immersion in art have made her into a "splendor" that shrinks oblivion. Her presence is felt not only in her art but also in the verses whose accomplishment, the Shelleyan "loveliness," Muldoon admits may be partly due to her aesthetic ideals, as multifarious as the poem that celebrates her. The placement of "Incantata" in *The Annals of Chile* emphasizes the redemptive quality of the poem. The elegy is preceded by "Twice," which suggests the speaker's feeling of dislocation similar to the haphazard exploration of his life with Powers, while it is followed by a series of three lyrics about the birth of his daughter, Dorothy Aoife. The death that stunned him so much is solaced in the arrival of new life which the poet welcomes with touching affection:

> I watch through floods of tears
> as they give her a quick rub-a-dub
> and whisk
> her off to the nursery. (*Poems* 343)

From the vantage of the entire volume, "Incantata" appears to be a negotiation between life and death that comes out in favor of the former.

The personal growth as man and poet that Muldoon explores in "Incantata" is given a more ample treatment in "Yarrow." Though it has had its critics, "Yarrow" has been hailed as Muldoon's "masterpiece to date" (Kendall 238), a "monumental closing work" (Holdridge 130), and a "magnificent poem" of his "best book to date" (Norfolk 32). The sheer complexity and multiplicity of motifs that comprise it make "Yarrow," like its monstrous antecedent "Madoc: A Mystery," a poem aporetically difficult to discuss. Arguably, an elegy for his mother who died in 1974, "Yarrow" traverses various landscapes, as its last line aptly puts it, "it has to do with a trireme, laden with ravensara, / that was lost with all hands between Ireland and Montevideo" (*Poems* 392). However, the central narrative traces the poet's childhood in rural Ireland, his strained relationship with his mother, his imaginary journeys with fictional and mythical heroes, and a love affair with a mysterious S, which takes place both in Ireland and in the US. It is the conflict between the mother and S that remains of immediate interest to the reader, for between those two the poet needs to navigate his way towards emotional and intellectual freedom.

In the first half of the poem the mother is shown to uphold traditionalist values, "'For your body is a temple,' my ma had said to Morholt, / 'the temple of the Holy Ghost'" (*Poems* 355), and later "turns to

me as if to ask, with the Lady Guinevere, / 'What is the meaning of the Holy Grail'" (*Poems* 356). It is the mother's strictness in the matters of religion, sexuality, and politics, "Since every woman was at heart a rake / and the purest heart itself marred by some base alloy / and whosoever looketh on a woman to lust // after her would go the way of Charles Stewart Parnell (*Poems* 362), that first stirs obeisant fear in her son that later results in a rebellion and running from home. She also takes care of her son's readerly interests, providing him with "a copy of Eleanor Knott's / *Irish Classical Poetry*," but he "was much less interested in a yellowed copy of *An Claidheamh / Soluis* than *Tschiffley's Ride* or *The Red / Rover* or *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*" (*Poems* 359). The son prefers the classic American adventure novels by A. S. Tschiffley, James Fenimore Cooper, and Mark Twain to patriotic poetry. Muldoon pitches those adventure narratives, particularly *Treasure Island*, along with mythical stories against the strict moralizing of his mother. It is not some member of the family that is chastised but Morholt, Tristan's adversary, thus the son is not approached as himself but as Sir Lancelot accosted by the Lady Guinevere.

The poet finds a fitting opposite to the mother in the figure of S. As Jonathan Bolton has observed, both the mother and S "exercise a goddess-like influence over him and come to embody the intrinsically feminine aspect of his creativity and imagination" (63). Indeed, they resemble the figure of the white goddess described by Robert Graves and aptly imaged by Coleridge in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner":

> *Her* lips were red, *her* looks were free,
> Her locks were yellow as gold:
> Her skin was as white as leprosy,
> The Night-mare Life-in-Death was she,
> Who thicks man's blood with cold. (178)

Amplifying the ambivalence of the goddess as intrinsic to Coleridge's evocation of the figure, Graves observes that "in one sense it is the pleasant whiteness of pearl-barley, or a woman's body, or milk, or unsmutched snow; in another it is the horrifying whiteness of a corpse, or a spectre, or leprosy" (434). Adoring extremity and violence, S seems to embody the latter aspect of the goddess (see Bolton 70 n 11):

> To find a pugilist-poet who'd tap his own prostate gland
> for the piss-and-vinegar ink

in which he'd dash off a couple of "sparrow-

songs," then jump headfirst into her fine how-d'-ye-do
heedless of whether she'd used a deo-
dorant, that was S—'s ideal. (*Poems* 354)

The ideal is thus rebelliousness of the likes of Arthur Cravan, the pugilist-poet, and his partner, Mina Loy. Later in the poem, S is also associated with self-destructive Sylvia Plath, as well as with the rampant activist, Yeats's unrequited love, Maud Gonne. As opposed to the fury of S, the mother represents a more complex goddess-figure. As Gwinn Batten points out, "the figure of the mother allies the authority of the schoolmistress . . . with the archaic, superhuman power of the hill goddess, the macha or Morrigan of *Síle na geioch* who bears, sustains, and destroys life" (173). Indeed, as the poet escapes home in a flourish worthy of his favorite adventure heroes, he remembers the warning received from his mother:

as I crossed the bridge, I was so intent
on Freedom's green slip and Freedom's green sprout

her "*Ná bac leis an craoibhín aoibhinn*"
and "Stay clear of those louts and layabouts." (*Poems* 368)

His flight to freedom and self-reliance is also challenged by the revenant voice of the mother, calling from the depths of his conscience: "'O come ye back,' I heard her sing, 'O come ye back / to Erin'" (*Poems* 369). This utterance associates Brigid with mother-Ireland who summons her sons back to her bosom. It is at this point that Muldoon, the poet of journeying like a latter-day Máile Dúin, begins his journey back home. As Bolton puts it, "['Yarrow'] continually enacts a return journey from remote, exotic settings to Muldoon's home county" (51). However, he never succeeds in completing his journey back, in the process losing both S and his mother.

Just as he tried to flee his parental home in his imaginary adventures with Jim Hawkins and other literary characters, so he now only manages to come back home in imagination. Yet, now that he wants to be back, there is only pain that awaits him:

The bridge. The barn. Again and again I stand aghast
as I contemplate what never

again will be mine:

> "Look on her. Look, her lips.
> Listen to her *râle*
> where ovarian cancer takes her in its strangle-hold." (*Poems* 387)

The information is a blow to him. In a poem that in winding sentences mischievously mixes tenses and locations, the diagnosis is phrased in a stunningly direct declarative. When he later realizes that he misnamed the cancer, "'Ovarian,' did I write? Uterine" (*Poems* 388), this is no longer a playful self-questioning but an admission of failure. Soon he also finds out that S is most likely dead too: "that must have been the year S— wrote 'Helter-skelter' / in her own blood on the wall; she'd hidden a razor in her scrubs" (*Poems* 390). Having lost the two women with whom his life was interwoven, the poet realizes that "I can no more read between the lines / of the quail's 'Wet-my-lips' or his 'Quick, quick'" (*Poems* 392).

Now that the deaths seem to have stirred in him a desire to return home, evoked by the repeated phrases indicative of the rural place where he was raised: "The bridge. The barn," and "Again and again," the poet's intimate connection with the place and its natural inhabitants has been severed. The ending of the poem emphasizes the loss as it also locates some solace in the words both alien and sensuously familiar:

> though it slips, the great cog,
> there's something about the quail's "Wet-my-foot"
> and the sink full of heart's-tongue, borage and common kedlock
>
> that I've either forgotten or disavowed;
> it has to do with a trireme, laden with ravensara,
> that was lost with all hands between Ireland and Montevideo. (*Poems* 392)

The poet admits he has "forgotten or disavowed" the past that is here represented by the names of animals and plants: quail and its local name wet-my-lip, heart's tongue, and borage, together with the vernacular kedlock, more often referred to as charlock. Although he knows that "'saboteur' derives from *sabot*, a clog" (*Poems* 356) and "It should be *Fidei Defensor* . . . not *Defensor Fidei*" (*Poems* 364), the poet no longer enjoys a close-knit relation with the language that is inextricably interlinked with the land. Despite his avowed lack of understanding of his native country, the plants that he names form a wreath that he, unwittingly, presents to the mother

and S. The ending of the poem recalls Michael Longley's similar linguistic wreath in "The Ice-Cream Man" (*Gorse Fires*, 1991) where the speaker, coming to the place where an innocent ice-cream man was murdered has only the names of flowers and plants to offer as bulwark against the bloodshed:

> thyme, valerian, loosestrife,
> Meadowsweet, tway blade, crowfoot, ling, angelica,
> Herb robert, marjoram, cow parsley, sundew, vetch,
> Mountain avens, wood sage, ragged robin, stitchwort,
> Yarrow, lady's bedstraw, bindweed, bog pimpernel. (192)

Like Longley, who "named for you all the wild flowers of the Burren" (192) when no other words seemed appropriate, Muldoon finds himself resorting to the instincts that he set out to leave behind. For both Longley and Muldoon, it is yarrow that comes at the start of a new line of verse, and though in Longley's poem it is the last one, yarrow remains redolent of hope.

The strength of "Yarrow" lies in its enforced refusal to be a part of the two worlds that the mother and S represent, a refusal that slowly turns to a realization that his identity as well as the freedom of self-expression he desired as a child have to a large degree been shaped by the two women. Struggling to break free of their dangerous influence, Muldoon begins to see the grave truth of the injunction "know thyself," although this knowledge is shot through with blind spots. In the light of the last lines, "Yarrow" becomes an admission that whoever he is now is rooted in the deceased, who return as constitutive parts of his self.

As he veers from image to image, inventing throughout his oeuvre interrelated lyrical narratives, Muldoon achieves a triumph of empathy and self-quest(ion)ing, whereby people close to his heart become indivisible parts of his own identity as projected in verse. In a characteristic ruse towards candidness, Muldoon does not stop at invoking the spectral presences of the dead but transports himself into the space of the poem where he can arrange a meeting with those he lost. Thus in strings of anecdotal images, the departed are brought back to life in the text of the poem, as their idiosyncrasies, views, and opinions are recalled. Sorrow does not disappear in a flourish of exaltation over the glory that the mourned achieved in death, but permeates the words in which the voice of the deceased can be heard. As a result, instead of the final extolment of

conventional elegies, Muldoon offers a painful realization of the loss, which is a triumph of humanism over floods of sadness. The flesh perished, the living body of text is free to wander the vast verse-scapes that Muldoon conjures up and propels into ceaseless motion, recuperating life through language that flows from the poet as much as from the dead themselves.

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Notes

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[1] In these two poems, for example, the intertextual links show them to be attempts at self-mourning as much as elegiac verse proper. "Sillyhow Stride" may thus be connected to Muldoon's light-handed account of his everyday life in *The Prince of the Quotidian*, and "Cuthbert and the Otters" is a bitter self-reflection of the poet who composed "The Briefcase."

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Compulsion to Re-enact:
Trauma and Nostalgia in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*

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Paraphrasing a well-known line from one of the psalms, one could say that the book publishers rejected has become the cornerstone of Tom McCarthy's glittering literary career. *Remainder*, his first novel, was completed in 2001 and took four years to find a publisher—a small Parisian art press called Metronome. In 2006, it was released in Britain and a year later (by Vintage) in the US. In November 2008, McCarthy became—almost overnight—a literary star thanks to Zadie Smith's glowing review in the *New York Review of Books*. Entitled "Two Paths for the Novel," Smith's article pits *Remainder* against Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*, arguing that the two novels represent two opposing directions for the contemporary novel—daring avant-garde experimentation ("that skewed side road where we meet Georges Perec, . . . William Burroughs, J. G. Ballard") versus the dominant stream of what Smith refers to (somewhat dismissively) as "lyrical realism." She insists that by constructively deconstructing the reader's expectations, McCarthy has aimed to "shake the novel out if its present complacency" and has succeeded, producing "one of the great English novels of the past ten years." *Remainder* has quickly become a cult novel in literary circles and a modern classic. In *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (2013), Peter Boxall hails it as one of the most important novels of the new century and one that taps into our Zeitgeist by answering to our "fascination" with "slowed time" and "shifted temporality" (9-10). McCarthy went on to write two highly praised novels that were shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize (*C* and *Satin Island*), and has been successful in generating interest in his numerous projects as a literary commentator, conceptual artist, and the co-founder (with Simon Critchley) of the International Necronautical Society. His ubiquity in the British media has been a cause of irritation to some critics: Leo Robson has recently called McCarthy "the most galling interviewee in Britain, outstripping even Martin Amis, improbable as that sounds" (50).

Part of *Remainder*'s critical success rests on its receptivity to multiple readings. Smith herself has offered several interpretive paths, suggesting that it could be read as a novel "on literary modes (*How artificial is realism?*), on existence (*Are we capable of genuine being?*), on political discourse (*What's left of the politics of identity?*), and on the law (*Where do we draw our borders? What,*

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and whom, do we exclude, and why?)." Other critics have focused on the novel's relationship with Modernism, its critique of trauma narratives, and its commentary on the pursuit of authenticity.[1] This article sets out to indicate the possibility of interpreting *Remainder* as a study of an obsessive longing to repeat and return, which combines in equal measure the features of Svetlana Boym's concept of restorative nostalgia and the Freudian notion of repetition compulsion.

It has to be recognized at the start that some critics have expressed reservations about reading *Remainder* as a study of a specific psychological condition. Most notably, Pieter Vermeulen has argued that *Remainder*'s "programmatic antipsychologism" (556) challenges "psychological realism" and "the customary pieties of trauma fiction"—such as the ethical dimension of the subject's confrontation with the pain and violence of trauma. In Vermeulen's view, McCarthy's novel aims to replace the traditional insistence on "empathic emotion and subjectivity" with "an intractable, dysphoric, subjectless affect" (550). He situates it in opposition to trauma literature's implicit conviction that the experience of trauma could be "contained within the psyche" and neatly represented in fiction. Vermeulen suggests instead that *Remainder* shares Roger Luckhurst's belief that trauma "violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that distress or confound" (qtd. in Vermeulen 550). Accepting this interpretation would involve refraining from seeking to account for the baffling behavior of the protagonist-narrator and focusing on the challenges that *Remainder* poses to trauma literature and to the novel at large. Vermeulen ultimately concedes, however, that McCarthy's novel does not entirely succeed in banishing psychology. The portrayal of the narrator's increasing social alienation (in the last chapters) and the inclusion of the doctor's verdict that he is exhibiting numerous autonomic symptoms of trauma give grounds for the interpretation of *Remainder* as a "modernist novel of consciousness" with an unreliable narrator serving as a tool to achieve "the mimesis of a traumatic mind" (Vermeulen 562). That the narrator's condition could be interpreted in terms of post-traumatic symptoms has also been suggested in an interview by McCarthy himself.

The novel begins with a characteristically impassive statement from the nameless first-person narrator: "About the accident itself I can say very little. Almost nothing. It involved something falling from the sky. Technology. Parts, bits. That's it, really: all I can divulge" (5).[2] Gradually, the reader learns that the accident has caused severe damage to the brain,

which has resulted in an almost complete memory loss. It also becomes apparent that the reason why the narrator cannot reveal the circumstances is the enormous financial settlement (eight and a half million pounds) which his lawyer has negotiated with the company responsible for the accident, on condition that no incriminating details should ever be made public. As a result of the brain damage, the narrator has had to relearn how to move. He has undergone complex specialist treatment called "rerouting," which involves outlining new neural paths for all motor activities. "Every action is a complex operation," he notes, "and I had to learn them all. I'd understand them, then I'd emulate them" (22). Elsewhere he adds, "[t]hat's the way I've had to do things since the accident: understand them first, then do them" (15).

The novel starts at a moment when the thirty-year-old narrator has just completed his physiotherapy sessions and has been spending his days in his Brixton flat, "doing nothing" (7). The above-mentioned change in his behavior—the need to analyze every move that he makes—renders him permanently bored, indifferent to people and events around him, and curiously desensitized or anaesthetized. Only occasionally does he experience momentary epiphanies that rouse him from his stupor. A peculiar excitement comes over him when he watches Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1973) with his friend, Greg. He is fascinated by the "perfection" and "seamlessness" of Robert de Niro's performance, which stands in stark contrast to the artificiality of his own disposition:

> He's natural when he does things. Not artificial, like me. He's flaccid. I'm plastic . . . [H]e's relaxed, malleable. He flows into his movements, even the most basic ones. Opening fridge doors, lighting cigarettes. He doesn't have to think about them, or understand them first. He doesn't have to think about them because he and they are one. Perfect. Real. My movements are all fake. Second-hand. . . . De Niro was just being; I can never do that now. (23)

He later admits that his felt lack of authenticity is not solely a consequence of his post-accident condition. That deficit, he maintains, had always been there, manifest in his inability simply to "do [his] thing" rather than constantly analyze what it is he was (and was supposed to be) doing. "Recovering from the accident," he adds, "learning to move and walk, understanding before I could act—all this . . . added another layer of distance between me and things I did" (24). The narrator also finds fault

with the inauthenticity of the people surrounding him, criticizing, for instance, the "amateur performances" of passengers in the arrivals lounge at Heathrow airport, or the unspontaneous reaction of Greg to the news about his lucrative settlement (27, 30).

The acute monotony and boredom of his subdued existence is abruptly interrupted by an unlikely epiphany during a dreary party, which he describes as "the event that, the accident aside, was the most significant of my whole life" (60). While in the bathroom, he notices a crack in the wall, which—like the Proustian madeleine—immediately transports him to a moment in the past, when (surrounded by the same crack, bathtub, and a very similar view from the window) he felt "real" and moved "fluently" and effortlessly—like de Niro (62). The narrator relishes the moment and tries to conjure up all the details contained in that recovered memory: the old tenement building, the smell and sound of sizzling liver from the neighboring flat, black cats walking on red roofs outside the window. All of this, he insists, is "crystal-clear, as clear as in a vision," yet he cannot recall either when or where the remembered scene took place (61). In order not to lose this memory, he meticulously copies the outline of the crack and makes a resolution that determines the course of events for the rest of the novel: "Right then I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my money. I wanted to reconstruct that space and enter it so that I could feel real again. . . . Nothing else mattered" (62).

The parallel with Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1927) offers an important interpretive context for McCarthy's novel. The sight of the crack in the wall, like the taste of the madeleine dipped in lime-blossom tea, leads to a moment of rapture over a spontaneous, involuntary rediscovery of a long-forgotten memory.[3] Although in both Proust and McCarthy the reconstruction of the recovered memory becomes a longer process that involves concentration and the intensive work of voluntary memory, the value of the ultimately consolidated recollection rests to a great extent on the involuntary impulse behind its resurfacing, as involuntary memory—in Proust's understanding— "resonates with the timelessness of pure memory: it offers a way to overcome the gap between past and present" (Whitehead 104). It also corresponds to Henri Bergson's category of "pure" (as opposed to "habit") memory, which, in *Matière et mémoire* (1896), Bergson refers to as "true" memory. The authenticity associated with the spontaneous recollection of an image from the past may partly account for the fascination of McCarthy's narrator with it. The truth and freshness afforded by pure memory stands in contrast to the tedium and artificiality of

habit memory involved in the arduous process of relearning how to move. In *Remainder*, the upbeat implications of the scene are complicated by the connotations of the very object triggering the epiphany—the crack in the wall. Whereas the melting madeleine evokes associations with the Eucharist and with a more intimate communion—that between the narrator and his aunt (Whitehead 107)—the crack connotes a flaw or a damage, which may be an ominous harbinger of imminent destruction, as is the case with the fissure in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher."[4]

On the day following the bathroom epiphany, after contacting a number of estate agents and property developers, McCarthy's narrator decides to engage a company that facilitates the implementation of large-scale projects. With his personal assistant, Naz, he immediately launches a systematic search for a building that fits the vague specifications of his vision. He ultimately settles for a tenement block near Brixton, called Madlyn Mansions (another nod to Proust), which he buys and refurbishes accordingly. He then engages a number of actors—or "re-enactors," as he prefers to call them—to re-enact the circumstances of the remembered scene. The narrator refuses to compromise on any of the elements of his vivid memory, ordering a time-consuming and ruinously expensive replica of the original setting—complete with a crack in the bathroom wall, black cats on the red roofs of the buildings outside the window, and a round-the-clock duty of an old woman sizzling liver, a man tinkering with his motorbike, and a next-door pianist practicing Rachmaninov (and making obligatory mistakes in the assigned places in the score). When a re-enactment goes well and all the images, sounds, and smells seamlessly integrate, the narrator feels elated and "weightless" (130).

The narrator's complete commitment to reconstructing a fragment of the past could, I wish to argue, be interpreted as a manifestation of restorative nostalgia, which Boym in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) defines alongside the reflective: "Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately. . . . Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt" (xviii). A "transhistorical reconstruction" or restoration is an apt description of the narrator's utopian project to rebuild the "lost home" in its literal sense. Restorative nostalgia's emphasis on action rather than reflection is mirrored in his fascination with de Niro's ability to do things naturally and in his recurrent complaint about always having to understand an activity before he can perform it. What

Boym labels as the protection of "absolute truth" could be traced to the narrator's pursuit of authenticity, defined by him at one point as a sustained desire "to be real—to become fluent, natural, to cut out the detour that sweeps us around what's fundamental to events, preventing us from touching their core" (244). The aim of re-enacting the bathroom moment has been, after all, to reclaim his sole memory of being "*real* . . . without first understanding how to try to be" (62).

Boym's conception of the longed-for object as "a home that no longer exists or has never existed" and, consequently, of nostalgia as "a romance with one's own fantasy" (xiii) could be illustrated by the dubious status of the founding memory of the narrator's reconstructive project. When hearing his account of it, his lawyer reminds him that his "memory was knocked off-kilter by the accident." The narrator concedes that perhaps it is not a "straight memory" but possibly a more complex amalgam—"various things all rolled together: memories, imaginings, films" (75-76).[5] In his *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel* (2005), John J. Su also highlights the link between nostalgia and a deficit of memory noting that nostalgia in the twentieth century was often contrasted with memory and regarded as "a form of amnesia." The "intimate personal experience" of memory was set against the "inauthentic and commodified experience" of nostalgia (2).[6] Whereas the origin of the predominantly negative perception of nostalgia could be placed in the last century, certain adverse consequences of nostalgic longing, seen at that time as a disease, were pointed out as early as in the seventeenth century by Johannes Hofer, who coined the term "nostalgia." Hofer argued that "while in a normal state the soul can become equally interested in all objects, in nostalgia its attention is diminished; it feels the attraction of very few objects and practically limits itself to one single idea" (qtd. in Starobinski 87). This characteristic monomania can be detected in McCarthy's narrator's obsessive commitment to reconstructing his vision—his total immersion in the project, to which he devotes all his time, as well as several million pounds. It appears that the intensity of the zeal with which he embarks on restoring a possible fragment of his past and the meaning with which he invests it are proportionate to the degree of ennui and apathy that he felt before—manifest in a remark made, symptomatically, just before the bathroom epiphany: "I was bored—by people, ideas, the world: everything" (59). His recovered scene could therefore be viewed in the light of Linda Hutcheon's argument in "Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern" that nostalgia could be "less a matter of simple memory than of complex projection; the invocation

of a partial, idealised history merg[ing] with a dissatisfaction with the present." The narrator's earlier invoked admission that his vision may be "more complex" than a "straight memory" echoes Hutcheon's skepticism about the reliability of memories that breed nostalgic longing.

Despite the brief moments of euphoria, the consecutive re-enactments of the partly remembered and partly imagined scene do not fully satisfy the narrator's desire to become "real." The re-enactor crew's attention to the minutest detail cannot prevent glitches, which frustrate and upset the narrator. He complains about the wrong texture of the floor or the pace at which the sun moves across the sky. Most often, however, he objects to a faint smell of cordite emanating from the sizzling liver—a smell which no one except him can detect. All attempts to eliminate it (changing the meat supplier or the type of frying pans) fail, leaving the narrator with a remainder (and reminder) of the reality that he wishes to escape. Lea sees this failure as a denial of "mystical transcendence" that renders the experience inauthentic "because it remains within the phenomenal" (467-68). Lea traces the narrator's sustained discontent with the remainder—defined as "that which cannot be assimilated into the biological or self-posited authentic" (468)—to his mild annoyance over the geometry of the negotiated figure of his settlement: "The eight was perfect, neat: a curved figure infinitely turning back into itself. But then the half. Why had they added the half? It seemed to me so messy, this half: a leftover fragment, a shard of detritus. . . . *Eight alone would have been better*" (9-10).

What disrupt the narrator's fleeting glimpses of "mystical transcendence" are the intrusions of the material. In an early scene on the London Underground, he is shaken out of his blissful reverie when noticing some grease on his sleeve, which he calls "this messy, irksome matter that had no respect for millions, didn't know its place" and speaks of matter as his "undoing" (possibly referring to the unspecified object which injured his brain when "falling from the sky") (17). Much further into the novel, after a series of re-enactments, he has a quasi-mystical experience in a car repair shop. When after filling up his windscreen washer reservoir twice and the blue liquid does not squirt, he pronounces it a "miracle" and a "triumph over matter." He feels "wonderful," "elated and inspired," and ventures, "[i]f only everything could . . ." but does not finish. As soon as he starts the engine, a stream of windscreen washer fluid gushes out of the dashboard and covers his whole body with a sticky blue substance. The narrator sits in his car, motionless, meditating on this "sad" and "spectacular" failure of matter's transubstantiation into un-matter (159-62). On the same day, he

decides to re-enact that moment, too, and commissions his assistant, Naz to build an exact replica of the car repair shop and to engage full-time re-enactors. This time, however, he wishes to replicate the experience with a difference—the liquid is meant to really vanish, "disappear upwards[,] become sky" (169).

From this moment on, the narrator's re-enactments may no longer be viewed as predominantly motivated by restorative nostalgia. While the aim of restoration or reconstruction remains in place, the subsequent pursuits do not appear to be underpinned by a longing to return. The car shop re-enactment could be interpreted as the narrator's attempt to undo his traumatic accident. He indicates a link between the two events when he muses on the failed miracle of contravening the laws of physics that make "large, unsuspended objects fall out of the sky" (161). His stubborn insistence that the facilitator crew should find a way of making the windscreen washer fluid vanish by "becoming sky" may stem from a wish to defy and take revenge on gravity for enabling that invasion of matter. The contents of the re-enactments that ensue—two successive shootings in Brixton and a standard bank robbery—are harder to relate to his condition, yet the very obsession with replaying experiences is strongly reminiscent of what McCarthy himself refers to in an interview as the "grammar" of "post-trauma"—defined by him as a "propensity to repeat" springing from the erasure of the traumatic moment or, as Lacan would call it, a missed encounter with the real ("What's Left Behind" 1).

The Freudian concept of repetition compulsion could be a productive tool in accounting for the protagonist's obsessive behavior, particularly in the closing chapters of the novel. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud muses on an episode from Torquato Tasso's Renaissance epic, *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581), in which Tancred finds himself doomed to keep inflicting pain on his beloved Clorinda. He interprets Tancred's second inadvertent wounding of his lover as an illustration of trauma's intrinsic propensity to repeat itself. Bewildered by the widespread experience among the soldiers of the Great War of the ongoing return of traumatic experiences in nightmares (which ran counter to his earlier conviction that all dreams are governed by the logic of wish-fulfillment), Freud turns to investigating "the mysterious masochistic trends of the ego" by exploring the rationale of what he comes to label the *fort-da* game (*Beyond* 7). Freud examines his grandson's routine play of re-enacting his mother's departure and return as an encapsulation of the will to gain control over a painful event by repeating the original scenario with one crucial difference—casting

oneself in the role of an active agent instead of a passive victim (*Beyond* 11).

This psychological phenomenon—termed repetition compulsion (*Wiederholungszwang*)—is defined in the *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* as "an inherent, primordial tendency in the unconscious that impels the individual to repeat certain actions, in particular, the most painful or destructive ones." Connected with primary masochism (and, incidentally, with the death drive), repetition compulsion may lead to "endlessly repeating certain damaging patterns" without being aware that one is doing so, since the mechanism operates beyond the subject's consciousness ("Repetition"). Freud situates the concept in opposition to remembering and sees it as akin to repression and forgetting. "The greater the resistance, the more thoroughly remembering will be replaced by acting out (repetition)," he concludes his 1914 essay "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through" (Freud 395). Six years later, Freud adds that repetition constitutes the failed outcome of the process of working through (*durcharbeiten*) a painful event, whereby the subject has forgotten the kernel of a traumatic incident, and is therefore conditioned to "repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of . . . remembering it as something belonging to the past" (*Beyond* 12). The logic of repetition, as understood by Freud, could be expressed by the following principle: what cannot be properly remembered or, in other words, integrated with the past, needs to be continuously replayed in the present, which results in the subject's immersion in the self-destructive cycle of repetition.[7]

The link between a lack of memory and repetition could easily be demonstrated in *Remainder*, as the narrator's desire to replicate certain scenes appears after—and, the reader is led to infer, as a result of—an event that triggers amnesia. The traumatic incident has also been forgotten and functions in the narrator's consciousness as "a blank: a white slate, a black hole" (5). This phenomenon may be classified as an instance of traumatic amnesia—a much-disputed concept related to the Freudian notion of the repressed memory. More precisely, the narrator's condition could be categorized as psychogenic (or dissociative) amnesia, defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as "an inability to recall important personal information, usually of a traumatic or stressful nature, that is too extensive to be explained by normal forgetfulness" (qtd. in McNally 173). The seemingly straightforward relationship between forgetting and repetition is complicated by the ambiguous source of the immediate inspiration for the first re-enactment during the crack-in-the-wall epiphany. The vision instantly conjured up by the narrator is, as has already

been suggested, a curious amalgam of half-memories and half-imaginings.

Where the Freudian compulsion to repeat becomes particularly relevant to the narrator's condition is in the idea of gaining control, or mastering, an event through repetition. The notion of the urge to replay distressing scenarios from one's past does not appear to be relevant to him, since the incidents that he chooses to repeat are not in any evident way painful to him. Although the narrator does not always assign himself the role of the instigator of the re-enacted scene or crime (for instance, that of the shooter or the leader of the bank robbery squad), he does mastermind every re-enactment by giving the entire crew very detailed instructions and by introducing modifications to the script in order to render it more authentic. He assumes the role of director, screenwriter, stage manager, actor, and—most importantly—the audience of every such enterprise. The nature of his engagement in re-enactments can be gleaned from the following passage: "After running through the shooting for the fifth time I was satisfied we'd got the actions right: the movement, the positions. Now we could begin working on what lay beneath the surfaces of these—on what was inside, intimate" (197). If the narrator's post-traumatic condition involves, as he points out, having to understand an action before he can perform it, in the re-enactments that he orchestrates he wishes to understand actions (on an "intimate" level) by performing them over and over. The conscious effort to re-enact, however, stands in contrast to the repetition compulsion's subjection to the unconscious.

An insight into the possible cause of the narrator's obsessive (and addictive) preoccupation with repetition is offered by one of the characters of the novel, a doctor named Trevellian, who has been summoned to the narrator's house after he lost consciousness for many hours. The doctor perceives his current condition (a narcotic-like trance) as a consequence of his body's ongoing pursuit of endogenous opioids—the internal "painkillers" produced to alleviate traumatic symptoms:

> The problem is, these can be rather pleasant—so pleasant, in fact, that the system goes looking for more of them. The stronger the trauma, the stronger the dose, and hence the stronger the compulsion to trigger new releases. Reasonably intelligent laboratory animals will return again and again to the source of their trauma, the electrified button or whatever it is, although they know they'll get the shock again. They do it just to get that fix: the buzzing, the serenity. (204)

If one adopts Trevellian's interpretation, the narrator's steady urge to re-enact has to be seen as fuelled by an inner hunger for a narcotic fix which is released whenever he, in some way, reconnects with his trauma. Although the consecutive re-enactments he engineers do not stage the traumatic scene, a certain associative link between the original traumatic stress and the plots of the replayed incidents may be said to form in the mind of the narrator. This biological interpretation shares two significant characteristics with the repetition compulsion hypothesis: both assume the subject's lack of awareness of their repetitive behavior and indicate the cyclical (or self-replicating) nature of the mechanism, which leaves no room for the subject to transcend it.[8]

Having outlined the reasons why the condition of McCarthy's narrator could be examined through the use of the critical notions of restorative nostalgia and repetition compulsion, I wish to suggest that those two categories do not need to be seen as distinct motivations determining the narrator's actions at different stages in the novel. Where they overlap is in their obsessive harking back to a past which permeates the present. As the American philosopher Edward S. Casey contends in "The World of Nostalgia," there is a strong link between nostalgia and traumatic fixation:

> Just as the psyche, in a perverse retro-logic, seeks to return compulsively to a trauma to which fixation has been made—however painful or pointless such a return may be—so the homesick soul wishes to realize a *status quo ante*, often without succeeding and at great personal hardship. In both instances there is an all too evident monomania regarding return to a place-of-origin. . . . (373)

Whereas the narrator's monomaniac disposition has already been discussed, his "perverse retro-logic" could be best illustrated by the novel's baffling coda. As a result of the narrator's decision to transfer a re-enactment of the bank heist to a real bank, without telling most of his crew that the security staff and cashiers will not have been warned, one of the re-enactors is killed and the rest have to escape to the airport. When they arrive, the narrator spontaneously and gratuitously shoots one of the crew without bothering to explain why ("I did it because I wanted to") (276).[9] He and Naz board a small private jet, while the remaining re-enactors and staff are offered tickets for a regular plane which has been organized to crash and annihilate all the witnesses of the

narrator's crime. The plan of eliminating the entire crew, which was negotiated by Naz with the IRA or Muslim Fundamentalists (the narrator cannot recall exactly which), strikes him as "beautiful" (254). In the last scene of the novel, he daydreams about the future reconstruction of the exploding plane.

The closing chapters of *Remainder* register the narrator's radically accelerating alienation or disconnection from reality. Although his deficit of empathy is conspicuous from the outset, the narrator's actions towards the end are bound to perplex the reader. He appears to sink into what could be described as a mixture of solipsistic trance and psychopathic spree, in which the surrounding people and objects serve as a playground for his amusement. Smith's remark about the novel's "excision of psychology" and the label of antihumanism, which is often attributed to McCarthy's writing, could be invoked to account for the otherwise bemusing shift that occurs at the end. The novel culminates in a scene unfolding in the private jet, which the narrator chooses to hijack, terrorizing the pilot into making continuous loops in the air, going forward and then returning. He feels "weightless" once again, as the plane is incorporated into his last séance of re-enactment: "Our trail would be visible from the ground: an eight, plus that first bit where we'd first set off—fainter, drifted to the side by now, discarded, recidual [sic], a remainder" (283). The final image of the novel is that of the plane endlessly (at least until the fuel runs out) performing a loop shaped like a figure of eight, which—as Lea notes—functions as a "correlative to infinity" (468), and which could also be interpreted as a metaphor for a traumatized subject's self-destructive immersion in the cycle of repetition.

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Notes

[1] Justus Nieland's "Dirty Media: Tom McCarthy and the Afterlife of Modernism," Daniel Lea's "The Anxieties of Authenticity in Post-2000 British Fiction," and Vermeulen's "The Critique of Trauma and the Afterlife of the Novel in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*," respectively.

[2] The first two sentences of the novel feature the title of Critchley's *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (1997). In his book, McCarthy's friend and collaborator from the International Necronautical Society discusses the experience of religious and political disappointment, which he sees as laying the foundation for modern philosophy. Among the philosophers (and writers) examined by Critchley are those cited by McCarthy in numerous interviews as being a formative influence for his own literary work—Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Blanchot, and Samuel Beckett.

[3] That scene captures the appearance of an involuntary memory—a notion introduced by Hermann Ebbinghaus and famously discussed by Marcel Proust—a recollection triggered unintentionally by an internal or external stimulus (Troscianko 448). Whereas the epiphany in *Remainder* is triggered by a visual stimulus, the involuntary memories in Proust are virtually never precipitated by the sense of sight. Anne Whitehead argues that "Proust relegates the visual to a subsidiary role and privileges, instead, the physical senses of taste and smell." She adds that he "makes clear that the sight of the madeleine alone had done nothing to restore the past to him" (109).

[4] Tamás Bényei has called my attention to the possibility of pursuing the link between the madeleine and the crack in the wall, and the different connotations they appear to evoke.

[5] The narrator describes his condition in the following way: "After the accident I forgot everything. It was as though my memories were pigeons and the accident a big noise that had scared them off. They fluttered back eventually—but when they did, their hierarchy had changed, and some that had had crappy places before ended up with better ones . . ." (87). The notion of memories as pigeons appears indebted to Plato's famous metaphor of the aviary from *Theaetetus*, where the process of recollection is likened to a pursuit of elusive birds in a giant cage.

[6] The commodified aspect of nostalgia has been most emphatically articulated by Fredric Jameson in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* and "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." The opposition between memory and nostalgia has also been stressed by bell hooks, who distinguishes "nostalgia, that longing for something to be as it once was, a kind of useless act, from remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present" (qtd. in Su 2).

[7] The concept of repetition was famously revised by Jacques Lacan, whose discussion of it (alongside a reconsideration of Freud's notions of the unconscious, transference, and the drive) was anthologized in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1973). Lacan preferred to use the terms "repetition automatism"

and "insistence" to account for the urge to re-enact painful events. His examination of the concept has focused on its links to the signifying chain and the relationship between the subject and language (Homer 84). In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002), Lacan's most famous interpreter, Slavoj Žižek, captures the inherently paradoxical nature of repetition and traumatic memory. He argues that the forgotten traumas "haunt us all the more forcefully," because "the opposite of *existence* is not nonexistence, but *insistence:* that which does not exist continues to *insist*, striving towards existence" (22). Žižek's notion of the insistence of the forgotten could account for the otherwise inexplicable zeal with which the amnesiac narrator of *Remainder* (towards the end of the novel) plunges into reconstructing several violent scenes whose only relevance to him might be that they could serve as an oblique analogy to the repressed scene of his accident.

[8] In an interview with Christopher Bollen, McCarthy discusses yet another possible interpretation of the narrator's obsession with re-enactments. He agrees with the interviewer's impression that there is a certain sexually fetishistic quality to the narrator's conduct and declares that "the whole thing is sex." He then goes on to compare *Remainder* with Marquis de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* (1905), whose four libertine characters engage teenagers and a prostitute to enact their erotic fantasies with a great precision and attention to detail. McCarthy concludes that that Sadeian logic of a "sadomasochistic sex game" is "central" to the novel.

[9] The narrator's remark could be read as a subtle allusion to the notion of *acte gratuit* (or *action gratuite*) as considered by André Gide in *Les Caves du Vatican* (1914). The idea expresses a wish to perform an action which is devoid of any logical or practical motivation—an action whose rationale is precisely the lack of any rationale. In "The Ideology of Modernism" (1962), Georg Lukács cites Gide—alongside Musil, Kafka, and Beckett—as practitioners of what he condemned as decadent and nihilistic "Modernist anti-realism" (1218), which celebrates absurdity and the impossibility of a coherent narrative. *Remainder*'s foreclosure of any convincing rationalization of the narrator's increasingly disturbing conduct makes it liable to Lukács's charge of a "flight into psychopathology" (1224), which he sees as a deplorable and harmful symptom of socially disengaged Modernist ideology.

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A Calculation More Curious Than Instructive: Epic Chronology in *Paradise Lost*, Books 1-3

Gábor Ittzés

HJEAS

Joseph Addison, examining the time scheme of *Paradise Lost* in the first sustained critical analysis of the epic, declared a chronology of its complete plotline to be both impossible and futile.

> The Modern Critics have collected from several Hints in the *Iliad* and *Æneid* the Space of Time, which is taken up by the Action of each of those Poems; but as a great Part of *Milton*'s Story was transacted in Regions that lie out of the Reach of the Sun and the Sphere of Day, it is impossible to gratifie the Reader with such a Calculation, which indeed would be more curious than instructive; none of the Criticks, either Antient or Modern, having laid down Rules to circumscribe the Action of an Epic Poem with any determined number of Years, Days, or Hours.
>
> [*The Spectator* No. 267, 5 Jan. 1712. (2:20)]

Addison argues first that time cannot be calculated in Milton's epic because much of its action takes place outside the cosmos,[1] and, second, a chronology might satisfy our idle curiosity but would not be instructive because we have no established critical-theoretical framework within which to interpret the findings, whatever they might be. I will leave aside the quibble about the incompleteness of literary theory and only note that Addison's second point stands in tension with the first sentence of the passage, where the construction of epic chronologies is presented as a critical task that depends on the reader's ability to pick up *hints*. The exercise itself is apparently perfectly legitimate. Indeed, Addison's fundamental objection seems to be predicated ultimately not on the underdeveloped state of literary theory but on the logical impossibility of calculating the time of action "transacted in Regions that lie out of the Reach of the Sun and the Sphere of Day"—on the tacit presupposition that time does not apply in the other three cosmological regions.

In his last essay on *Paradise Lost*, Addison ventures a chronological tally for Books 4-12, but he maintains his initial point: "As for that part of the Action which is described in the three first Books, as it does not pass within the Regions of Nature, . . . it is not subject to any calculations of Time" [*The Spectator* No. 369, 3 May 1712, (2:151)]. A generation later Thomas Newton concurred: "for the action of the preceding books [1-3]

lying out of the sphere of the sun, the time could not be computed" (1:275, ad 4.598). Even when he took issue with Addison's ten-day total, he confirmed the larger thesis: "this is the eleventh day of the poem, we mean of that part of it which is transacted within the sphere of day" (Newton 2:315, ad 11.135; cf. 2:281-82, ad 10.845). Given this unanimous consensus of influential early critics, it is no wonder that no overarching epic chronology was suggested for *Paradise Lost* for over two hundred and fifty years.[2]

Mid-twentieth-century criticism broke with that tradition quite rapidly and radically, although by no means completely. After Grant McColley's pioneering work in 1940, Gunnar Qvarnström and Alastair Fowler developed a highly influential 33-day scheme in the 1960s, which soon invited revisionist readings. First, Galbraith Crump offered a 28-day alternative in 1975, then a generation later Sherry L. Zivley proposed a 33+4-day chronology in 2000. What all these authors share in common is the conviction that the (re)construction of an overall chronology of epic action is possible from the Son's anointing to the expulsion, that is, including that part of the action which is "transacted in Regions that lie out of the Reach of the Sun and the Sphere of Day." That approach seems to have carried the day in the second half of the century, but there is another trajectory as well, of which Zivley's two-part arrangement, separating out the four days of the war in heaven, also reminds us. Critics like Allen H. Gilbert in 1947 and Laurence Stapleton in 1966 argued, on different grounds, that events of epic action could not be arranged along a single timeline. Most recently, Anthony Welch has articulated that point, explicitly drawing on the arguments of his eighteenth-century predecessors.

The problem first adumbrated by Addison thus remains a major crux in the interpretation of *Paradise Lost*. The timing of events in the first three books is still a fundamental question in any reconstruction of epic chronology.

In the beginning

First-order epic action begins, after the invocation to Book 1, with the rebels' awakening in hell:

> Nine times the space that measures day and night
> To mortal men, he [Satan] with his horrid crew
> Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf
> Confounded though immortal: but his doom

Reserved him to more wrath; for now the thought
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
Torments him[.] (1.50-56)[3]

From the point of view of time, this is tantalizing.[4] The passage is highly suggestive but offers very little solid ground (either literally, for the devils, or metaphorically, for the interpreter). I venture three observations.

First, the text begins, crucially, with a time adverbial: "Nine times the space that measures day and night / To mortal men" (1.50-51). Whatever the narrator is about to say, he relates it to our common experience of time ("day and night / To mortal men"). Our temporal experience—together with the related common sense terms such as *day* and *night*—are relevant, and presumably adequate, to clarify details of the ensuing story. Milton anchors the whole narrative, with its mind-blowing and other-worldly scope and duration, in our mundane experience, including our ordinary time-consciousness. On a less existential and more practical level, Milton also establishes a timescale for the action. Time is measured in days—not aeons, years, seconds, or whatever other units.

Second, if Milton does not quite say when—at what time of day—the narrative begins, the text provides some clues. Since Milton largely adheres to the Semitic tradition of measuring days from sunset to sunset,[5] it is logical that the action should begin in the evening, especially as we are now at the end of a previous episode that lasted for nine full days so we must be entering a new evening. Further, the line introducing the scene ends with "night" (1.50), which puts structural emphasis on the last word and connects it with the next time adverb in the text, the *now* of 1.55, suggesting that it is now night.

Third, the action starts in "utter darkness" (1.72),[6] and several similes evoke night images. Satan's huge body is like that of Leviathan which sailors often mistake for an island "while night / Invests the sea, and wished morn delays" (1.207-08), and his shield is "like the moon" (1.287). The dumbfounded rebels "sprung upon the wing" at Satan's call "as when men wont to watch / On duty, sleeping found by whom they dread" (1.331-33) and flew up like the locusts "That o'er the realm of impious Pharaoh hung / Like night, and darkened all the land of Nile" (1.342-43). I therefore suggest that the action begins at night, although there is only a "feeling" of night; the time of the poem's opening scene cannot be determined with exactitude.

The first dawn

The sequence of events after the opening scene of awakening (1.54-669) is largely uncontroversial. Pandæmonium is built and admired (1.670-751); a general council convened and held (1.752-2.506). While the infernal MPs disperse (2.506-628), Satan departs for the newly created world and encounters Sin and Death at hell's gates (2.629-927). He then crosses chaos (2.927-1033) and catches sight of heaven and the cosmos (2.1034-55). It is here that light—other than "darkness visible" (1.63)—first appears in the poem. Both hell and chaos are dark places. The text really hammers home the point.[7] Attention is also repeatedly drawn to the absence of light.[8] By contrast, "the sacred influence / Of light appears" (2.1034-35) when Satan approaches the walls of heaven at the end of Book 2. It is a decidedly dim, "dubious light" (2.1042), but it is identified as "A glimmering dawn" (2.1037). This imagery will be consistently maintained.

Book 3 opens with an invocation to holy light (3.1-55),[9] followed by the narratively first scene of heavenly council (3.77-343), concluded with the jubilation of the heavenly host, which the narrator also joins in (3.344-417). The Father and Son's exchange is occasioned by the former surveying the universe (3.56-76) and beholding, first, Adam and Eve on earth,[10] and then Satan "[c]oasting the wall of heaven on this side night / . . . and ready now / To stoop with wearied wings, and willing feet, / On the bare outside of this world" (3.71-74)—completing the last stretch of his journey we saw him set out on at the end of Book 2. Just as at the end of Book 2 where the "glimmering dawn" shot "far into the bosom of dim Night" (2.1036-37) here, the metaphor of "on this side night" may have simple spatial referents given that Night as Chaos's consort (cf. 2.961-993, 1002) represents a cosmological realm. "Dawn" and "this side night" are the border zone between heaven and chaos viewed from opposite angles. Yet the reader can hardly ignore the temporal overtones—the literal meaning of "dawn" and the obvious metaphorical referent of "on this side night."

When the focus shifts back to the fiend after the heavenly council, his story line is picked up at the same point again, with Satan now landed: "Meanwhile upon the firm opacous globe / Of this round world . . . / Satan alighted walks" (3.418-22). This is followed by a detailed description of the region (3.422-554), including an account of the Paradise of Fools (3.444-99), of heaven's gate and the adjacent ladder (3.501-25), and of the flight path down to Eden inside the cosmos (3.526-54). After surveying the starry universe (3.555-61), Satan plunges in (3.561-612). He encounters Uriel at the sun (3.613-739) and then descends to land on Niphates (3.739-42). With

that, we have, of course, arrived in "the sphere of the sun" (Newton 1:275, ad 4.598) and that part of the poem where Milton takes great pains to mark the passage of time. Prior to the Uriel scene, the first securely datable event in epic action,[11] however, there is little hard and fast evidence to pin down a firm chronology.

Two details have been interpreted by critics as signaling specific times, but I find neither reading fully convincing. Zivley understands the "cursed hour" of 2.1055 as midnight (120), which might seem acceptable in and of itself, but it does not square with the emerging light symbolism discussed below. Further, if it is midnight at 2.1055 and early morning at 3.552-54, as Zivley agrees, this last leg of Satan's journey, which serves to unify the action (recall 2.1055; 3.69-76, 418-22), would take uncharacteristically long.

Fowler reconstructed the particulars of Satan's view inside the cosmos (3.555-61) as a chronographia and concluded that it must be midnight in Eden (Milton, Rev. 2nd ed. 201, cf. 31). His argument is, briefly, that Satan at the orifice is behind the sign of Libra while the sun is diametrically opposite in Aries, behind the earth. Since Eden is facing the orifice, it is the middle of the night there. An adequately detailed treatment of his analysis would burst the limits of this paper, but I can offer a few observations to indicate some weaknesses of his interpretation. First, his assumption that Satan is at or behind the sign of Libra is unwarranted. The text says that he takes a view "from eastern point / Of Libra to the fleecy star" (3.557-58), but it might designate the *extent* of his view, not his own position. With a logic comparable to Fowler's, for example, Masson placed the fiend at the celestial north pole (1:354-55, cf. 1:35, 39-40). Similarly, it is not self-evident that the *horizon* beyond which the Ram that "bears / Andromeda far off Atlantic seas" (3.558-59) is the edge of the earth's disc as Satan sees it—rather than an instance of Eurocentrism, shared by both writer and reader, in the defining relative clause which merely interprets the noun phrase "fleecy star" (3.568). Third, viewing the cosmos "from pole to pole / . . . in breadth" (3.360-61) need not necessarily mean a horizontal *axis mundi*. As early as 1734, the Richardsons proposed a Latinate interpretation: "[T]he Poles . . . are said to be in Breadth because the Ancients knowing Much more of the Earth East and West than North and South, and so having a Much Greater Journey One way than the Other, One was Called Length, or Longitude, the Other Breadth, or Latitude" (125).

In other words, *in breadth* here simply means "in the direction of latitude (as opposed to longitude)" and is synonymous with "from pole to

pole" or "from north to south." Milton never uses *latitude* in his English poetry, but *breadth* again appears in that sense in the description of the sun's annual path after the fall (10.673).[12] Fourth, Satan is "*high above* the circling canopy" (3.556, emphasis added), that is, the earth's conical shadow, which means that the sun (and the sign of Libra behind it) would not be fully hidden from his sight even when they are directly behind the earth: they are larger heavenly bodies than the earth and their rim would be visible from Satan's vantage point at the orifice. None of these perhaps invalidates Fowler's point definitively, but neither can they be verified independently, although they are all presuppositions of Fowler's reading. Finally and most importantly, his timing either contradicts the light imagery, as with Zivley, or disjoints the two timescales (it is early morning at the orifice when it is midnight in Eden), but the latter is inconsistent with Fowler's whole project.

To come up with a temporal interpretation of Satan's action outside the cosmos, we have to look elsewhere and return to our earlier clues. The cosmographic passages describing various regions where chaos, heaven, and the cosmos intersect are connected through references to Satan's progress:

> All this dark globe [the Paradise of Fools] the fiend found as he passed,
> And long he wandered, till at last *a gleam*
> *Of dawning light* turned thitherward in haste
> His travelled steps[.] (3.498-501; emphasis added)

At the orifice, his next stop, Satan

> Looks down with wonder at the sudden view
> Of all this world at once. As when a scout
> Through dark and desert ways with peril gone
> All night; *at last by break of cheerful dawn*
> Obtains the brow of some high-climbing hill,
> Which to his eye discovers unaware
> The goodly prospect of some foreign land
> First seen, or some renowned metropolis
> With glistering spires and pinnacles adorned,
> Which *now the rising sun* gilds with his beams. (3.542-51; emphasis added)

Throughout the whole long scene, transitioning from Book 2 to Book 3, a cluster of images moving from night into daylight is steadily deployed.

Milton never quite says that it is dawn, but he unfailingly evokes a sense of early morning.

Two further considerations might be added. First, as I have argued elsewhere on the basis of some larger structural patterns of *Paradise Lost*, double-book units correspond to individual days of epic action. With the exception of Books 6-7, which continue the same afternoon, the transition occurs between even and odd numbered books (Ittzés, "Hero" 431-34). The turn from Book 2 to 3 falls into this pattern so we rightly expect the break of a new day here. Second, in other parts of the epic, where Milton formally keeps track of time, the imagery he uses—and the sense of the time of day he thus evokes—is consistent with the explicit clock time. Satan calls on Uriel at the sun at noon. The date is later explicitly confirmed (4.564), but in the original scene a noontide metaphor appears (3.616-18). A complex epic simile introducing Satan's first sight of the human pair during the long drawn-out twilight scene of Book 4 concludes with Mount Amara that can be reached at the *end* of "A whole day's journey" (4.284). At sunset, Uriel comes "gliding through the even / On a sunbeam, swift as a shooting star / In autumn thwarts the night" (4.555-57) to visit the angelic guard at Eden. After dinner, Adam and Eve, appropriately, also discuss night topics (4.611-89) (Ittzés, "Ten Days" 102-06). In the light of all that, it would be highly unusual for Milton to deploy imagery with clear temporal import but in tension with the time of day actually suggested for the given episode. Considering all available evidence, I therefore contend that, bringing the metaphorical and literal levels of the text together, Book 3 begins at sunrise on what will turn out to be the first paradisiacal day and ends at noon, with Book 4 later completing the narrative of the second half of the same day.

A single night

If individual scenes are not easy to peg on a timeline, it is equally difficult to establish how much time these episodes occupy altogether. Two considerations might help us further. First, when the text offers definite time expressions, they indicate short duration. Pandæmonium is built "in an hour" (1.697). Welch protests that the phrase simply means a short time, with *hour* here "'used somewhat indefinitely for a short space of time, more or less than an hour' (*OED* 'hour' 2a)" (5). He may very well be right, for the import of the passage is surely to contrast the short time of devilish efficacy with the "age" the "incessant toil" of human "hands innumerable" (1.698-99) requires to create lesser marvels as Welch rightly points out. But in and of itself that does not invalidate or obliterate the literal meaning of

the words. Whether exactly or only roughly sixty minutes are meant, the shortness of the period is emphasized, and a relevant timescale is provided to interpret the brevity of the episode. Similarly, the devils "entertain / The irksome hours, till [their] great chief return" (2.526-27). We may conclude, with hindsight, that Satan's expedition must have taken several days and was by no means completed in a few hours but, moving into the story, we should pick up this line as an important clue to the chronological scale Milton is establishing for us. Long periods of epic action extend over days (recall 1.50); events narrated in detail cover hours of epic time (cf. 3.416-18).

There is nevertheless another aspect of Milton's treatment of time that we must consider. When Satan departs after the infernal council, his journey is presented as long and arduous.[13] The walls of hell come into sight "at last" (2.643). Before moving on, he stands "on the brink of hell . . . awhile" (2.918) and comes to the throne of Chaos "at length" (2.951). He loses no time there (2.1010), however, and "at last" (2.1034) reaches the far side of chaos. How long this voyage takes, we do not know, but the text makes us feel that it is long, and it might almost have taken him forever (2.931-38). Yet, the scale on which to interpret its lengthiness is provided by the rest of the text. In the immediate context, the devils expect Satan's return after some tedious *hours*. In a wider context, there are other occasions when chaos is crossed by various epic characters. The devils' fall through it lasts for nine days (6.871), but Raphael completes a return trip from heaven to hell and back within a single day (8.229-46). The sense of limited duration must color the interpretation of the sense of a great temporal extent because Milton gives us both. Taken together, this is probably a kind of double time so prevalent in Renaissance literature.[14]

Some critics refuse to venture any estimate for the length of time covered in Books 1-2 (esp. Stapleton 738-39; Welch 15), but most others agree that Satan reaches the coast of heaven either on the day of his awakening or a day later, such as McColley (17), Qvarnström (25-31), and Crump (166).[15] Fowler, on his complete timeline that also includes events of the second narrative order from the Son's anointing, consistently dates the awakening to day 22, while the arrival at the outskirts of this world to day 23 (Milton, 1st ed. 26-27, Rev. 2nd ed. 31, cf. Fowler 35). But, however surprising, Fowler is in fact slippery with his day numbering[16] which undercuts the evidentiary force of his chronological table. Zivley also argues for an extended time frame for the opening books (119-20), but she does not really explain why the events therein must fill more than a night.[17]

No convincing argument has thus been presented to establish that the events of the first two books fill several days. On the other hand, we have seen that the relevant scale by which to measure the extent of individual episodes is established by the text; it is the hour (esp. 1.697; 2.527, 1055, and cf. 2.796-97, 848). Second, the action of Books 1-2 is all set in darkness; light appears at the very end of the unit. The visual symbolism is overlaid with temporal significance (esp. 2.1034-1042, 3.498-501, and 542-51). The story up to Satan's emergence from chaos is presented as a single night, whether literal or metaphoric, of evil.[18] In short, nothing in the text explicitly contradicts, and virtually all evidence is coherent with the interpretation that Books 1-2 narrate the events of a single night and Book 3 those of the next morning, from sunrise to midday.

Conclusion

Addison's skepticism about the inapplicability of time to those segments of epic action that take place outside the cosmos may thus be not fully warranted. As is well known, Milton projects time far before the beginning of this world. In the foregoing analysis I have argued that it is possible to reconstruct at least a general chronology of events in the first three books of *Paradise Lost.* The exercise surely requires a different approach than its counterpart in Books 4-8, where Milton carefully peppers his text with unambiguous, if occasionally coded, references to the passage of time (Ittzés, "Ten Days" 102-12). Here, in the opening books, an interplay of a set of assumptions and recognitions must be brought to bear on the interpretation.

It must be recognized, first, that the action forms a continuous sequence. Individual scenes are carefully chained together without temporal gaps, and the whole is seamlessly tied in with the beginning of the action unfolding within "the Reach of the Sun and the Sphere of Day" [*The Spectator* No. 267, 5 Jan. 1712, (Addison 2:20)]. Further, Books 1-3 are "sandwiched" between nine days establishing the relevance of postlapsarian human time consciousness for the interpretation of the epic (1.50-52) and the mundane time of the regions of the sphere of the sun from Book 3 onward. That, together with the continuity of action, is a strong argument for—at least a robust sense of—a temporal continuum as well.

The interpretation of action in chronological terms also depends on the recognition of the relevant timescale the text establishes. Many events in the opening books are cast in temporally vague categories with indefinite duration, but Milton makes clear from the beginning that the acts of his

grand drama cover days, while individual scenes are presented more on the scale of hours. There is surely some discrepancy between the vast scope of cosmic action and the astronomical distances implying extended duration on the one hand and the mundaneness of the actual timescale on the other, but that is just the point. The reader must learn to hold those in tension, without letting one overcome and exclude the other. It would be as unwise to over-literalize the brevity of time—a crucial sense of immensity, so profoundly characteristic of *Paradise Lost*, would be gone—as it would be altogether to relinquish, because of the temporal indefiniteness of numerous episodes, the claim that we have a controlled sense of the passage of time. Hindsight also contributes to the interpretive process. Considerations of the poem's overall structure—pairs of books correspond to individual days of action—will help confirm the temporal parsing of the initial books.

While the reconstruction of epic chronology is first and foremost an intellectual exercise, it is definitely doomed to failure in Books 1-3 if the text is reduced to its cognitive content, and its poetic qualities are not recognized and embraced. A key to establishing a chronology of action prior to the Uriel scene lies in the imagery of the poem. Both the light-darkness symbolism in general and the references to specific times of day in the metaphors' vehicles in particular warrant close attention. Without working out the metaphoric implications of the text, no chronological argument can be remotely complete in the extraterrestrial books. A combination of all of these interpretive moves, however, can produce something akin to a cumulative case argument in analytic philosophy. A precise chronology of the first three books cannot be demonstrated with certainty, but the combined effect of all reasoned considerations is a strong case for a general temporal outline.

The principles of interpretation here mobilized for a reading of the opening books are not limited to "Regions that lie out of the Reach of the Sun and the Sphere of Day." They can be generalized and extended to the rest of *Paradise Lost*, enhancing the reading of the poem. Thus the continuity of action, with simultaneity clearly signaled, is a narrative principle that can be demonstrated for the entirety of the epic. Book 10 especially shows with what elegance and precision Milton can handle a narrative as multifarious as the story of the first postlapsarian afternoon and night with four parallel plotlines. The calculated complexity of the unfolding primary narrative with its analytical transparency and the carefully crafted seamlessness of the whole scheme suggest a chronologically unified structure for the entire poem.

Similarly, temporal dualities permeate *Paradise Lost*, and our findings in the first three books can be extended to the rest of the epic. The sense of a long duration generated by indefinite time lapses is not to override the rest of the evidence. If not altogether ignored, it is best understood as an instance of Renaissance double time in the broad sense that need not undercut the validity of the primary chronological reconstruction. A sense of long duration and an impression of fleeting time should be held in tension. This can be further generalized to suggest that there is an overarching pattern in that the middle of the narrative is drawn in chronologically sharp contours while the edges are left more blurry but certainly not altogether indefinite. Put differently, in the paradisiacal center of the epic, Milton provides explicit signals to keep track of time; in the infernal and postlapsarian books he uses different techniques including allusions encoded in the poem's imagery to suggest, rather than firmly state, the timing of important scenes—with the result that time is presented as both real and mythic, which is yet another of the epic's celebrated temporal dualities.

The blurriness at the edges notwithstanding, Milton establishes the relevant timescale throughout the narrative. His basic units of time are the day and the hour. Shorter and longer durations also occur—epic similes can have especially broad temporal sweeps—but do not take center stage. The crucial point in the present context is, however, not the precise units of time the epic utilizes most but the very fact that Milton lets us know on what timescale to think when reading his text.

In light of the ensuing cosmic drama, particularly noteworthy is the initial reference to fallen temporality ("Nine times the space that measures day and night / To mortal men," 1.50-51). The entire narrative, and not only the first scenes, is anchored in common, postlapsarian, human experience, which can be legitimately brought to bear on its interpretation. That is not to underappreciate the literary qualities of the epic. *Paradise Lost* is a poetic text, not a historical account or a logbook. It keeps track of time but not as a chronicle or a journal would. The imagery it employs—and the sense, including the passage of time or a particular time, it invokes in the reader—is an integral part of its meaning. The larger thesis requires further research to confirm, but it seems likely that Milton consistently synchronizes the temporal implications of his metaphors and similes with the actual chronological setting of the scene in which they occur.

The relevance of the interpretive principles here summarized—such as the continuity of action, the importance of the timescale, temporal

dualities, patterns of overall structure, applicability of mundane experience, cognitive utilization of the poetic text's metaphoric import—extend not only lengthwise beyond the first three books but also thematically beyond the reconstruction of epic chronology. If the initial calculation of a night's duration for the events narrated in the first two books and an additional morning for those in the third is perhaps more curious than instructive, the larger result of hermeneutical considerations and tools is surely every bit as instructive as curious. If Addison had foreseen this outcome, he might have forgiven us for engaging in the exercise.

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Notes

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[1] I use this term to describe the world created in six days (cf. Gen 1-2 and Bk. 7 of *Paradise Lost*), that is, the fourth cosmological region, in addition to heaven, hell, and chaos, in Milton's universe.

[2] Alastair Fowler indeed faults Newton's influence for "dissuad[ing] modern critics from examining the poem's time-scheme" (Milton, Rev. 2nd ed. 30). Note, however, that it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that Addison's and Newton's declarations were taken at face value and given more weight than their actual performance. Even then, earlier discussions survived for several decades in the critical apparatus of nineteenth-century editions (cf. Henry John Todd's edition that went through five editions from 1801 to 1852) until the issue was indeed dropped from critical enquiry for a century or so. Masson offered occasional speculations about the temporal interrelatedness of various episodes in the epic (esp. 1:358, ad 4.449-50) but ultimately stopped short of producing an overall chronology.

[3] The text of *Paradise Lost* is cited after Fowler's revised second edition.

[4] Properly speaking, the narrative opens with the fallen angels' nine-day stupor (1.50-53), but because those lines are in the past tense to which is contrasted the *now* of line 54, accompanied by a shift to present tense narrative (*torments*, line 56), critics agree that the action begins with the awakening and customarily treat the previous period of confusion as part of the secondary narrative. While that is not accurate in a strict sense (it is recounted by the narrator not a character in the epic), we can surely accept the traditional view, especially as the rebels' nine-day blackout is summed up in three and a half lines, while their regaining consciousness is described in the first grand scene of the epic, filling the bulk of the first book (1.54-669).

[5] Cf. for example, 7.253, 260, 274-75, 338, 386, 448, and 550. Perhaps the clearest evidence is supplied by Raphael's rarely quoted "Ere Sabbath evening" (8.246), where the context makes it incontrovertibly clear that the Sabbath comes after (or rather, begins with) the evening and not the evening after the Sabbath.

[6] For further affirmations of darkness in the opening scene, see 1.63, 73-74, 181-83, 226, and 244-45.

[7] Cf. 1.63, 72, 599, 659; 2.58, 220, 263, 269, and 377 for hell, and 2.405, 464, 891, 916, 953, 958, 960, 973, 984, and 1027 for chaos (see also 3.16, 20, 421, and 712).

[8] Cf. 1.73, 85, 181, 245; 2.137, 220, 269, 398, 433, and 867, 959, 974.

[9] On the invocation, see Péti, esp. 246-48 and 251-53.

[10] Incidentally, this is our first sight of the human pair—and not the one through Satan's eyes in Book 4, as is sometimes suggested. That one is surely more detailed, but it is obviously significant both that we first see Adam and Eve through God's eyes from heaven and that we only receive a passing glimpse (3.64-69).

[11] For the soliloquy, see 4.29-30; for the arrival, 4.564-65, and cf. 3.616-18 for an initial metaphoric dating (see Ittzés, "Ten Days" 102).

[12] The Richardsons' reading was also adopted (although, uncharacteristically, without acknowledgement) by Newton (1:208). Masson, as we have seen, also disagrees with Fowler.

[13] Cf. for example, "sometimes / . . . sometimes . . . / Now . . . then . . ." (2.632-34).

[14] The best known instance is, of course, Shakespeare's *Othello*, but temporal dualities were much discussed in Milton studies in the second half of the twentieth century as well (e.g., Gardner 39, Gilbert 147-50, 49, Stapleton *passim*, cf. Crump 151-53). More recently, Fowler has argued that Renaissance dualities of time should be understood in terms of multiple perspectives and a distinction between measured (represented) and narrated (reported) action rather than as a juxtaposition of short and long duration (34-44). The question deserves independent treatment. At any rate, I use "double time" in a loose sense, to include a variety of temporal dualities in *Paradise Lost* (and Renaissance literature in general).

[15] Gilbert speculates that Satan's voyage through chaos "presumably was not made more swiftly than his fall," that is, nine days (149). Later in the same page, however, he himself questions this very assumption. Of course, Raphael's trip is strong evidence for the possibility of a quick crossing (8.229-46).

[16] A case in point is his summary in the introduction. First he says that "[t]he duration of *directly represented* terrestrial action . . . is . . . eleven days (Days 23-33)." Later on the same page Fowler claims that a "similar symbolism underlies the arrangement of directly represented action. Satan's week of miscreation (ix 48-66) is framed by the four remaining days, Days 23-24 and 32-33" (Milton, Rev. 2nd ed. 32, italics original). First, "directly represented action" and "directly represented terrestrial action" are not coterminous, for the latter includes a temporally significant extraterrestrial component, Satan's awakening in and escape from hell. A similar slippage appears in *Renaissance Realism*, where Fowler says that "Addison remarks that the action directly narrated by Milton occupies eleven days" (43) although Addison clearly spoke of *terrestrial action*, excluding anything before Satan's arrival on Niphates (cf. the opening quotation of this essay). Second, elsewhere (Milton, Rev. 2nd ed. 31, 281, ad 5.1-2), Fowler dates Raphael's visit to day 24, which is also consistent with the "eleven days of *terrestrial* action from day 23 to 33" scheme, but day 24 is obviously the first day *of* Satan's flight and thus cannot *frame* it, as Fowler also recognizes when he allocates days 24-31 to the latter event (31). The fact that the said period consists of *eight* days constitutes another problem that is exacerbated in the notes (473, ad 9.67-68; 480, ad 9.192). For further analysis, see my essay on "Satan's Return" (499-501).

[17] She only nails down one episode (Satan's departure from chaos) with precision on the timeline. At any rate, even a reading of midnight for the "cursed hour" (cf. p. 397) would not automatically explain why the contents of Books 1-2 cannot fit into a single night.

[18] Cf. his journey through darkness between his two temptations of Eve (9.53-69) and also that after his fall we only see him either in darkness or in disguise except for the dim light as he moves from chaos into the cosmos (for details, see Ittzés, "Hero" 436, esp. n. 28).

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Possession: The Dostoevskian Master Trope of Reading and Writing in J. M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg* (1994)

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> "Almost all the initial difficulties of his [Coetzee's] novels vanish when one happens to have read the same books that he has."
>
> (Stephen Watson qtd. in Kossew, ed. 9)

Apart from *Foe* (1986), *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) is J. M. Coetzee's most explicit discussion of authorship through the consistent rewriting of a canonical text by a writer who, as among others Elleke Boehmer, Katy Iddiols, and Robert Eaglestone point out, has had the most profound influence on his own writing (3). In this text, Coetzee's reading of Dostoevsky's 1871 novel *Devils*, also known as *The Possessed* on the basis of Constance Garnett's 1914 translation, and his representation of Dostoevsky as a writer is focused to a large extent around the figure of the "monster." The trope is apparently inherited from modernism: in *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900-1930* Peter Kaye points out that with the publication of Constance Garnett's translations in the 1910s (18) "Dostoevsky was introduced as an exhilarating monster . . . on the English horizon" (6). The figure also sums up the stereotypical view of the Russian writer as, among others, a man of outdated, conservative political views and infected with all the moral and mental sickness of his age.[1] This monstrosity, however, is inseparable from the master trope of the original Dostoevskian text, "possession," which Coetzee reinterprets in the context of mastery—let it be political, sexual, hermeneutic, or authorial. In fact, in *The Master of Petersburg*, monstrosity seems to be the inevitable product of the attempt to relinquish mastery in textual production, to find a "middle voice" (cf. Coetzee, *Doubling* 94-95) in between being possessed and doing the possessing—and thereby come into being. The resultant text, in turn, can be conceived of only as a monstrous being, a body stitched together from the shreds of earlier (and even forthcoming) bodies and texts: an intertextual complex.[2] Coetzee thus concedes and, at the same time, reinterprets the monstrosity of the Dostoevskian novel and the author figure it implies. Also, by making Dostoevsky our contemporary through a set of "deliberate anachronisms" (Scanlan 467), he shows his authorial plight as part and parcel of the (post)modern writer's condition.

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For understanding Coetzee's Dostoevskian rewrite, and specifically how the trope of possession works in the text, it is necessary to turn—however briefly—to the Russian classic first. *Devils* is the fusion of political intrigue and social satire: it tells the story of how a nameless provincial town is intruded upon by anarchists, who are modeled on the historical figures of Nechaev and his circle. While they wreak havoc in the small town, a Russian nobleman, a Byronic superfluous man, also returns there—to his birthplace—and makes a last desperate attempt to reform his life before he finally commits suicide. It is he, Stavrogin, who links the two plot lines: not only is he allegedly the "master" of the anarchists, who are all his "disciples," but also the future leader of the nation in their eyes. Let me emphasize two highly relevant aspects of *Devils* here. First, continuing the tradition of the anti-nihilist novel, *Devils* is usually read as a straightforward expression of Dostoevsky's conservative politics, a defense of autocracy.[3] Second, one of its chapters, entitled "At Tikhon's," but usually mentioned as "Stavrogin's Confession," was censored on the novel's publication, and first came out in its entirety only in 1921, causing a huge (critical) scandal. Understandably, as in this confession, Stavrogin pleads guilty to several crimes, including murder and marrying an idiotic woman as a horrible joke, but most importantly to seducing an emphatically childish girl of fourteen called Matryona and not preventing her consequent suicide—in fact, finding horrible pleasure in the knowledge that she is killing herself. Notwithstanding the censoring, this particular episode of the novel was well-known for Dostoevsky's contemporaries—or at least for one of them—to spread the rumor that Dostoevsky was writing here out of his own personal experience (Joseph Frank qtd. in Scanlan 477). Thus *Devils* contributed to the establishment of the stereotypical, monstrous Dostoevsky image in at least two ways: on the one hand, its political message posits Dostoevsky as a defender of autocracy, and on the other, the infamous Matryona episode implicitly envisions him as a sensualist, a child abuser, a sadist—in short, a monstrous man carrying the sickness of his decadent age.[4]

As the title of Coetzee's novel most clearly suggests, he utilizes all of the above features in *The Master of Petersburg*, focusing on the notion of mastery. The main character of his metafictional prequel—or, if you like, parallelquel—to *Devils*, which also posits itself as the story of its origin,[5] is a fictional Dostoevsky who often acts out an alternative version of Stavrogin's narrative. He also provides the focalization of the text, which is narrated in third person present tense, but—as Derek Attridge

emphasizes—remains very close to fictional Dostoevsky's consciousness throughout (116). As, among others, Franklyn A. Hyde notes, the basic situation of the novel involves a "counter-historical" biographical element. Namely, fictional Dostoevsky, deep in mourning, returns to Petersburg in 1869 to gain possession of his recently died stepson, Pavel Isaev's personal legacy—his letters, diary, and other documents. In reality, Pavel Isaev survived his stepfather by decades (212). Fictional Dostoevsky's stay in Petersburg turns into a hermeneutical quest, a desperate attempt first to understand—to "master"—the story of how and why Pavel actually died (plausible explanations include an accident, suicide, or even murder), then who Pavel really was, and ultimately who he himself is. In his quest major scenes make him uncannily similar to his own—yet unborn—(anti)hero, Stavrogin. First, the political intrigue of *Devils* is reshaped into the gradually discovered fact that Pavel was a Nechaevist, which subsequently leads to fictional Dostoevsky's reluctant, almost forced involvement in the anarchist circle's activity. Upon meeting Nechaev, the fictional writer figure is shocked to find that allegedly he himself is the source and origin of the political turmoil he abhors: Nechaev claims that Dostoevsky was his ideological "master" through *Crime and Punishment* (1866) (201)—just as Stavrogin allegedly is the "master" of all kinds of horrible political "disciples" in *Devils*. Similarly, fictional Dostoevsky's relationship with fourteen-year-old Matryona, the daughter of his widowed landlady, is a particularly disturbing rewrite of the Matryona episode in Stavrogin's censored confession. Although devoid of actual rape and death, it is a nonetheless horrible narrative of spiritual seduction—yet another form of mastery.

The different kinds of mastery—hermeneutical, ideological, sexual, spiritual, artistic, to name only a few—evoked through the rewriting of *Devils* all seem to be summed up in the one central trope of that novel, possession. That is, *The Master of Petersburg* culminates in the chapter entitled "Stavrogin," in which fictional Dostoevsky sees a veiled monstrous vision emerging from his own mirror-image, paratextually identified with the central character of *Devils*. Inspired by this visitation—which he provisionally interprets in terms of demonic possession—he writes the first drafts of "Stavrogin's Confession" and leaves them on the table in the apartment as a blasphemous attempt to provoke divine revelation by sinning; that is, by corrupting the child Matryona with the writing. At the same time, the text he writes "under possession" is a knowingly perverted

understanding of Pavel and himself—mastery with a twist, resulting from the loss of mastery over himself.

As it might transpire from the above, when Coetzee rewrites *Devils*, he launches a literary experiment that promises dubious success in a late twentieth-century post-apartheid South African context: what exactly is the relevance of repeating a most conservative denunciation of revolutionary politics (cf. Scanlan 466) in a country just about to celebrate the success of its own revolution? What is the point of an equally conservative, distinctly pre-modern interpretation of the individual in crisis, which figuratively attributes both political and moral disintegration to straying from the Law of the Father and thus opening the soul up for demonic possession (cf. Kristeva 18-20; Szilárd passim)? Let me suggest that these questions rely on the false proposition that *Devils* unproblematically applies the trope of demonic possession to suggest its own authorial—and therefore authoritative—reading, an issue that Coetzee's interpreters are obviously less sensitive to than Coetzee himself.[6] The ambiguous trope of possession, in fact, has everything to do with handling situations of crisis in writing.

That is to say that Dostoevsky's central trope retains an ambiguity of the active versus the passive, of the agent and object position: an ambiguity of whether the anarchists and Stavrogin are metaphorical devils and *do* the possessing or are the playthings of (transcendental) evil and *are* possessed.[7] The former reading is what the original Russian title, literally translatable as *Devils*, suggests, together with the anarchists' spreading of evil like a contagious disease through manipulation, blackmail, and coercion; in other words, through depriving the townspeople of their own will and making them behave as if they were possessed. The latter interpretation has been elevated to authorial authority owing to the fact that it is paratextually and intratextually included in *Devils*. As is well known, one of the novel's mottos is an excerpt from the Biblical narrative of the Gadarene swine—the part in which the devils, already exorcised from the madman by Jesus, are allowed to enter a herd, which, under demonic possession, hurl themselves into a lake and drown. The madman, in contrast, is "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind" (Luke 8.32-5). The implications of the Biblical verses are spelled out at the end of the novel. That is, on his deathbed the father figure of *Devils*, Stepan Trofimovich, has a moment of final revelation: in his reading, the Biblical narrative is an allegory of Russia, the devils are "all the plagues, all the miasmas, all the filth, . . . [which] have accumulated in our great, our dear, sick Russia" (732). Though this suggests that the anarchists, as metaphorical devils, *do* the possessing, actually an

ambiguity is created here: on second thought, Stepan Trofimovich recognizes the nihilists and himself, the liberal who fathered them, in the swine *possessed* by the devils. Even if taken as an authoritative identification of the anarchists—and Stavrogin—with devils, the authority of this interpretation is undermined in the novel. That is, it is distanced from the authorial position and attached to characters of limited understanding: Stepan Trofimovich, who is the target of satire throughout the novel and an incorrigible liar,[8] and the chronicler, whose narrative competence is somewhat limited—most conspicuously, in crucial issues (for example, Moore 52; Matlaw 45-46). With reference to Coetzee's interpretation, my major points here are that in *Devils* the emergent ambiguity of whether the central image is that of doing the possessing *or* being possessed seems to draw attention to possession, possessing itself (without an agent or object), on the one hand and, on the other, that treating demonic possession as the unproblematic master trope of authorial self-interpretation in *Devils* equals a crude "monologizing" of Dostoevsky's "polyphonic" novel.[9]

So what issue is Coetzee addressing exactly when he rewrites the Dostoevskian story of demonic possession? One possible answer to this question resides in the fact that, as the deathbed scene above suggests, in *Devils* the ambiguous trope is metonymically related to a hermeneutical act: an attempt to "master" inexplicable, chaotic events (of evil) and organize them into a meaningful story. In other words, with reference to Peter Brooks, it signifies an effort to provide an end that would turn a mere sequence of events into a plot—as deathbed scenes traditionally do in fiction before modernism (10-24). However, against all appearances, in the Dostoevskian world of ultimately shaken paternal authority this act of interpretation reads more like a hopelessly failed attempt to bring allegoresis to a halt by resorting to the sacred—and presumably to the symbolic. The vicissitudes of the Dostoevskian master trope evoke in a nutshell what Julia Kristeva emphasizes as a novel aspect of *Devils* which ushers in modernist writing: possession is a trope of the de-authorized (symbolic) father's desperate attempt to achieve self-recognition (delineate the limits of his subjectivity) by giving his (*père*)*-version* of the event; that is, by trying to include in symbolization what by definition resists it: the unclean, evil (the abject) (cf. Kristeva 18-20).[10] Read in a postmodernist context, Dostoevsky—as a literary father—registers perfectly not only the plight of living with chaos, but also the writer's need to attempt to set its boundaries in the knowledge of the utter futility of this very attempt, especially in moments of political turmoil and concomitant intellectual and moral crisis.

It is in this sense that, taking his cue from Dostoevsky, Coetzee applies the trope of possession. Going through several allegorical slips of meaning from material through hermeneutical and sexual to spiritual mastery, potentially demonic possession as staged in the final chapter of *The Master of Petersburg* comes to be associated with the very consciousness of the instability of all kinds of boundaries and integrity. This, however, seems to be a prerequisite for artistic creativity from a position that is necessarily devoid of authorial power or mastery: writing comes to equal a hermeneutic act in which the subject—at its own peril—identifies with the object of its inquiry and thus, much in the manner of the Dostoevskian intertext, eliminates the agent versus object difference. By implication, the Dostoevskian novel in Coetzee's reading is the most significant representative of the resultant hybrid, unauthoritative—monstrous, if you like—textuality.

Indeed, in *The Master of Petersburg*, the meanings of possession form an allegorical chain that allows for associating the trope with fictional Dostoevsky's "development" as a writer—his gradual resignation from authorial power, from "mastery," presumably to become the author of truly polyphonic novels Bakhtin celebrates,[11] and at the same time to realize that all any writer can do is to produce "perversions of the truth" (Coetzee, *The Master* 236).[12] The trope of possession is established with reference to a breach of (Pavel's) privacy: Councilor Maximov associates Dostoevsky's wish to "come into possession of the private papers and *everything else*" of Pavel (39, emphasis added) with prying into the most intimate secrets of the dead. In other words, possession is linked here with reading, with voyeurism, with intruding the private space of others, with gaining power and mastery over them. Fictional Dostoevsky's obsessive desire to reach Pavel—to touch him in his dream, even to become one with him by donning his suit and living in his room, which clearly implies the rival double's attempt to take the place of the subject (cf. Dolar 8-13)—and thereby understand him, reinforces the metaphor. At the start, possession is a trope for mastering Pavel[13] and his story by understanding, reading, by the hermeneutical act.

Nevertheless, agent and object relations, and thus power positions associated with reading as possession, are ambiguous from the very beginning. In contrast with the above identification of reader and possessor, in the same dialogue fictional Dostoevsky gives a harsh critique of the Councilor's reading practice exactly because it involves the reader's ironic self-distancing and resistance to being *possessed by* the text. As he argues:

"[C]learly you do not know how to read. . . . I noticed how you were holding yourself at a distance, erecting a barrier of ridicule, as though the words might leap out from the page and strangle you. . . . [R]eading is being the arm and being the axe *and* being the skull: reading is giving yourself up, not holding yourself at a distance and jeering" (46-47).

Fictional Dostoevsky provides here a model of reading which could be summed up as the reader's multiple narcissistic identification with objects—rather than agents—in the written narrative.[14] This implied relinquishing of agency and mastery is what Maximov's answer makes explicit: "you speak of reading as though it were demon-possession" (47).[15] The same agent-object relations are underpinned by the association of ideology—possession of similar sorts—with "improper" reading in Dostoevsky's eyes. This is exemplified by Nechaev's case, whom fictional Dostoevsky, regurgitating the official, "authorial" explication of *Devils,* interprets in terms of possession—as a "host" to the "spirit" Baal (44). Being "under possession by" (44) one text, the discourse of ideology, Nechaev cannot open up for another one, that is, he can only master and pervert *Crime and Punishment* by reading it in anarchist terms, provoking fictional Dostoevsky's outraged comment: "You are mad, you don't know how to read" (201).

It is this already ambiguous trope of reading as possession, which, through its spiritual and sexual connotations, becomes the trope of artistic creation in the novel. Indeed, "*spirit*-possession" (44) is even etymologically related to the *topos* of the *inspired* artist, a connection the same first dialogue between fictional Dostoevsky and Maximov reinforces. That is, while the writer is giving his most inspired speech on proper and improper reading, he feels that "[s]omething has begun to take fire within him while he has been speaking, and he welcomes it" (46-47). This loss of agency in the creative process, associated with the transgression of corporeal boundaries, is underpinned by the application of the trope of possession to sexuality, which is inseparably bound to a carnivalesque revision of another *topos* of artistic creativity, that of fathering or begetting a text (cf. Gilbert and Gubar 3-45).[16] For a start, the statuette of a goddess copulating with the dead god Shiva and "saving [his seed]" (241), which fictional Dostoevsky recalls and later associates both with Pavel and artistic creation, calls for an interpretation in a Bakhtinian context. It is a carnivalesque image of fathering/writing by (sexually) transgressing the fundamental barrier between life and death, by the burial of seed in the maternal body of a goddess—the land—so that it could live on there and be the source of a

new life and being.[17] The connection is emphasized when fictional Dostoevsky—after a prolonged writer's block—starts to write remembering this statue: "As unblinkingly as he [Dostoevsky] can he gazes upon the body-parts [of the Pavel he envisions] without which there can be no fatherhood. And his mind goes again to the museum in Berlin, to the goddess-fiend drawing out the seed from the corpse, saving it. Thus at last the time arrives and the hand that holds the pen begins to move" (241).

Yet, agent and object positions in this sexual possession, in this fathering of the text from the seed of the dead are ambiguous again, to say the least. For one, Dostoevsky clearly identifies with the male character in the scene—through Pavel, through his benumbed, melancholic identification with the dead, and even through his experience of sexuality. This identification with the passive male character—a feminine position as opposed to traditional gender binaries (cf. Cixous and Clément 63-69)—is reinforced in the (sexual) imagery of his relationship with both Matryona and Anna Sergeyevna, the girl's mother, who are indirectly identified with the ecstatic and active fiend-goddess of the statuette. The image of the goddess-fiend is first evoked in the context of Dostoevsky's figurative "seduction" of Matryona:

> If the seed could only have been taken out of the body, even a single seed, and given a home.
> He thinks of a little terracotta statue he saw in the ethnographic museum in Berlin: the Indian god Shiva lying on his back, blue and dead, and riding on him the figure of a terrible goddess, many-armed, wide-mouthed, staring-eyed, ecstatic—riding him, drawing the divine seed out of him. (76)

The goddess-fiend is implicitly identified with the fourteen-year-old girl here: the description of the statuette is directly followed by Dostoevsky's mental comment that "[h]e has no difficulty in imagining this child in her ecstasy" (76). This impression of fictional Dostoevsky's feminine passivity is corroborated by the description of his two consecutive sexual intercourses with Anna Sergeyevna, which clearly evokes the statuette. In the first of these scenes, after fictional Dostoevsky's insistence that he wants to have a child with the widow, much emphasis is laid on the motif of the seed: the woman speaks of "[a] river of seed" (225). Next night, in her "erotic trance" (230), though she clearly takes the active part in their intercourse (cf. 230-31), she speaks of the devil in her frenzy (230) and "flinging her head from side to side, clenching her jaw, grunting, it is not hard to see her too as possessed by the devil" (231). It is at

this point that she is the most reminiscent of the fiend-goddess of the statue taking possession of the (dead or at least passive) body of the writer-god.

Although all the above scenes point towards a passive, feminine male casting of the writer Dostoevsky, the reverse idea is also present in the text with equal force. Thus, Dostoevsky is associated with the goddess-fiend as an emblem of feminine receptivity when Nechaev announces to him that "I want to sink a seed in your soul" (176). Indeed, bearing in mind fictional Nechaev's several anachronistic references to *The Brothers Karamazov* (to be published only in 1880), and the way his figure and his discourse "prefigure" *Devils* and Stavrogin, it is hard to escape the conviction that the seed meant here is that of inspiration for these two novels. Accordingly, Nechaev—similarly to the veiled, monstrous Stavrogin of the last chapter—is meant to act as (demonic) Muse here. Especially so, because the figure of the seed reads as a carnivalesque version of the Biblical image Dostoevsky chose as the motto for *The Brothers Karamazov*: "Verily, verily I say onto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12.24). Seed, semen, and word—even the Word—are connected in one image, in which a strangely passive, male but still feminine Muse (see Nechaev's cross-dressing) inspires a writer represented as an ecstatic, active, masculine, but nevertheless female figure—"the goddess-fiend drawing out the seed form the corpse, saving it" (241), with whom fictional Dostoevsky clearly is associated in the above-quoted final chapter.

All in all, possession as a trope for the hermeneutical act (interpretation, reading, and writing) in Coetzee's text seems to be a consistent continuation of and an organic development from its Dostoevskian original. If the implication of the Dostoevskian master trope is the necessary ambiguity of the authorial position, the simultaneous inevitability and futility of the attempt to draw the limits of the subject in a chaotic abject world of limitless carnival, to quote Michael André Bernstein again (20), and therefore a necessary resignation from mastery as authorial control in the polyphonic novel, then Coetzee takes these implications to their extreme. He envisions Dostoevsky as a prototype of the (post)modern artist in the process of finding a "middle voice"—between that of the agent and the object, of self and other, of the possessor and the possessed. And ultimately, between a voice of one's own and that of others—literary masters whose words, like the ancient, petrified seed of the dead, can hardly wait to "leap from the page" to be received, revived, and turned into an uncannily familiar, though novel and dangerous being—the monstrous, hybrid body of the postmodern (inter)text.

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Notes

[1] As Margaret Scanlan highlights, Coetzee's own representation of Dostoevsky was seen as "reinforcing a stereotyped view of Dostoevsky or at least a facile notion of the correspondence between authors and characters" (470).

[2] I borrow this trope from Maggie Kilgour, who sees in Frankenstein's creature a most perfect image of the (Gothic) novel's intertextuality (4).

[3] This is the reading that, for example, underlies Mike Marais's interpretation of Coetzee's text in "Places of Pigs: The Tension between Implication and Transcendence in J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron* and *The Master of Petersburg*," or Scanlan's "Incriminating Documents: Nechaev and Dostoevsky in J. M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg*" On how Dostoevsky's novel actually goes way beyond the traditions of the anti-nihilist novel—especially because of Stavrogin's character—see Smirnov 120-30.

[4] This image is most clearly reflected in English modernism in D. H. Lawrence's vision of Dostoevsky, as Kaye demonstrates (44-45). Aldous Huxley's "Baudelaire" essay and *Point Counter Point* show the same, about which see in detail Reichmann passim.

[5] Cf. "Another meaning of the term 'master' is that of an original, such as an original document, from which copies must be made" (López 271).

[6] Coetzee's reading of Dostoevsky is informed by René Girard's concept of triangular desire and Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic/polyphonic nature of Dostoevskian texts, as is clear from "Confession and Double Thoughts," for example (227, 216). Especially the latter excludes the association of any "ultimate truth" with the authorial position or taking a fictional character as the mouthpiece of the author.

[7] Few things reflect this ambiguity more clearly than the English translation history of Dostoevsky's novel, more precisely of its title. As opposed to Garnett's version, *The Possessed*, since 1914 various other translations have come out alternatively with the title *Demons* and (*The*) *Devils*, which are somewhat more literal renditions of the original *Бесы*. Coetzee consistently refers to Dostoevsky's novel as *The Possessed* on the basis of the Garnett translation, for example in "Confession and Double Thoughts" (227). Since he has a reading knowledge of Russian and has taught translation (see Kannemeyer 146, 175) this might reflect a conscious choice pertaining to the ambiguous implications of the original title. For a hermeneutical reading of the obvious loss of agency implied by the trope of possession in the context of sin and confession, see Ricoeur 48-49.

[8] Cf. "My friend, I've lied my whole life. Even when I was telling the truth. . . . I may be lying even now; certainly I'm lying even now" (Dostoevsky, *Devils* 729). A case study of how this feature of the novel can be ignored, and the deathbed scene can be elevated into the position of authorial self-interpretation is to be found in Tatyana Kasatkina's reading, based on the aesthetics and theology of the icon (68-92).

[9] For an overview of early "monologic" readings of Dostoevsky through the author's identification with the voice of one or other of his fictional characters, see Bakhtin 5-46.

[10] For an excellent elaboration of Kristeva's sketchy comments on *Devils* into a general view on the bitter—because limitless—carnival of Dostoevskian fiction, see Bernstein's monograph, especially 20-29.

[11] This attitude of relinquishing authorial power and mastery has been repeatedly pointed out in Coetzee criticism; see for example Head 152; Lawlan 152-53; and López 268. Similarly, commentators often make mention of the transgression inherent in the

writer figure fictional Dostoevsky embodies, for example Kelly 132, and López 264-65. However, to the best of my knowledge, there has been no study published that would examine these aspects of Coetzee's novel in the light of the Dostoevskian intertext and in the consistently Bakhtinian-Kristevan critical context of the carnivalesque, the abject, (textual) hybridity, and the dialogic/polyphonic novel.

[12] Rachel Lawlan notes the relevance of Kristevan thought in the interpretation of this motif, though she does not follow through its implications: "Perversion, Julia Kristeva suggests, is the father's account, *'verse au père—père-version'* (2): Fyodor writes the tyrannical, authoritarian words of the Father, the Superego. Pavel's death by falling threatens him with a loss of self by becoming a 'corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall),' that which he must but cannot 'permanently thrust aside in order to live' (3)" (150). María López, in turn, reads this motif in the context of the anxiety of influence á la Harold Bloom, and takes it back to its Latin original: "'To pervert' is to cause to turn away from what is right, proper, or good; to corrupt; to bring to a bad or worse condition; to debase; to put to a wrong or improper use; to misuse; to interpret incorrectly; to misconstrue or distort. It derives from Latin *pervertere* 'corrupt, turn the wrong way, turn about', from *per-* 'away' and *vertere* 'to turn'. . . . Literary writing is always a perversion in relation to literary predecessors. . . . [T]he writer must always betray his literary masters, his literary parents. . . . But in literary terms, the betrayal of one's father is the greatest homage that can be paid" (269-71).

[13] Cf. Maximov's repartee to fictional Dostoevsky's claim of guardianship: "A man of twenty-one is his own master, is he not?" (34).

[14] About narcissistic identification as a fundamental psychological process behind reading in general, see Alcorn 63-99.

[15] Let me point out that, although Marais reads this place in terms of the complementing notion of exorcism, I find his shift of emphasis less than convincing. Quoting the above-cited excerpt, he comments: "To read in this way is to respond to what the text says despite itself and despite oneself. In fact, to read thus is to exorcize the text, an idea that is implicit in Dostoevsky's charge that Maximov fears the story may strangle him, and which becomes explicit in the latter's reference to 'the spirit of Nechaev' leaping 'from the page' (48)" (Marais, *Secretary* 156). However, rather than envisioning the healing of the possessed (text) associated with exorcism, both motifs Marais refers to lay emphasis on the possibility that as a result of the (Dostoevskian) reading process the reader might become possessed, and this emphasis disappears only because Marais quotes them out of context. Compare "in your present mood the spirit of Nechaev might leap from the page *and take complete possession of you!*" (48, emphasis added) with the above truncated version.

[16] Cf. "As in Coetzee's earlier novels, sexual intercourse here serves as a figure for inspiration" (Marais, *Secretary* 149).

[17] For aspects of the carnivalesque, such as fascination with transgression (of corporeal boundaries, of social hierarchy, of the barrier between life and death), hybridity and the grotesque, see Bakhtin (*Problems* 126; *Rabelais* 90-91). The dead and living bodies joined in intercourse to resurrect the dead by finding a receptive vessel to his still living seed evoke the carnivalesque notion of "pregnant death" in particular, though Bakhtin mentions statuettes of highly pregnant and obviously very old women (*Rabelais* 25).

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REVIEW ESSAY

J. M. Synge, Our Contemporary: Recent Trends in Synge Criticism from Postcolonial to Cross-Cultural Studies

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It has become widely acknowledged by now that John Millington Synge has remained the most enduring playwright of the Irish Dramatic Renaissance which started to flourish at the turn of the last century. In spite of the hostile, even scandalous reception of the first performances of *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903) and *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), after Synge's death in 1909, his drama rapidly won acclaim and has been continuously performed on both the Irish stage and in theatres all over the world ever since. Not long after that date, his work started to attract critical attention as well, and this sustained critical interest has demonstrated the vitality and artistic power of Synge's plays to inspire a diversity of new responses and approaches. Owing to its exceptional richness in nuances, ironies, and ambiguities, during the last couple of decades there has been a kind of critical Renaissance on Synge's dramatic oeuvre. In the past decade alone several book-length studies and essay collections have been published: *Playboys of the Western World: Production Histories* (ed. Adrian Frazier 2004), *The Cambridge Companion to J. M. Synge* (ed. P. J. Mathews 2009), *Synge and His Influences: Centenary Essays from the Synge Summer School* (ed. Patrick Lonergan 2011), *Synge and Edwardian England* (ed. Brian Cliff and Nicholas Grene 2012). In 2013, Anthony Roche published a collection of his own essays, *Synge and the Making of Modern Irish Drama.* Parallel with these, there has been a steady output of articles in literary and theatre journals, as well as in scholarly collections, addressing broader themes and a cluster of other writers beside Synge, such as respective chapters in Christopher Murray's *Twentieth-century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* (1997), Grene's *The Politics of Irish Drama* (1999), and a chapter on Synge in George Cusack's *The Politics of Identity in Irish Drama: W. B. Yeats, Augusta Gregory and J. M. Synge* (2009).

There are clearly identifiable major trends, directions, and changes in Synge criticism written in English during the past twenty-five years or so that have raised new questions about the playwright's canonical work for the theatre. Through shared themes, interests, and cross-references, the trends overlap and intersect with each other, and allow for a cumulative pattern to emerge. Obviously, I am not able to include all the insights that

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appear in the studies on Synge, but will offer a selection of these with an eye for dialogue and links which demonstrate how certain ideas form part of the overall critical output, while also highlighting some controversial points in the criticism which might be important for further research. Given the wide-ranging sweep of the critical material, I will restrict myself to examples from Synge's *The Shadow of the Glen* and *The Playboy of the Western World.*

Postcolonial and gender criticism

David Cairns and Shaun Richards's *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (1988) can be considered as the first book that offers a consistent approach to Irish literature and culture from a postcolonial perspective. The authors focus on the constitution of the colonial subject and its re-imagination in works which represent the negative effects of colonization and decolonization in terms of psychic imbalance and problems stemming from social fragmentation, a strict normative ideology of gender relations, and the policing of female sexuality. They stress that the discussion of these and related themes necessitates a re-reading of masters of the Irish Literary Revival, like Synge. In the chapter "What Do We Hope to Make of Ireland?", Cairns and Richards take a new look at Christy Mahon and Shawn Keogh in *The Playboy*, interpreting the opposition of these characters as indicative of polarized relations to father figures that oppress the colonized Irish represented by the peasant characters in the drama. In their view,

> Shawn is an arrested alter-ego of Christy, a presence which serves to remind the audience of the extent of Christy's psychological growth. As Christy's development consequent upon his "killing" his father becomes clear, Shawn's cry that he is "afeared" of Father Reilly becomes an acknowledgement of the repressive power of the other restrictive power on agency in peasant life; Christy's liberation from the power of the patriarch becoming a model for liberation from that of the priest. (87)

Synge's construction of a pair of contrasting characters, thus, underscores the double colonization of the Irish by both a familial ideology promoting hierarchy and the Catholic Church turned paternalistic in the colonial situation. The play itself suggests that the Irish can liberate themselves from these only through self-transformation. Addressing Synge's portrayal of the father-son relationship in *The Playboy*, Mary C. King focuses on its further, subtle implications with respect to colonial stereotyping. King argues that

by dramatizing "despotic, inadequate 'father figures' paired with emasculated 'sons'" (Christy is also such a son-character up until the end of the play), Synge's "pairing strips of its veneer Arnold's characterization of the Saxon as imperial master and the feminized Celt as merely subaltern, revealing its repressive agenda" (86).

Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland*, published in 1995, a monumental work and a thrilling read drawing on insights of postcolonialism, generated a fervent critical debate, largely because of the ways in which the author uses these insights. Notwithstanding the enormous amount of knowledge about Irish culture and references to prevailing ideologies and images of decolonizing Ireland, by now, parts of the book seem to be dated for lack of a consistent theoretical underpinning which would better explain the inclusion of certain details. In the chapter on *The Playboy*, Kiberd argues that Christy's construction by the Mayo community in a kind of "Cuchulanoid heroism" is "mischievously debunk[ed]" by Synge (183). He interprets the protagonist's journey in the play as a parody of nationalist values, which endorse the imaginary at the expense of the real. Discussing the change in Christy (and the play itself) in terms of postcolonial theory, Kiberd finds that the play's "tripartite structure" corresponds "very neatly with Frantz Fanon's dialectic of decolonization, from occupation, through nationalism, to liberation" (184). Christy is first a subordinated ("occupied") being who proceeds to "active self-reflection in the mirror during the second act" (185)—the physical mirror he looks into and the mirror the community's attitude provides for him—and then liberates himself from the views and desires imposed on him by others. Kiberd's somewhat mechanical interpretation has been criticized by several scholars, most notably by Grene. In Grene's view, "[t]he action of *The Playboy* hardly works with such a clear progressive dialectic or with such a politically engaged commitment as Kiberd's analysis implies[,] . . . [and] the play's heavily ironic mode of representation . . . allows no attitude, no emotion or idea to go unchallenged" (*Politics* 92-93). It is the subtle role of irony in Synge's work that Murray also emphasizes. He claims that "[in] so far as Synge was in conflict with himself, his class, his religion, and aspects of Irish life he found detestable, he struggled to reconcile what he termed (in the preface to the *Playboy*), 'reality' and 'joy'. To do so he had to find a style. That style was founded on ironic detachment" (*Twentieth-century Irish Drama* 65). More recently, in a subchapter on Synge in *Irony and Identity in Modern Irish Drama* (2006), Ondřej Pilný also explores a range of often double-edged

ironies in Synge's plays, which thoroughly complicate the issue of national, as well as individual identity (36-67).

The critical discourses of postcolonialism and feminism have often been found relevant in conjunction with each other, given that, as Geraldine Moane contends, "colonialism itself is a gendered process. In a colonial context, violence, political exclusion, economic exploitation, sexual exploitation, control of culture and divide and conquer are patterned differently for men and for women. Furthermore, colonialism and patriarchy reinforce each other as systems of domination" (33). Concerning the issue of individual needs in an oppressive environment, Cairns and Richards pay due attention to the female protagonists, Nora Burke, Pegeen Mike, and the Widow Quin in *The Shadow of the Glen* and *The Playboy* as representatives of the desire for a freer existence openly expressed by their sexuality. Through these characters Synge, the authors suggest, challenges the traditional social roles ascribed to women by nationalist ideology, and exposes the denial and displacement of individual desire as damaging for the growth of subjectivity in a colonized society (Cairns and Richards 87). Synge's drama, seen in this light, reveals that rigid nationalist-patriarchal norms disable self-realization and revolutionary acts that would pertain to the cultural decolonization of Ireland. From a similar vantage point, the feminist analysis of Gail Finney explores the reasons why Pegeen welcomes Christy so immediately and warmly in Act 1. As soon as Christy's tale is told, she identifies with him, trying to achieve self-realization through a man "who in killing his father has accomplished what she too wants metaphorically to do," and projects onto Christy "characteristics that she would like to possess herself" (Finney 110). However, her heroization of Christy lasts only as long as he and his wonderful stories about an enviable but sufficiently remote deed remain acceptable within the bounds of patriarchy, which seems to have an uncontestable power over her; she is unable to opt out of its value system.

Seamus Deane has likewise observed that in the world of dual colonization represented by Synge, women occupy the lowest position despite their individual potential to voice and realize their needs: the only thing they can do is to serve the establishment of male freedom. For Deane, Pegeen's strength is taking her nowhere: "The rather stale punning of the Pegeen (Pagan)—Christy (Christian) names defines her status as that of someone who is ultimately replaced, who becomes historically anachronistic with the arrival of the new redeemer figure" (143). Was she ever meant to function as someone of such communal significance?—a reader of Deane's

argument might well ask. Or should she be compared to pagan warrior women? Synge probably did not have this comparison in mind. On the whole, Deane continues, she is "no more than a catalyst for Christy's liberation," while the play "celebrates the language of heroic solitude over that of unheroic companionship. Women can at best speak only the latter" (143-44).

Moreover, Synge's work carries an implied critique of the gender ideology of Irish nationalism which, together with the public reaction to his critical stance, is an important concern for postcolonial interpretations. Irish nationalism, similarly to other anti-colonial movements, cherished and idealized the notion of manliness (and masculine prowess), elevating it into a patriotic ideal to be followed even at the cost of life. The nationalist ideal of manliness and the cultural practices linked to it entailed a distorting interference in the normative gender politics of Irish society. Writing about nationalism and gender (especially images of male heroism) in Irish drama, Susan Cannon Harris scrutinizes a crucial medical aspect of colonialist ideology and the reaction of Irish nationalism to it. In early twentieth-century Britain, the critic argues, "medical science is so successful in defining, constructing, and controlling the human body, [that] it becomes a phenomenally effective means of enforcing political and social control" (Harris 12). Consequently, Harris continues, medicine and the eugenist ideas based on it enter into a "symbiotic relationship" with colonial administration (13), and they together construct "the colonial [male] subject as subhuman" (14). Harris re-examines the initial hostile reaction to *The Playboy* in view of the repercussions of the eugenist movement in Ireland, explaining the anti-*Playboy* hysteria as rooted in the extreme nationalist opinion that the play showed complicity with the imperial diagnosis that the Irish male has a damaged, unhealthy body. The ambition to counteract colonialist stereotyping of the Irish as unhealthy (therefore abject and inferior) blinded the contemporary nationalist audience (most of whom were men eager to see political ideas on the stage) to the fact that what the play critiqued was the unhealthy and damaging effects of colonialism itself. Inadvertently, their rage against *The Playboy* confirmed the theory about the unhealthiness of the Irish male constructed as part of the very imperialist ideology they were opposing. According to Harris's conclusion, the play demonstrates that "the power of eugenics is built on a lie," and operates "as a tool that creates the reality it pretends to describe" (116).

The Shadow has also been revisited by several scholars, mostly addressing the question whether the protagonist, Nora Burke's departure

from her husband's house with the Tramp—the main focus of the early nationalist criticism of the play—liberates her from the disabling bonds of patriarchy or not. Roche stresses that by choosing life in nature Nora does not manage to emancipate herself in this way, since for her there is no alternative to patriarchy, either in the real or in the utopian world of nature described by the Tramp so eloquently.

> When the scene is viewed without the language and its seductions, . . . the resolution of the play becomes more suspect. Ironically, the woman is seen to be passed from one male figure who has definitively rejected her to another who now relinquishes his claim until a third steps in and takes her on. . . . Renewed attention to the language of Synge's conclusion shows the extent to which the Tramp's language takes over, telling Nora over and over what she'll be saying and what she'll be hearing. . . . [F]or the most part she is silenced. . . . ("Woman on the Threshold" 150)

On the side of the Tramp, it seems that Nora will not be free but continue to live under another form of male control. Like Deane's analysis of the position of Pegeen, Roche's discussion of Nora suggests that despite the fact that Synge's female characters express sexual and human needs, they hope and seek for self-fulfillment in vain. The patriarchal ideology of nationalism created an artificial gap between the ideal and the real, making equal male-female relations impossible.

The intertwining of nationalism and gender in Synge also forms the subject of Cusack's and Rob Doggett's respective analyses of *The Shadow*. Unlike Roche, Cusack is quite hopeful about Nora's fate claiming that Synge "liberates Nora's femininity and sexuality, thereby enabling her to form a complete identity" (141). It could be argued that with this he reads more into Nora's personal development than the ending of the play would warrant. Cusack is right, however, in highlighting that "this version of Irish womanhood"—through the embodiment of unrealized desires—"directly contradicts the one favored by Gaelic nationalism," and implicitly critiques the nationalist idealization of femininity (144). Nora's figure in this discussion, however, tends to assume political dimensions, and she appears to be a mere cipher: "By creating a feminine identity that more accurately represented Irish womanhood and presenting it in contrast to the Victorian model of domestic security, Synge sought to challenge what he saw as a self-defeating anachronism in Gaelic nationalist philosophy" (Cusack 144). Doggett also stresses the transgressive spirit of Nora's character, which

rejects the domestic values upheld by the fundamentally patriarchal ideology of Irish nationalism. Yet Nora is denied agency, which fact Doggett rightly examines in the context of "material conditions in late nineteenth-century rural Ireland[,]" where "economic factors worked . . . to ensure that the only monetarily secure space for the rural woman was the domestic space" (1019). Doggett's study carries considerable novelty, which, however, also makes it problematic to some extent. For Synge, Doggett argues, "the peasant female repeatedly functions as a symbolic connection with a traditional, primitive Irish world that remains irretrievably consigned to the past," therefore Nora performs "Synge's own sense of disconnection, the modern Irish national artist forever displaced from an authentic national past" (1025). In this sense, Nora symbolizes (the playwright's) desire to renew the national culture and communal life, but her lack of agency represents the tragic unfeasibility of this goal. As part of his conclusion, Doggett reveals another kind of affinity between the artist and his creation: "The peasant female thus functions for Synge as one tragic certainty in a rapidly changing world, a blank page upon which Synge writes his own tireless longing for an impossible order" (1030). By foregrounding the author's nostalgic desire for a no longer accessible past and downplaying the critical and subversive potential of his portrayal of the female protagonist, this approach to the intersection of gender and nationalism in *The Shadow* is at least as contentious as Cusack's over-politicizing of Nora's character.

Some postcolonial studies on Synge address his attitude to and relationship with rural Irish people as a basis of his dramatic representations of life in the Irish countryside, west or east. The cultural nationalist, revivalist discourse of which Synge was unquestionably a representative regarded the people living in the West of Ireland as iconic figures who, supposedly being noble and dignified, embodied the opposite of colonial stereotypes. Synge spent several months on the far-west Aran Islands, immersing himself in the culture of the community he found there. Joseph Devlin argues that Synge formed his rural characters avoiding the extremities of the dominant political nationalist discourse. The playwright knew, Devlin continues, that the ideological fantasies of nationalism as a "totalizing discourse" tended to mask the deeper realities of Irish life (374). Synge used his own experiences and imagination when constructing dramatic characters and their relationships, rooted in a "complex and uncompromising . . . personal vision of the Irish peasantry" (Devlin 383). Paul Murphy's 2008 book, *Hegemony and Fantasy in Irish Drama*, chooses a different path, welding a postcolonial and psychoanalytical approach with

Marxist theory. Relying on Lacan, the author's point of departure is that the peasant and the woman, "classed and gendered subalterns," functioned at that time as fantasy-objects and "as the constitutive principle of national ideology in terms of their manifestation of 'essential' national character" (Murphy 7). Furthermore, in Murphy's interpretation, "the conflict over Synge's *Playboy* would effectively signal the end of the Anglo-Irish bid for hegemony against the rise of Irish Ireland counter-hegemony" (7). *The Shadow*, according to Murphy, contains "the hallmark criticism of Catholic womanhood," with an assault on "Catholic gender ideology" through Nora, who is "forced to accept a life on the roads with the Tramp rather than remain in a loveless marriage with her husband Dan Burke" (137). It is doubtful, however, that "Catholic womanhood" itself is critiqued in the play, and Murphy's class-based analysis proves to be somewhat reductive when set against the playwright's prose work and letters, as well as his nuanced, subtly ironic strategies of character portrayal.

The Cambridge Companion to J. M. Synge (2009) includes an essay which summarizes crucial postcolonial traits in the playwright's oeuvre. The author, C. L. Innes, confirms the writer's position as "postcolonial," and Synge himself as an artist participating in the "anti-colonial" struggle, since his achievement contributed to the decolonization of the mind (118). Central to the chapter, Innes revisits and re-evaluates the range of views on Synge's portrayal of the Irish peasant. She observes that questions of authenticity and realistic representation as aspects of Synge's "anthropological strategies" continued to be highly controversial issues for many decades, and by now have become a prominent concern in studying Synge as an Irish postcolonial author. According to Innes, "Synge's writings offer a series of evolving responses to these questions" (119), which implies that the writer never remained content with one-sided, idealized, or essentialized images of rural traditions in his representation of Irish peasants and their world. Roche also notes that the "authenticity" debate "has bedevilled the perception of Synge in Ireland ever since [the writer's time]." In Roche's view, what this debate overlooks "is that [Synge's] plays are not an unmediated reflection of social reality but a self-consciously constructed dramatic artefact" (*Synge and the Making* 5).

Discourses of modernism

From about the eve of the new millennium, there has been a marked shift in the theoretical considerations of Synge's drama. More attention has been paid to the ways in which his plays both reflect and contest the

archaizing artistic directions of the Irish Literary Revival, and how they become aligned with a more experimental tendency of modernism. In *The Cambridge Companion to J. M. Synge*, Gregory Dobbins argues that there is a duality in Synge's work: it belongs to the Revival movement, but takes a critical position to it at the same time. Commenting on the general scene, Dobbins discusses the "ambiguous relation the Revival had to modernism," and emphasizes that "Irish modernism, after all, emerged partly in response to the conventions of the Revival" (133). Furthermore, as Dobbins claims, the most outstanding revivalist authors, Yeats and Synge in particular, have demonstrated that there is no strict barrier between Revivalism and modernism as they both, in their respective ways, developed modernist techniques in their drama. While Yeats was influenced by the European avant-garde and medieval Japanese theatre, Synge placed his plays in the archaic world of the past using the mode of satire or travesty at the same time, thus reversing the main feature of the revivalist practice. By this reversal, Dobbins contends, "Synge's writing implicitly calls for something new which will negate the fetishisation of the past; in doing so, it anticipates the more radical modernist positions that would follow" (137). The outsider figures in Synge, according to Dobbins, represent "alternative forms of aesthetic labour not marked by alienation," and anticipate the characters of Flann O'Brien and Samuel Beckett's modernist prose of the 1930s by offering recalcitrance against the "stifling" values, rules, and expectations of "postcolonial modernity" (144). Similarly, in an article Mark Phelan elaborates on the appeal of primitivism, rural life, folklore, and traditions to Synge and Yeats, and claims that for these writers it was "a means of escape from the vicissitudes of modernity, industrialization, 'civilization'—all of which were axiomatically associated with Anglicization" (112). Nevertheless, Phelan adds, in his later work Synge rejected the "revivalist strategy of representing the peasant" because it tended to mitigate the existing undercurrent of violence in Irish rural life, manifest at fairs, in faction fighting, and in other forms of social encounter, and purged his writing of the vestiges of any romanticizing attitude to primitivism (113).

Grene has identified the subversive character of Synge's style in *The Playboy* as an important manifestation of the playwright's modernism. The drama, Grene contends, juxtaposes as well as blends conflicting representational modes undercutting realism with "fantastic theatricality" (*Politics* 79), which continues to upset audience expectations into our time. Moreover, *The Playboy* deploys the carnivalesque to complicate its playing "comic games with the tragic legend of Oedipus" in an unstable, modernist

style (Grene, *Politics* 95). Other scholars have also discussed the language of Synge's drama as the primary locus of his modernism. Cusack argues that the writer was a catalyst for change in the "Abbey's institutional philosophy" from "reaching out to the nationalist community" (as it was so evident in the production of *Kathleen ní Houlihan*) to embracing "artistic autonomy" (119). Synge, Cusack suggests, entered the national theatre scene as a young modernist, with his own beliefs about the self-disciplined nature of art and the artist. Exploring another aspect of Synge's language, Alex Davis highlights that in contrast with the mannerisms dominating some English decadent writing, Synge's style is highly complex in its modernist effects, balancing the features of rural Irish people's speech as observed by Synge with those of an artistically created textual construction (43-44). King has gone so far as to claim that Synge's dramatic use of language comes close to postmodern strategies: "Capitalizing on and ironizing ideologies of peasant purity and 'poetry talk,' the plays foreground the socially mediated nature of what passes for eternal truth" (81).

Roche has also contributed to the critical debate on Synge and modernism. He discusses affinities between the arch modernist Joyce and Synge, and places Synge on a par with Joyce as they both deploy modernist techniques. Reflecting on the re-construction of the iconographic "Mother Ireland" character in Yeats, Gregory, Joyce, and Synge, Roche states that "for Joyce as for Synge," she appears as "a fertile, sexually active woman in her prime" (*Synge and the Making* 120). He most probably thinks of Molly Bloom, Nora Burke, or the Widow Quin, through whom the modernist tendency to privilege the body over the mind is represented. The old woman in the first chapter of *Ulysses* seems to have been conceived, Roche contends, "under the sign of Yeats and Gregory," as she resembles Kathleen ní Houlihan, mythologized in the text through the images "silk of the kine and poor old woman" (Joyce qtd. in Roche 121). Contrasted with her, "the Molly Bloom who gets the novel's final chapter and word is under the sign of Synge" (Roche, *Synge and the Making* 121), as she is a woman interested in the body for its own sake, therefore very different from the idealized and symbolic version of the Kathleen/Mother Ireland figure. Anne Fogarty offers another extensive study of Syngean intertexts in the work of the modernist Joyce, claiming that the two writers cannot be seen as "merely oppositional" (225). In her view, the links between them "may most fruitfully be explicated through the metaphors suggested by their texts" (226). According to Fogarty, "Joyce gleefully baited his readership" with the word "shift"—the use of which in *The Playboy* led to the well-known

fierce scandals during the play's first performances—making it a "leitmotif" in the "Penelope" chapter of *Ulysses*, where "'shift' becomes a signifier to denote the complications of female desire and the perspectives of the Other" (237-38). The Joycean use of "shift" in this way throws a new light on Synge's unorthodox use of the same word as a metaphor reflecting Christy Mahon's unconventional view of Irish womanhood, as well as Synge's modernist concern with the body.

Joseph Valente's *The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture, 1880-1922*, a significant contribution to gender and masculinity studies in relation to Ireland, also offers several insights into the modernist character of Synge's plays. Like Dobbins and Roche, Valente also underscores that Synge was both revivalist and modernist. However, he goes beyond them when analyzing the demythologizing ways in which the playwright recreated the female icon and the central male hero of the Revival, and his analysis reveals further affinities in Synge's and Joyce's Mother Ireland figures. Writing about *The Shadow* under the suggestive subchapter title "Sovereignty Spoofs," Valente develops recents discussions of the play in terms of an antidote to Yeats's and Gregory's drama *Kathleen ni Houlihan* further, arguing that Synge's is a Sovereignty play too, but with a parodic turn on the female Sovereignty character. The focal point of the argument is the "double-woman motif" as present in both plays, which means that "the iconic Woman/Nation can attain conceptual and political consistency only through a dialectical negation of actual women" (Valente 123). Valente finds Lacan's famous proclamation that "Woman does not exist" relevant to Synge's play: Nora is but "a fantasy effect of patriarchal nationalism" (123). Synge thus evokes the "double woman" motif but inverts it: his Nora does not become liberated and rejuvenated like Kathleen but has to face the sure process of untimely aging, exemplified by one of her old friends now toothless and homeless, once she is out of her husband's house. Valente also explores the male characters' behavior towards Nora, as well as their manliness. Compared with earlier scholarly examinations which contrast Dan Burke and Michael Dara with the Tramp, a further novelty in Valente's argument lies in that he pays so far unparalleled attention to the figure of the dead Patch Darcy. Valente re-evaluates Patch as a "messianic," spiritualized figure whose last words in life were heard by the Tramp, and with whom the Tramp identifies performatively (126). The two male couples, the Dan-Michael pair and the Patch-Tramp pair, represent seemingly oppositional yet similarly exploitative ways of the patriarchal treatment of Nora: the imperialist and the nationalist, dispossessing her on

the one hand, and idealizing her on the other. She is "forced to leave with the Tramp," who calls her a lady and uses a courtly rhetoric to convince her that living in nature by his side will be wonderful (Valente 127). Nora's individual female desires, including sexual fulfillment, are ignored, she becomes an iconic figure "rescued" by an idealizing discourse but not liberated in reality. Valente interprets this inverted and parodic treatment of revivalist image-making as the hallmark of Synge's modernism, which has ensured the lasting artistic power of the playwright's work and its entry into the modernist canon, denied to his contemporaries, like Padraic Colum, Alice Milligan, Edward Martyn, or even Augusta Gregory (128-29). Valente's grouping Gregory with lesser playwrights is, however, questionable. She did create a profoundly revised Sovereignty character in the eponymous protagonist of her myth-based and autobiographically inspired play *Grania* (1911), a female character who gains agency and chooses her own path in life at the end, albeit at the expense of emotional loss. Also, Gregory's comedy, *Spreading the News* (1904), is highly parodic of the double-edged power of storytelling, a major technique of Revival literature.

Production histories and performance studies

Besides the ongoing scholarly work that inquires into the nature of Synge's modernism (even postmodernism), there has been an increasing critical interest in the experimental and intercultural aspects of performing his drama on stage. Research in this field runs parallel with recent developments in Irish cultural studies, according to which modern Irish culture has a strong performative element. As theatre specialist Lib Taylor contends, "performativity is fundamental to theatre [where] the term implies a self-aware theatricality and indicates a theatrical event which foregrounds the representational functioning of the staged event. What most significantly marks this definition of performativity is its . . . deliberate manipulation of citation and reiteration" (164-65). Irish theatre has always been a site of addressing questions of national and cultural identity through acts which repeat certain patterns but also present shifts and variations on these to undermine fixities and expectations concerning behavior and individual subjectivity, as well as offer new alternatives. In theatre criticism, "[t]heatre-as-performance gained more attention in Ireland from the mid- to late 1990s" (Walsh and Brady 4), and this tendency underpins discussions of the contemporary revivals of the classics, among which Synge's dramatic oeuvre holds a particularly significant place.

In the first group of the essays collected under the title *Playboys of the Western World: Production Histories*, early productions of Synge's masterpiece are analyzed. While reaching back in time, these scholarly reflections on various aspects of the performance history of the play also map new directions for analysis. Writing about the trajectory of Synge's play in America, John P. Harrington claims that historical investigations lead one to the question how the play should be performed in the future. In his opinion, the discipline of Performance Studies may have an increasingly important role in this regard, as "[r]econstruction around the integral performative qualities of Christy and his onstage audience could help create productions conceptualized on performance rather than Irish politics, Irish lyricism, or Irish exoticism" (Harrington 58). The volume also contains a roundtable discussion with Garry Hynes, followed by eight responses to her direction of the play in 2004, known as the Druid *Playboy*. Some of these responses highlight features of the production resonant with Harrington's ideas about the possibility to move away from the sense of obligation that a new production should necessarily reflect the original context of the play. Frazier highly appreciates Cillian Murphy's "bravura" performance offering a "variety of picturesque moments along the self-fashioning pilgrimage of Christy" ("Postmodern Paddywhackery" 120). As for the style of the whole production, Frazier highlights other aspects of how performativity works: "the two most attractive things about the ensemble's playing are the flamboyant physicality of the movement and the deliberately un-rhythmical way of saying Synge's lines" ("Postmodern Paddywhackery" 122). Frazier also considers the Druid *Playboy* in the context of Hynes's broader work and concludes that her experience of directing contemporary playwrights influenced by Synge, such as John B. Keane, Marina Carr, and Martin McDonagh, has significantly contributed to her revising her approach to Synge in 2004 ("Postmodern Paddywhackery" 123-24). Paige Reynolds stresses the role of "visual jokes" in Hynes's production of *The Playboy*, which underscore oppositions (168). By way of an example, she focuses in some detail on the mini-scene when Sarah tries on Christy's boots, indicating "that she wishes to step into a role that might permit her the opportunities and freedoms that allowed Christy to kill his father, to set out in the wide world, and to escape the burdens of paternity and patriarchy." What the audience can see here, "highlighted with startling clarity," Reynolds continues, is the staging of "the small compensations offered by imagination to the women of Mayo" (171). This mode of visualizing the use of imagination can be seen in some contemporary plays by women as well,

for instance, in the female protagonists' carnivalesque role-playing against an oppressive Dublin working class milieu and its gender inequalities as represented by Paula Meehan's drama, *Mrs Sweeney* (1997). The 2004 Druid *Playboy* has proven that Synge is unquestionably our contemporary, and future productions of his masterpiece have to take into account ongoing changes within the theatre world rather than make attempts at conforming to ideals of the past.

The remarkably far-reaching recent journey of *The Playboy* in international theatres can be viewed in the light of Grene's words: "this is not a play that is dependent on its original context for success, and [its] clichéd ways of representation may be transcended by vital and imaginative re-creations" ("Synge in Performance" 159). Contemporary Irish productions, too, in varying degrees, transpose the plot of the play to other social milieux and reconfigure the protagonist's strife for freedom and self-definition. In an article aptly titled "Re-Location and Re-Locution: Adapting Synge," Melissa Sihra discusses adaptations of *The Playboy* in contemporary Ireland and faraway postcolonial countries. Most importantly for the present paper, she focuses at length on Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle's version of *The Playboy*, produced in 2007 by the Abbey Theatre to celebrate the centenary of the premiere of this classic. The production was a quintessentially intercultural venture, authored by a Nigerian living in Ireland and an Irish writer, set in a contemporary west Dublin pub where the publican is the head of a gang. Christy is a "Nigerian immigrant [called] Christopher Malomo—polite, well-educated, looking for work," which makes him and the additional theme of the play "deeply politicized" in the context of the diverse Irish attitudes to immigration (Sihra 229). In accordance, the non-mainstream character of Synge's language in the original is replaced by "a new urban register and dialect," Sihra emphasizes (229). Murray claims that this version, although not emphatically, foregrounds the issue of race, yet also remains true to Synge's subversive attack on and critique of "Irish moral complacency" ("Beyond the Passion Machine" 117). The Malomos, son and father, "stand out in the play in contrast to the skittish and deceitful Irish," and Pegeen loses a man who "represents the new Nigerian immigrant, who is less a threat than many Irish nationals may think" (Murray, "Beyond the Passion Machine" 114, 117). Brian Singleton looks at the performance from the angle of gender and masculinity, drawing the conclusion that: "[w]here this rewriting and its production differ is that it challenges the nativism inherent in the nationalist discourse, presenting vestiges of hegemonic masculinity" among the Irish

male characters (43). On the whole, the production had considerable success with Irish audiences who, by that time, had become well aware of, and perhaps grown tolerant and considerate of the phenomenon of multiculturalism in Ireland and the social tensions it might bring to the surface.

Cross-cultural studies

Coinciding with the completion of the present review article, the 2015 spring issue of the *Irish University Review*, guest edited in honor of Murray by Irish drama scholars Csilla Bertha and Cathy Leeney, contains an essay by Roche, who addresses a subject never dealt with before at such length and in such depth. An absolutely pioneer writing in the developing field of cross-cultural studies of Irish theatre, Roche's essay is titled "'Mirror up to Nation': Synge and Shakespeare," the first half of which echoes the title of Murray's seminal guide, *Twentieth-century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation*. Scant material is available on the playwright's engagement with Shakespeare, therefore Roche's contextualization of the data he collected in most erudite and sophisticated ways to achieve a coherent interpretation of the two writers' artistic dialogue is remarkable. Roche draws extensively on the Synge manuscripts held by Trinity College, in particular on Synge's notes taken when he, as a Trinity student, attended the lectures of Professor Edward Dowden on Shakespeare. Analyzing the notes and other sporadic remarks in letters or jottings by Synge, Roche claims that the Irish writer considered Shakespeare a realist whose work was, concurrently, reaching out to the land of fancy, much like his own, often called fantastic or "transfigured" realism by critics (see King 81). Thus, according to Roche, "an unvoiced yet clear parallel" can be seen between the two playwrights ("Synge and Shakespeare" 16-17), which he scrutinizes in the field of generic instability, for instance. *The Playboy*, he suggests, bears kinship to Shakespeare's problem comedies, such as *The Merchant of Venice*, which is supported by Synge's own reference to Shylock as both a comic and a tragic character in his letter to the *Irish Times* written after the tempestuous first night of his play (Roche, "Synge and Shakespeare" 19).

By way of another cross-cultural aspect of Synge criticism, in recent years, several scholars have highlighted Synge's connection with twentieth-century non-Irish modernists and his influence on or artistic dialogue with Irish playwrights of the postmodern era. The pivotal role of Ibsen in the making of modern Irish theatre has been noted by numerous critics across the past decades. Ibsen's works, *A Doll's House* especially, has enjoyed

productions in Dublin since the early twentieth century. In her *Ibsen and the Irish Revival*, Irina Ruppo Malone takes a fresh look at Ibsen's influence on *The Shadow*. While she acknowledges that Nora is reminiscent of Ibsen's Nora because of her name and desire for individual autonomy and self-fulfillment, Ruppo Malone stresses that Synge was no imitator of Ibsen. Among the differences, she claims, the most obvious one is that "Synge's Nora . . . is thrown out of her house" (Ruppo Malone 34). Importantly, Ruppo Malone suggests that through the Ibsenian parallel Synge managed to "establish a form of communication between the peasant way of life and that of the upper classes" (35), and challenge "the widely accepted belief in clear distinctions between the world of Irish peasantry and that of the city" (36). This connection with Ibsen offered, it seems, another way for Synge to undermine the essentialist idea that the Irish peasant was pure and completely immune from the demoralizing tendencies of modern urban ways of life.

In "Synge and Edwardian Theatre," Frazier examines Synge's links with the English theatre world of his time. His point of departure is that in the relevant reference literature Edwardian theatre is "primarily understood to be the theatre of London in the first decade of the twentieth century, a vast entertainment industry in which productions of the plays of Synge played only a tiny part" (46). Although they got to the stages of the metropolis, Synge's plays were considered very different from what the London audience was used to and favored. The influential contemporary critic, Max Beerbohm commented on Synge's plays as "exotic, and therefore charming," comparable to the productions brought over from Africa, meaning "[r]ather like a day [spent] at the zoo" for most of the audience (qtd. in Frazier, "Synge and Edwardian Theatre" 54). Although having only a marginal position in Edwardian theatre, nowadays, a century later, most of Edwardian drama can be seen as museum pieces having only documentary value, while Synge's work is alive and thriving on the world stage.

Probing into the reception of Synge in Germany, Roche claims that Brecht was an admirer of Synge's work, and it is a significant cultural fact that

> the last full Berliner Ensemble production supervised by Brecht . . . on 14 August 1956 was an adaptation from a translation by Peter Hacks of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, with Brecht's daughter Barbara in the role of Pegeen Mike. . . . He chose Synge's play as one of four classics from the

> world repertoire deliberately to strengthen the Berliner Ensemble in the area of what he called strong or serious comedy . . . (*Synge and the Making* 64)

This remark provides further evidence that Synge's masterpiece is a close relative of Shakespeare's problem comedies.

Among the Irish playwrights of the postmodern era, it is undoubtedly the London-based McDonagh whose work several critics find reminiscent of Synge on account of the numerous parallels between their plays. Roche's analysis is illuminating about the core aspect of these similarities, a unique overlapping of the modern with the postmodern. Although set apart by almost a hundred years, both playwrights received criticism for "devising" rather than authentically and realistically representing Ireland in the early and the late 1900s, respectively. Their strategy of devising culminates in a "liberating play with stereotypes," while "the area where Synge and McDonagh most disturbingly replicate and resemble each other, is in the proliferation and foregrounding of violence, both verbal and physical" (Roche, *Synge and the Making* 206-07). In view of these links, manifest in the productions of the West of Ireland Druid Theatre working under director Hynes, "it is now impossible to consider the plays of J. M. Synge without reference to those of Martin McDonagh (and vice-versa)" (Roche, *Synge and the Making* 213). According to Richards, "only audiences able to read 'across' the dysfunctionality of McDonagh and Synge's characters are able to mobilize readings of the former's plays as social critique" (259-60). Thus, only an intimate understanding of the non-imitative and provocative approach in Synge to the representation of rural life in his own time and society can result in a sound estimation of McDonagh's place among the playwrights of contemporary Ireland. Strangely, however, given the uncommon popularity of McDonagh, this artistic relationship is viewed in an almost reversed way by some theatre people who have come to know about Synge through McDonagh. To paraphrase Joyce's Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses*, who paraphrased Yeats in the "Scylla and Charybdis" chapter when saying that Shakespeare is "[t]he chap that writes like Synge" (qtd. in Roche, "Synge and Shakespeare" 126), with a bit of exaggeration one might even hear it said nowadays that Synge is the chap who writes like McDonagh.

Conclusion

Assessing a range of ideas carefully argued and at times controversial in recent Synge criticism, the conclusion can be drawn that the field is

developing towards a more integrative phase which involves a re-consideration of Synge's work in the wider context of European culture and in that of a fast-changing contemporary Ireland and its theatre world. Synge has proven to be one of the few twentieth-century Irish playwrights whose oeuvre challenges very different critics to discover multiple resonances with a range of theories and allows for many-sided explorations. He is seen as fully European and also "our contemporary" through his lasting influence and the continuing power of his oeuvre to invite new approaches both in criticism and in the staging of the plays (see Lonergan 2). In view of Synge's increasing importance for Irish theatre culture, as well as for international audiences, the trajectory of recent Synge criticism tends to reflect the changes within the discipline of Irish Studies itself. From examining the effects of colonialism on gendered and classed Irish identities as they have shaped the nation's literature and culture, Irish Studies by now has progressed to become interdisciplinary and more engaged with the present than earlier (even though the complex relationship between the past and the present remains a concern), facing the multiplicity of questions that a fast-changing world poses. The new findings and insights offered by Synge Studies are thought-provoking markers of, as well as catalysts for these transformations.

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REVIEWS

Richard Rorty's Authoritarian Rhetoric

Scott M. Campbell

Csató, Péter. *Antipodean Dialogues: Richard Rorty and the Discursive Authority of Conversational Philosophy.* Debrecen: Debrecen UP, 2013. 204 pages. ISBN 9789633183861. Pb. Npr.

Pragmatism can be infuriating. I learned this during my third year as an undergraduate student at the University of Virginia, when I took a course called *Hegel to Derrida*, taught by Professor Richard Rorty. One student, who had clearly studied some Descartes, asked, "What if we are brains in vats?", to which Rorty responded, "Who cares?" He was an excellent professor, holding informative lectures and leading engaging class discussions, and once a week, we piled into his office in groups of twenty and talked to him for an hour. It was an incredible opportunity to have that kind of access to a world-renowned philosopher. Still, pragmatism can be infuriating, because it gives its practitioners the license to say, "Who cares?". What one may consider a deeply important and thought-provoking philosophical question could be, for the pragmatist, simply not an issue we need to think about.

What kinds of questions should we care about then? This inquest implies a standard of evaluation, but Rorty does not countenance predetermined standards, so how can he convince someone else that an issue is important without appealing to a standard? We find an answer to that question in Péter Csató's *Antipodean Dialogues*, a compelling and timely book on the conversational dimension of Rorty's philosophy. Csató covers a wide range of Rorty's published works, from early to late, in an attempt to describe the rhetorical strategies at play in the philosopher's writings. What is important in Rorty's pragmatism is not so much the content of his ideas but the way he presents those ideas, namely, as an invitation to engage in conversation.

After introducing the topic, Csató's book divides into four main chapters before concluding. The first chapter describes the way in which Rorty translates philosophical problems into his own pragmatic language. This practice serves to make those problems available to a wider, non-philosophical audience, but by putting philosophical issues into his own language, Rorty can deal with them on his own terms. The second chapter

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takes up Rorty's ironism. For Rorty, irony is the idea that no language can definitively describe reality. Ironists speak indirectly, aware that the words they use do not constitute a final or definitive vocabulary. In the third chapter, Csató takes up the relationship between the work of Rorty and Derrida, and finds there an ambiguity. Rorty praises deconstruction as a kind of private irony, that is, an opportunity to disrupt normal ways of thinking and develop new ideas, new metaphors, and thus whole new ways of speaking and writing. But then Rorty also normalizes the language of deconstruction into his own project of trying to disabuse his reader of any kind of metaphysical or essentialist thinking. The fourth chapter makes a similar point about religious faith. Rorty sees no place for faith in public discourse. Nonetheless, he views it as a legitimate form of private self-fashioning. He takes a critical attitude toward religion, which is fundamentally metaphysical and foundationalist, an attempt to view the world as being governed by something other than time and chance. But after excluding religion from the public sphere, Rorty then brings it back, according to Csató, by showing how important religious faith can be to believers personally by giving their lives meaning and purpose. Csató contends that by finding religion privately acceptable, Rorty makes it politically viable, a set of social practices that, in addition to making life more meaningful, can also be used to solve social problems.

Csató's book is exploring a basic tension in Rorty's philosophy, the tension between normal and abnormal discourse. Rorty championed original, creative, and imaginative (abnormal) thought. He applauds writers who develop innovative terms, expressions, and metaphors that completely change the way we talk. The ironist develops new ways of thinking, speaking, and writing. Rorty saw Heidegger, Derrida, and others as engaging in this kind of abnormal discourse, ways of speaking that defy accepted norms. But, at the same time that Rorty lauds these original thinkers for their abnormality, he also has a political agenda that depends on the cultivation of solidarity. Indeed, Rorty needs consensus in order to retain some notion of truth. For Rorty, of course, truth is not coherence with reality, but rather the forging of agreement. It is this basic tension in Rorty's work, between the normal and the abnormal, between consensus and innovation, that Csató is exploring in his book, and it makes for engaging and interesting reading.

He goes further than this, however, in order to make the perhaps surprising claim that Rorty's normalizing tendencies bespeak something more insidious than just a tension in his work. Csató sees Rorty's

normalizing as "authoritarian strategies" which are, he says, "a means of discursive control" (19). This is the most important contribution that Csató makes to the secondary literature on Rorty, and it is substantially correct. Csató shows how Rorty employs rhetorical strategies that, operating at a meta-level, co-opt the ideas of other thinkers into his own paradigm of pragmatic anti-essentialism. Rorty is constantly in dialogue with other thinkers, but whether they like it or not, what is at stake in their own work is the debate between metaphysics and anti-essentialism. This is the effect that Rorty has on them, and it is what enables him to distribute thinkers' names all over his works. To a degree, this is the hallmark of an informed and well-read author, but Csató helps us to see that it is also a coercive strategy. Are you a metaphysical essentialist or a pragmatic anti-essentialist? For Rorty, all thinkers have to queue up on one side of this line or the other.

There are many critics of Rorty's work, and Csató deals with criticisms of Rorty expertly. Csató describes Hilary Putnam's claim that if Rorty is going to denounce metaphysical realism, then he can only do so by harboring some concealed notion of it himself. In other words, Rorty must have some conception of what is definitively true if he is going to say that metaphysics and essentialism are wrong. Csató shows how, through a discussion with Putnam, Rorty pushes his interlocutor toward a meta-level of discourse. Of course, this meta-level is nothing transcendental. It is higher in the sense that it is a reflection on the nature and function of philosophy itself. At the end of their discussion, we find Putnam talking about the importance of overcoming metaphysics and about the practical importance of speaking and thinking (77). Rorty has lured Putnam into a conversation that ends with Putnam saying the kinds of things that Rorty would say.

It is well-known that Rorty was a disciple of Dewey, who famously wrote that the goal of education is more education. With his emphasis on rhetorical strategies, Csató shows how Rorty has translated that dictum into his own work, so as to say that the goal of conversation is more conversation. Moreover, Csató demonstrates the normalizing effect of getting into a conversation with Rorty when he takes up the work of Barry Allen and his claim that Rorty privileges language over artifacts. Allen argues against Rorty that we can trace language back to objects. Instead of insisting on the primacy of language, Rorty's rejoinder, basically, is that words and sentences are also objects, and so he and Allen do not have much to argue about (79-80). Most importantly for Csató is that Rorty has

got Allen talking, that is, engaged in conversation. Allen concludes, eventually, that knowledge is not contingent upon conversation, thus reinforcing his original position, but he does this in the context of a conversation with Rorty, thus contradicting his position. Rorty goads you into a conversation in which you either modify your position so that it fits better with his position (as happened with Putnam), or you back yourself into a contradiction that affirms Rorty's point (as happened with Allen). In such strategies we see the discursive control Rorty is attempting to wield. If we accept Csató's thesis, then what Rorty is really saying is this: the goal of conversation is more conversation, in which you move closer and closer toward my ideas.

In the third and fourth chapters, Csató discusses deconstruction and religion, respectively, and in each case he is making a similar point: Rorty employs both for his own pragmatic purposes. He finds in deconstruction a highly original and innovative (abnormal) discourse that has the potential to overcome metaphysics. But, as Csató points out, he also thinks that Derrida is far too attached to certain terms, "privileged metaphors," that broach on metaphysical realism, a vocabulary that is thought to represent reality (123, 131). Ultimately, though, Rorty sees in deconstruction the same project as his own brand of pragmatism stated in a highbrow terminology (109-10). This conclusion fits neatly with Csató's claim that Rorty appropriates philosophies toward his own end of advancing the cause of pragmatic anti-essentialism.

Rorty's atheism was well-known, but, as Csató shows, he is surprisingly sympathetic toward individuals with personal religious beliefs. Indeed, he thought that faith was a powerful impulse for personal development and self-perfection. What is most interesting about Csató's analysis in this section is his conclusion that Rorty's pragmatic anti-essentialism allows for "antifoundationalist faith" (179). Since Rorty does not believe in foundations, he must even dismiss rationality as a foundation. It is a surprising conclusion that should perhaps not be so surprising. Faith and rationality are both ungrounded, simply beliefs that lack foundation, which is the very structure of Rorty's rhetorical strategies. His pragmatic anti-essentialism cannot make an appeal to standards of justification, that is, to premises that serve as a necessary starting point for the argument. Those premises do not exist. All Rorty can do is keep talking to you, engaging you in conversation, and describing why he finds some positions more appealing than others. All the while, his rhetorical strategies are trying to bring you around to his way of thinking.

The major question I have at the end of the book is about Csató's beliefs regarding the value of Rorty's thinking. In the Introduction, he admits to a "fundamental accord with the basic assumptions of [Rorty's] neopragmatism, especially with regard to its antiessentialist traits" (21), but he has done such an excellent job showing the "authoritarian" tendencies and "discursive control" at play in Rorty's rhetorical strategies that the reader is left wondering about how we benefit from Rorty's philosophy. Csató's goal, however, is not to tell us that we should or should not read Rorty's work. Rorty has made a profound and lasting impact on the philosophical landscape, and we have much to gain from studying his work, but anyone interested in Rorty's neopragmatism is well-advised to read Csató's important book, and keep in mind its main thesis as they do so.

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The Play between Text and Intertext

Richard Rankin Russell

Murray, Christopher. *The Theatre of Brian Friel: Tradition and Modernity.* London: Bloomsbury, 2014. 299 pages. ISBN. 978-1-4081-5734-3. Hb. $104.

Criticism on Brian Friel, considered during his life Ireland's best and best-known playwright, continued apace in his 85th year. One of Friel's most perceptive critics, Christopher Murray, who edited the invaluable Faber collection of the dramatist's essays and diary entries in 2014, published that year his long-awaited study, *The Theatre of Brian Friel: Tradition and Modernity.* Murray's attentive close readings of the plays and his ability to juxtapose them with earlier dramas by major playwrights will prove to be this study's main contributions to our understanding of Friel's work. He signals this focus with his opening contention that "in recent years, the focus in Friel Studies has been predominantly political and . . . this emphasis now threatens to overwhelm the commentary" (2). Instead, he argues, "Friel is a Proteus figure, who, like the sea god, is constantly changing his shape in an effort to escape categorization, being identified with any one theatre, any one style or set of beliefs" (2). At the same time, he holds that "the tension between tradition and modernity" is "the dominant theme of his plays" (6), and identifies his immersion in the drama of Chekhov, Pirandello, O'Neill, and Tennessee Williams, along with his intuitive grasp of the communication crisis in modern drama, as crucial aspects of this tension. This conflict between tradition and modernity is seemingly central to Murray's always informative and often well-argued analyses of a series of Friel plays from the 1960s through the 2000s, but unfortunately, the meanings of "tradition" and "modernity" are never fully explained, even though his conclusion offers some belated and tentative gestures toward elucidation of this dialectic. The lack of clarity about these and other terms, such as "modernist" and "postmodernist," can sometimes obfuscate Murray's fine readings of individual plays that are often driven by his remarkable ability to contextualize them through intertextual juxtapositions with other literary works, especially influential dramas.

In the chapters that follow, Murray often links a particular play with a drama or dramas written by another author or authors, a valuable intertextual strategy he believes Friel learned from T.S. Eliot. He also takes pains to show how Friel writes searchingly about individual conscience "in

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drama with social significance" (9), and to explore the playwright's emphasis on metadrama, "an aesthetic based upon the performative self in the modern world" (9-10). Over the course of nine chapters, he covers a number of Friel plays that concern themselves with both of these emphases.

His introductory chapter is excellent, even startlingly so at times, as when he identifies Friel's scrupulousness and excellence in style as likely inspired by the lecturer Neil Kevin's teaching of Walter Pater's *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style* (1889) during the playwright's days at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth from 1946-49. Kevin's own emphasis on "exactitude and delicacy" in style, along with "nonchalance," probably also influenced Friel's developing style (4). Unfortunately, Murray's own style suffers from a tendency toward the passive voice and some overly terse sentences that veer toward ambiguity. Moreover, he sometimes buries his main ideas within paragraphs without highlighting them in topic sentences, as he does, for instance, when he first introduces his thesis for the entire study on page six. And yet, the insightfulness of his thinking about Friel, the product of many years teaching and writing about the plays, nonetheless makes this one of the better studies of the playwright.

By attending to Friel's informal apprenticeship with fellow Northerner Tyrone Guthrie in Minneapolis in the spring and summer of 1963, Murray shows how not only John Murphy's 1959 play at the Abbey Theatre, *The Country Boy*, influenced the playwright's breakthrough drama *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, but also, how two other dramas directed by Guthrie during Friel's time with him, *Hamlet* and *Death of a Salesman*, impacted *Philadelphia*. Moreover, although surprisingly without invoking Synge and his moving dramatic studies of loneliness, another major influence for Friel, Murray successively argues that *Philadelphia* sprang most deeply from Friel's profound sense of loneliness that he experienced during his time in seminary at Maynooth.

The Loves of Cass McGuire responds to the sentimental reception of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* in its bleak portrayal of a seventy-year-old woman who finds she cannot go "home" again to Ireland; it also discusses how both *Cass* and *Crystal and Fox* constitute part of Friel's ongoing explorations of metadrama. As he repeatedly redrafted *Cass*, Friel brooded on Luigi Pirandello's seminal play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1922), which successfully broke the fourth wall between actors and audience, and the final version of *Cass* displays a similar fascination with narrative control. *Crystal and Fox*, a tragicomedy about a traveling theatre company, is also

meta-theatrical, portraying Fox Melarkey, who loves his "fit-up" theatre company yet destroys it and his relationship with his wife, Crystal, by telling her he betrayed their son who committed a violent crime in Manchester.

Other chapters turn to political and history plays. In *The Freedom of the City*, Friel incorporated and changed part of the transcript of the Widgery Tribunal about the events of Bloody Sunday on 30 January 1972, when thirteen unarmed Catholic protestors died at the hands of the British Army in Derry City (a fourteenth later died of his wounds), and set the play in 1970, all in an attempt to create some distance from the events of that fateful day. Despite the commercial failure of the follow-up play, *Volunteers*, Murray helpfully shows how Friel's friendship with Seamus Heaney and, eventually, their work for the Field Day Theatre Company, grew out of this failure. That company would go on to produce three consecutive Friel plays: his most controversial play, *Translations*, his version of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, and *The Communication Cord.*

Subsequent chapters build well on previous ones: for instance, Murray's treatment of Friel's adaptation of Euripides's *Hippolytus*, *Living Quarters*, rightly insists again on the influence of Pirandello's *Six Characters*, particularly seen in the characters' loneliness, but with a twist, as Friel's characters search for a director of sorts and find it in the character Sir. And Murray successfully shows how *Living Quarters* and later plays, such as his masterpiece, *Faith Healer,* which features what he sees as Friel's use of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, explore increasingly deeper regions of doubt and uncertainty through meditations on memory.

A particularly convincing aspect of this study, as already noted above, is Murray's marked ability to illuminate crucial passages from Friel's drama by juxtaposing them with salient passages from earlier dramas. Another example of this successful intertextual reading strategy occurs during his analysis of the moving love scene between the Irish-speaking Máire and English-speaking Yolland in *Translations*, which Murray approaches through the cross-linguistic passage where Henry woos Katharine of France in Shakespeare's *Henry V*. Murray also convincingly shows Chekhov's influence on Friel in plays such as *Aristocrats*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, which he sees as a kind of expanded version of *Three Sisters*, and *Molly Sweeney*. Reading Daisy's final line in the ambiguous conclusion of *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* through Pegeen's lament over losing Christy Mahon in Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* establishes in a stroke both the ambiguity of that later Friel play and his ongoing debt to Synge. Indeed,

Murray's greatest strength may be his powerful skill at contextualizing Friel's work in this way.

It is unclear, however, what exactly Murray means by the "modernity" of his title, and although he invokes the word a great deal in this study, along with the very different, more literary terms "modernist" and "modernism," much more clarification at the outset and throughout would have made the individual chapters cohere better around his thesis about the dialectic between tradition and modernity. For example, when he posits in the introduction that "[w]ith the arrival of modernism at the beginning of the twentieth century, the organic synchronization of form and content became deeply problematic" (7), and then quickly moves on to citing the importance of theatrical experimenters, such as Chekhov, Pirandello, O'Neill, and Tennessee Williams for Friel, he associates these playwrights with literary modernism, and certainly such a case could be made. But does literary modernism really begin in 1900? Arguments could be made for its beginning earlier or later. But "modernism" is not the "modernity" of his title and thesis: modernity has a much longer and more documented lineage.

He does return to the tension between modernity and tradition—which I am convinced is of central importance for Friel—in the second half of his last chapter, arguing convincingly that "tradition" for Friel "does not mean shallow worship of the past," but rather, "authenticity, intelligent recognition of where true value lies, feeling grounded in respect for the real" (191). Supplying such a definition in the introduction would have grounded much of what follows about tradition in the body of the study. But his suggestion that "once Friel started writing for the *New Yorker*, an awareness that *modernity* must be present in the short story, through point of view and style, complicated his work" is confusing, as is his contention that Friel admired Eliot's "modernist concept of tradition and its relation to individual talent . . ." (191; emphasis added). "Modernity" could be thought to begin with the Greeks' emphasis on rationalism; or with the medieval conception of it epitomized by Occam's razor, the explanation that the answer to a problem lies in choosing the solution with the fewest hypotheses; or with the Enlightenment's continuing exaltation of rationalism and the individual. Modernity might not even be over yet, while "modernism," which seems to be Murray's tag for literary modernism, surely is. Moreover, Friel's inherently communal plays and preference for ambiguity marks him generally as philosophically against modernity's rampant individualism and privileging of certainty. "Modernist" literature is

very different from "modernity" as a philosophy or worldview, and it can be opposed to philosophical modernity as Joyce, Eliot, Lawrence, and Woolf all suggested in their modernist fictions.

Murray offers another tension in Friel between modernism and postmodernism later in his conclusion, arguing that "[l]ike Beckett, Friel is both modernist and postmodernist," and holding that "the tension between the two styles, modes, artistic convictions, suffuses his body of drama," but he has not sufficiently established definitions of "modernist," "modernity," the "postmodern," or "postmodernist," and has not shown the differences in style between modernist and postmodernist writers (193).

The Theatre of Brian Friel: Tradition and Modernity concludes with three critical essays on different aspects of Friel by three other critics—Shaun Richards, the late David Krause, and Csilla Bertha. I realize that Methuen Drama's Critical Companions series calls for this inclusion of essays by different hands, but it is a strategy that subtracts from the thrust of this, or any monograph. Including these essays makes the book not so much a companion as a hybrid form between the monograph and a critical collection. Worse, one of these three essays, that written by Krause, represents a mean-spirited attack on later Friel by a champion of a less-talented playwright, Sean O'Casey. Krause's essay reveals that he has not only no feel for or grasp of the Friel plays he "analyzes"—*Molly Sweeney*, *Wonderful Tennessee*, *and Dancing at Lughnasa*—but also that he unfairly sees them as static and didactic, whereas his essay itself displays these qualities. Richards's essay gives a fair outline of postcolonialism, but Friel's drama is much richer than any -ism, even one so articulately—if somewhat exhaustingly—theorized by Richards. Murray himself makes the point in his introduction that Edward Said's still-influential essay written for Field Day, "Yeats and Decolonization," shows an insufficient understanding of "the complexities of the Northern [Irish] politico-cultural situation"; instead, Said's "legacy is to the formation of postcolonial theory, not to the understanding of Irish drama" (9). Influenced by the late Paul Ricoeur's study, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), along with Pierre Nora's theories of *lieux de mémoire*, Bertha writes crisply and convincingly about Friel's last original stage play, *The Home Place* (2005); hers is easily the best of these three essays, and the only one to offer really new insights into Friel's drama. She successfully posits the importance of remembrance to characters and community in that play, and shows how Ricoeur's ethical reading of memory and his ultimate insistence on forgetting help shape the play's conclusion.

Overall, despite its confusion about modernity and (literary) modernism, and despite the inclusion of three concluding essays by other critics, Murray's *The Theatre of Brian Friel: Tradition and Modernity* offers a satisfying and comprehensive survey of this wonderful dramatist's plays, replete with insights drawn from intertextual juxtapositions of earlier dramas with Friel's own, along with very helpful and thoughtful close readings of the plays. Beginning students, as well as experienced readers and critics of Friel will find this study an invaluable resource.

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Welcoming Fiction into the Modern Historiographical Canon

Brian Ward

Markus, Radvan. *Echoes of the Rebellion: The Year 1798 in Twentieth-Century Irish Fiction and Drama*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2015. 240 pages. ISBN 978-3-0343-1832-7. Pkb. £40.00.

The 1798 Irish Rebellion against British rule had a dramatic and long-lasting impact on the history of Ireland, most obviously in the introduction of the Act of Union binding the two nations in a single parliament which was introduced two years later as a reaction to the rising. The internationalist republican philosophy of the rebel leaders, and the bloody battles of the ultimately unsuccessfully attempted revolution, quickly became enshrined in nationalist lore, and set the political boundaries for the following century. Republican ideals of an Irish brotherhood and independence became the blueprint for anti-imperialist nationalism throughout the nineteenth century, and they were an important influence on the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising.

In addition, the 1798 Rebellion was a significant source of musical, oral, and literary inspiration. While there has been a sustained interest in producing historical interpretations and reinterpretations of the events of 1798 and its aftermath, less attention has been paid to the influence of 1798 on Irish fiction and drama, particularly works produced in the twentieth century. In *Echoes of the Rebellion*, Radvan Markus seeks to address this imbalance, providing both a survey of literary works published in the twentieth century, as well as an extended criticism of five texts which Markus has highlighted as particularly worthy of attention. One reason for this relative lack of research is that the influence of 1798 was to a large extent superseded, first by the sacrifice of the 1916 Rising, and secondly by the later War of Independence (1919-21), which paved the way for the creation of the Irish Free State. The reduction in significance of the 1798 rebellion in light of more recent events further emphasizes the changing nature of historiography. Rather than diminishing the value of Markus's study, this shift in attitudes can be seen as creating a metatextual element within his research, as he seeks to examine the role of historiography in the formulation of Irish fiction and drama.

As a theoretical framework, Markus draws primarily on the works of Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur. White has written extensively on the problems of history as an objective record of events, instead highlighting

how history may be seen as a deliberately selective narrative. Ricoeur emphasizes the ethical considerations in the relationship between historian and the past, and connects historical narrative with the creation of a collective identity in a manner similar to Renan's theory of national identity. In conjunction with Derrida's specter of history and Foucault's archaeology of knowledge, these theorists lay the groundwork for a conception of history as a narrative that shapes and is shaped by the historians' present, as much, or more than, it is shaped by the events of the past which the historian writes. The commonality between these works is the blurring of the border between historical and fictional narratives. While it is important for any reader of history to be aware of such issues, this experience is exasperated in Ireland because, as Markus argues, so many historical issues persist as open wounds in modern politics. Issues of sectarianism in Northern Ireland are as relevant now as they were in 1798, but the memory of 1798 becomes amplified in current events in Northern Ireland.

While these initial chapters are important as the foundation for later analyses, more than a third of the total work is dedicated to the framing of the argument in various theoretical and historical contexts. As a result, the literary analysis of key texts can sometimes appear rushed, as in the section of chapter four dealing with the role of religion in Sam Hanna Bell's *A Man Flourishing* and modern Irish society, to provide one example. Although Markus's objective is primarily the intertextual critique of historiography in twentieth-century fiction and drama, this analysis may well have been enhanced by allowing more room for the literary analysis of those texts.

Interestingly, there is no reference to the works of well-known Irish critics, such as David Lloyd, Declan Kiberd, or Luke Gibbons, and only passing references to the works of Seamus Deane and Joep Leerssen. This is, of course, an intentional decision by Markus, as he focuses his attention towards philosophical works primarily concerned with history and historiography. However, the aforementioned Irish critics have in the past examined similar themes to those discussed by Markus. The decision to avoid those critics shifts the emphasis of the text away from a literary analysis of the 1798 Rebellion in twentieth-century literature towards an analysis of the problems of historiography in fiction as evidenced by the example of Ireland. This is highlighted in chapter two, where Markus provides a metahistory of the changes in attitude apparent over the last century, resulting from both new methods of analysis in history and changing ideologies. These changes in historiography further highlight the role of authorial narrative and decisions in the writing of history as a

precursor to the literary analysis. This has been most apparent in the trend of revisionism in Irish history, a term which, as Markus notes, "is notoriously hard to define in Irish historiography" (39). Although we are now ostensibly in a post-revisionist period, the theoretical and political underpinnings of revisionism remain provocative within the Irish academy.

Markus's primary goal for this study is the analysis of historiography impacting fiction and drama, and the fiction authors' reactions to those trends. His analysis of Eoghan Ó Tuairisc's Irish language novel, *L'Attaque* (1962), is particularly illuminating in this regard, as he examines the author's use of folk memories in the formation of history, as well as similarities between fiction and history as narratives formed by authorial choices. This is further highlighted by creating connections between medieval Irish literature, the peasant culture of 1798, and the poetry of Padraic Pearse. Markus illustrates how Ó Tuairisc's initially simple prose and seeming anachronisms hide a conscious effort to bring various strands of medieval and modern Irish literature together, creating a certain flattening of language and history in the process. Medieval mythology, eighteenth-century *aisling* poetry, and modern popular history techniques are synthesized to form a metatextual document which challenges perceptions around the boundaries of literature and history.

Chapter six examines Thomas Flanagan's *The Year of the French* (1979). An Irish-American scholar writing in the 1970s, Flanagan was particularly well placed to interrogate the limitations of contemporary historiography, and this novel appears to challenge entrenched narratives and highlight the instability of historiography through the use of both fictional and real historians from the revolutionary period. Similarly, the final chapter builds on the preceding stages to provide an insightful analysis of Stewart Parker's play, *Northern Star* (1984). The play is a dense web of literary, historical, and metaphysical allusions, including seven scenes written in the style of seven different Irish playwrights. In this way, the play compresses the experiences of Henry Joy McCracken's last night through chronological and literary time until it becomes contemporary with the experience of the Troubles in the 1980s, the unintentional result of McCracken's politics. Markus examines the metahistorical form of these texts, as well as the role of language in fiction, to critique historiography. In doing so, he also seeks to emphasize the role of literary devices in the creation of historical narrative.

In his conclusion, Markus states that the goal of his study is to examine the "possibilities of literary works to contribute to our

understanding and interpretation of the past" (205). While it may be said that Markus has illustrated the symbiotic relationship between literature and history, whether fiction can contribute to our understanding of history is less clear. When viewed through Markus's theoretical framework, a single historical narrative can no longer be confidently read as a collection of objective facts, however, the role of fiction in formulating the historiography of an event remains contentious. If fiction is to play a role in historiography, then it may be as part of a metatextual *bricolage*, which may result in less authoritative, but also more inclusive and dialogic historical narratives.

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Translational Border-Crossings

Eszter Krakkó

Boase-Beier, Jean, Antoinette Fawcett, and Philip Wilson, eds. *Literary Translation: Redrawing the Boundaries.* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. xviii + 265 pages. ISBN 9781137310040. Hb. £60.

The collection of essays, entitled *Literary Translation: Redrawing the Boundaries*, not only investigates the disciplinary boundaries of Translation Studies, but through the very act of investigation proves that an open discussion with other disciplines forms an integral part of this relatively young but dramatically expanding academic field uniquely uniting theory and practice. This duality is visible in the oeuvre of most of the contributors. Co-editors Jean Boase-Beier, Antoinette Fawcett, and Philip Wilson are not only among the leading researchers in the fields of literary translation and translation theory (all of them are affiliated with the University of East Anglia, a flagship in Translation Studies, although Philip Wilson currently teaches at İnönü University in Turkey), but they are also translators themselves. Fawcett and Wilson also publish their own poetry, a type of text whose translation-related problems are addressed in many of the essays.

This border-crossing of academic and idiosyncratic (co-)authorial activities on the editors' part, together with the bilateral learning process that characterizes the dialogue between Translation Studies and its bordering disciplines, is also captured by the visual metaphor on the book cover: a tranquil coastal landscape on a hazy summer morning with the sun rising in the background. In the foreground, a graveled pathway meanders towards the seacoast, separating as well as connecting two sides of a meadow covered with colorful heather. The image perfectly captures the translator's journey, suggesting that the process of translation reaches its *telos* if the pathway that separates two languages and thus, two cultures, disappears and, as in the case of the cover picture, the two sides of the meadow merge into one; or, to use a temporal metaphor in the wake of Clive Scott's brief but insightful Foreword, if the source text is relocated into a future of possibilities. As Scott argues, translation's "function is not to preserve texts, . . . but to reproject them into possible futures, or futures of possibility" (x).

Yet, the process of translation can endow a text with the possibility of future interpretations only on condition that it "reattaches a source text to a

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cultural milieu and redefines the cultural givens, whether those givens concern politics, ethnicity, gender[,] or intertextual fabric" (ix). Consequently, it is an indispensable element of translation that the translator should be able to discern and "read" the cultural codes of at least two languages so that the translation may represent "alternative modes of perception" (ix) compared to the source text, which naturally calls for the positioning of literary translation within the framework of cultural studies. Scott comes to the conclusion that translation (and let me add, Translation Studies) should be seen as "an opportunity to renew what might be productive of literary effect, by cross-lingually extending our auditory capacities, our ability to generate associative chains and formal metamorphoses, our ability to cope with simultaneous perceptual structures," and "our awareness of cultural significations and leakages" (x-xi).

By initiating a much needed dialogue between literary translation and cultural studies, Scott thus sets the tone for the rest of the volume, at the heart of which lies the assertion that "literary translation, understood as a sub-discipline of translation studies, can cross disciplinary boundaries" (1). However, as the editors note in the complex and informative Introduction, in addition to cultural studies, literary translation and translation theory have evident intersections with several "other areas of academic research, including linguistics, philosophy, history," and "literary studies" (1). The editors also contend "that literary translation must draw from" (1) these disciplines, while also providing novel ways of inquiry for them. As for the question why scholarship centered on literary translation has never considered taking a close look at the relationship between literary translation and its bordering disciplines, the answer is provided by a brief but detailed account of the history of this new academic discipline. The first practitioners of Translation Studies, "often considered to have been formalized by a 1972 paper by James S. Holmes" (1), spent a lot of time and energy on separating it from other (emerging) academic disciplines. One must note that even the 1990s witnessed debates that were "clearly part of an important discussion about the integrity of" (2) Translation Studies, as well as literary translation, and only recently has literary translation become established and "confident enough to see its boundaries as fluid" (2).

At the same time, initiating a dialogue between literary translation and other disciplines may not only change how one perceives the field of Translation Studies, but "should have an effect both within and outside the field of literary translation" (2). The editors hope that Translation Studies

can follow the example of "philosophy, the oldest discipline in the academy," which "has depended crucially on taking over and rethinking insights from other disciplines" (2). Therefore, the reinterpretation of (disciplinary) boundaries features as a major component in practically all of the essays. Some of the contributions interrogate the boundary between theory and practice, and analyze how various theories can further a more thorough understanding of literary translation *per se* (or the other way around). This provides the central point of investigation of practically the only purely "theoretical" text in the volume, in which Maria Tymoczko convincingly demonstrates "[w]hy Literary Translation is a Good Model for Translation Theory and Practice." Conversely, Eliana Maestri's insightful essay highlights how literary theory helps literary translation reinterpret the notion of authorial intention, while providing a parallel analysis of A. S. Byatt's autobiographical story, "Sugar," and its French translation, "Le Sucre." Similarly, in her "Iconic Motivation in Translation: Where Non-Fiction Meets Poetry?", Christine Calfoglou chooses particular Greek texts and their English translations to demonstrate that linguistic theory, or, more precisely, linguistic iconicity can shed light on the roles of the (literary) translator.

Poetry features in several other essays as well, which suggests that it is not only translation theory that can illuminate literary translation in a way that "might lead to a re-evaluation of [its] practice" (4). Indeed, as the editors also point out, it has become a widely accepted view in Translation Studies "that the sort of theory that might best be used as a basis for translation practice is one that is peripheral to translation studies" (4). This idea is shared by George Szirtes—a well-known poet and a translator of Hungarian verse into English—whose contribution centers around an authorial (but not authoritative) interpretation of his poem on translation. In "The Translators," as well as in the essay, Szirtes offers an "insight into the act itself, an act that is itself a form of composing, . . . the possibility of offering a kind of formalism as a background noise against which to hear the noise of the text itself, of the new text" (62).

The study of literary translation can draw insights not only from translation theory and self-referential literature on translation, but also from a wide range of other disciplines that may enhance the "understanding of literary translation theory and practice" (4). B. J. Epstein's essay provides a case study of translations of children's literature from English to Swedish. Epstein argues that translation-based interpretation has been unreasonably underrepresented in this field. In a highly engaging essay, James Thomas draws attention to another neglected field, that of pseudo-translations. Thomas's essay examines

both the psychology and the possible cultural implications of pseudo-translations through a close reading of Antoine Fabre d'Olivet's early nineteenth-century literary mystification, "*Le Troubadur, poésies occitaniques du XIII^e siècle* [[T]he troubadour, Occitanic poems of the thirteenth century]" (134).

Another "group" of contributions illustrate "how influences and insights flow in the other direction as well" (5), providing a glimpse into the ways in which literary translation practice, as well as theory, can enrich other disciplines. Duncan Large, for instance, writes "On the Work of Philosopher-Translators," and claims that the "influential and strategically important literary translations of" (197) translation-philosophers may influence their philosophical works as well. Conversely, Peter Davies demonstrates that translation not only contributes to subsequent generations' knowledge on the Holocaust, but that various descriptive methodologies used in Translation Studies can enhance Holocaust studies with new meanings and approaches through calling attention to such themes as "the interlingual translations of texts, the multilingual nature of the concentration camp experience," as well as "issues connected with translating experience into representation" (205). Others, such as John Milton and Irene Hirsch, investigate the role of translation at historical turning points ("The Important Role of Translation in the 1789 Brazilian Minas Conspiracy"), whereas Susanne Klinger provides a link between literary translation and postcolonial studies by looking at the "twofold" translation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* not only into German but also into an audio-book ("Translating the Narrator").

The rich diversity of these examples shows that the ambitious attempt to launch a discussion about the apparently fluid boundaries of literary translation and Translation Studies with neighboring disciplines has resulted in a compilation bearing a ground-breaking initiative. A helpful Index and the Bibliography following the Introduction may also serve as useful reference tools for newcomers to the field of studying literary translation. The only shortcoming of the book might be that despite the fact that the contributors represent several languages and several continents, the volume does not contain a single essay that is itself a translation. It would have been thought-provoking to read such an essay in the volume that is self-referential in so many other ways. Despite this minor lack, this collection of essays not only deals with "implications for the very making of translational texts" (xi), but is a translational text itself that can be recommended both for seasoned practitioners and theorists of literary translation, as well as any other reader with an interest in Translation Studies.

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"A visual third way"
Eszter Szép

Grønstad, Asbjørn, and Henrik Gustafsson, eds. *Ethics and Images of Pain.* New York: Routledge, 2012. xxiii + 238 pages. ISBN 13 978-0-415-89-382-4. Hb. $160.

Ethics and Images of Pain offers ways to rethink the much-explored relationship between violence, images, and ethics in a contemporary transmedial visual context. Historically, the question of how to relate and respond to images of violence and pain has been brought to the center of attention primarily via a critical investigation of the medium of photography, though our cultural heritage has greatly built on violent images prior to the advent of this particular picture making technique. For example, the representation of the suffering of saints reaches back into a distant past and, as the volume shows, this tradition still influences our mechanically reproduced images of pain. However, as J. M. Bernstein explains in the Preface, photography has found itself at the heart of ethical debates, "because each photographic image pins the human to its helplessness and vulnerability before the eyes of all others" (xii). The sections and studies of the collection investigate how the pictorial practices of the late twentieth century have changed the representation of violence. They also explore changes in the reception of these images, as well as the nature of spectators' relationship to mediated suffering.

Ethics and Images of Pain is a collection of essays that grew out of the second conference of Nomadikon, a transdisciplinary research group based at the University of Bergen, Norway. The collection adds valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on the relationship of ethics and photography. It also manages to elaborate new concerns without dethroning the possibly most influential thinker on the topic, Susan Sontag. Rather, in the spirit of Sontag, who changed her stance over whether suffering and death should be photographed from a definite rejection in *On Photography* (1977), arguing that the abundance of images desensitizes the viewer, to a "yes, atrocities must be witnessed" in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), this truly multidisciplinary collection provides insightful essays investigating a wide array of practices of representation and practices of looking at other people's pain.

The starting point of the collection, as Berstein states, is "the image character of modern ethical life" (xiv), that is, the realization and

exploration that contemporary ethical life offers "image-saturated responsibilities and liabilities" (xiv). Hence, our relationship to and our concept of images cannot be left out of consideration when thinking about ethics. Pictures—photographs, documentary, and feature films, performances, theatre, and painting—mediate violence to the contemporary viewer. The editors, Asbjørn Grønstad and Henrik Gustafsson, claim that "the problems of spectatorship are already woven into the fabric of the image" (xv).

Ethics and Images of Pain is a genuinely post-visual turn volume in the sense that it does not only investigate the iconography of certain images of pain, but also their politics, how they work, their contexts, and ways in which they are received. The collection bears the characteristics of the post-visual turn period also in the sense that it investigates the acts of looking and the construction of vision and visibility, rather than the object of representation itself. As the editors formulate in the Introduction, the emphasis in this volume is on presentation rather than representation. "This anthology, then, straddles the divide between object and experience, representation and affect" (xv).

The study of painful images has most often been connected to a very specific subject, namely, to the problem of witnessing historical traumas, such as the Holocaust or, recently, the Abu Ghraib archive. Parallel to this, photography has been the favored medium of such studies. In contrast, the collection investigates what the editors call the "ethical phenomenology" (xvi) of images of suffering, not restricted to any specific subject or any specific medium. The encounter with images of pain is investigated in several media: theatre, performance, sculpture, painting, feature film, documentary, and digital photography. What has not been given enough attention in this exploration of the ethics of images, with the double aim of reorienting previous lines of inquiry and establishing a "new critical conceptology" (xv) is, perhaps, digital art practices.

The collection is divided into four parts, with each part featuring a particular aspect of the "ethical phenomenology" of images. The studies offer analyses of specific sights and approaches toward the act of looking itself, rather than an approach to images in general. The first part, "From Voyeurism to Visual Politics," is concerned with the intermingling of politics and aesthetics. All essays in this section deal with the performance of seeing and the position from which something is seen or shown. Mark Ledbetter argues for a reinterpretation of voyeurism by claiming that "[w]e are voyeurs by nature, and voyeurism is necessary to ethical encounter" (4).

Ethical voyeurism means a response to a sight, and involves discomfort and uncertainty. It also means the disappearance of the opposition between viewer and viewed: "[i]f we truly look and see, images see and use us" (7). Frank Möller also investigates ways in which atrocities are viewed, taking the Abu Ghaib torture photos as its starting point. Möller states that the question of how to respond to images of suffering adequately, as well as related concerns of overexposure, reduction of effect, and right to look, should all be finally left behind. He shows non-conventional practices employed to make the complexities of atrocities visible: photographs that result from the co-production between photographer and a subject "who seems to have understood the possible dynamics of photography better than those critics who deny the people depicted one of the few possibilities to increase their visibility, to perform agency, and to exert influence by imprinting their image indelibly on the spectators, thereby reminding them of their, the subjects', existence" (25). Following this train of thought, Mark Reinhardt states that "discussions of the rightness or wrongness of picturing and looking overshadow analyses of the broader field of powers and struggles within which those [photographed and violent] activities are situated" (35). In exploring "a visual third way" (39), he investigates photographic responses to violence that are indirect, ironic, and staged. Photographs also engage in a variety of practices apart from looking, such as display, transmission, and circulation. Ken Gonzalez's Erased Lynching series mobilizes all the above, by showing how the gaze works in a manner that undermines the ways in which the politics of vision has been constructed.

The second part, "Looking In, Looking Away," brings together three papers approaching audience reaction and engagement. The section-opening piece by Stefano Odorico explores Errol Morris's use of the Interrotron, the invisible device facilitating the work of news readers, in his documentary, *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008). Here, the spectator is directly addressed and is made more active, thus, spectatorship is made a painful experience. Next, Tara H. Milbrandt analyzes a bystander-video that shook Canadian self-perception: a Polish citizen who spoke no English was taken for a suspicious individual and was killed by Canadian police after spending days at the Vancouver International Airport. "[T]his case reveals the critical role that the ordinary camera-endowed person can play in public life in challenging authoritative and seemingly 'settled' accounts of important incidents, particularly those involving agents of the state" (88). In contrast to decisive spectatorial engagement, Mattias Frey examines

instances when spectators refuse to engage and watch, and walk out of the cinema. This performative gesture is "the ultimate act of spectatorial resistance," which is not at all easy to perform due to the way theatrical spectatorship is organized in cinemas, or to value factors that spectators themselves evaluate.

The third section is devoted to studies of performances and to the problem of the unrepresentable. Mieke Bal's "Imaging Pain" draws a parallel between Colombian Doris Salcedo's *Plegaria Muda* (2008-2010), an installation of 162 coffin-sized tables placed face down on identical tables in normal position, with around twenty centimeters of soil and grass seed sandwiched between them, and Bal's own film, *A Long History of Madness* (2011). As Bal emphasizes, both are "making real pain visible while refusing the outright representation of it" (118). Bal concludes her article by stating that "[i]mages *of* pain . . . have the mission to compel viewers to reflect on the place representation has in such a search for art's political agency" (138). Øyvind Vågnes examines very different performances, video works through which Mathilde ter Heijne, a Dutch visual artist, visualizes women committing suicide with the help of a dummy. This surrogate allows spectators to think about suicide without witnessing it and without being able to turn away. Suicide as a performance gets reinterpreted "as a form of utterance" (152). Jody McAuliffe examines the political potential of theatre by drawing a parallel between her own visceral play, *Gulag Follies*, and historically distinct sufferings, such as slavery and the civil rights movement. "The hope is that gulag consciousness spreads to the audience like a plague, cutting us like a primitive inoculation against future gulags" (169).

The final section, "Mimetic and Mnemonic Frames," investigates the mediation of historical experience. The first two essays are on war films. Holger Pötzsch proposes a distinction between mimetic and poetic styles in realist war cinema, and argues that "poetic" artistic renderings, which are realistic but less transparent than mimetic ones, show the constructed nature of the past and the cinematic image. These films, like *Waltz with Bashir* (dir. Ari Forman, 2008) and *The Other Bank* (dir. George Ovashvili, 2009), possess "an ethically engaging potential" (175), and challenge spectators to abandon passivity and start to reimagine someone else's pain. Tonje H. Sørensen connects scenes of suffering to concepts of martyrdom, and examines reflections of religious iconography in *Roma, Città Aperta* (1945), *Englandsfarere* (1946), and *Max Manus* (2008). Finally, Jon-Ove Steihaug gives a wonderfully haunting comparative analysis of the medical photographic archive of the Gaustad mental asylum and a patient artist's,

Bendik Riis's paintings recording treatments similar to torture. Steihaug argues that both should be regarded as documents of corporeal treatments.

The collection can be a valuable companion to researchers of contemporary visual culture, representations of armed conflict, and even to those interested in artistic interventions into memory politics. The authors show that questions of ethics are continuously raised by cultural production, and call attention to the various ways in which visual media consciously engage in politics. Even if I find the depth of the studies uneven, the multimedial approach is one of the strengths of the volume.

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Becoming Modernist

Anna Szabó

Adroin, Paul, S. E. Gontarski, and Laci Mattison, eds. *Understanding Deleuze, Understanding Modernism.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. xiv + 280 pages. ISBN 9781623563493. Hb. $98.99.

Understanding Deleuze, Understanding Modernism is the second volume of the series, Understanding Philosophy, Understanding Modernism, following the introductory one dedicated to Henri Bergson. The aim of the series is "to understand literary modernism better through philosophy . . . [by] offering collections focused on single key philosophical thinkers influential both at the moment of modernism and to our current understanding of that moment's genealogy, archeology, and becomings" (xiii). The editors claim that the relevance of such a series on modernism resides in the "current reassessments of modernism," owing to which it is seen not only as a historical period, but also as "a mode of production," "a concept" (xiii).

It is not by chance that the volume on Deleuze takes the prominent second place in the series, since the relationship of Deleuze and modernism is remarkably multifaceted and, what is even more important, appears to be mutual. The editors and the contributors to *Understanding Deleuze, Understanding Modernism* clearly point out that Deleuze was not only a philosopher who devoted numerous writings to modernist works of art. Modernist art profoundly influenced and impregnated his way of thinking and writing which, as Patrick M. Bray puts it, "suggests philosophy's debt to literary practice" (11) and, as it is apparent from the anthology, to fine arts and cinema, as well. One of the crucial aspects of the relationship of Deleuze and modernism the collection accentuates is that Deleuze and Guattari did not use modernist artists' ideas and works as examples for their concepts, but on the contrary: their thought developed from, and as a result of, a thorough engagement with these works. As the editors note, the contributors provide evidence, in turn, for the impact Deleuze's treatises had on "the ways we think about modernism, politics, aesthetics, and life" (3).

Some authors, such as Claire Colebrook, Ian Buchanan, or Audronė Žukauskaitė, are outstanding figures in Deleuze studies. Other contributors, like Joe Hughes, Anna Powell, and Aidan Tynan, have also published widely on him, and those who are not strictly speaking Deleuze scholars also

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establish an engaging dialogue between their research field and Deleuze's modernist thoughts.

The volume has a tripartite structure: the first part, "Conceptualizing Deleuze," offers an "in-depth discussion, elaboration, and contextualization of [Deleuze's] key philosophical texts" (2). The second part, "Deleuze and Aesthetics," focuses on "mapping . . . the relationship between modernist literature and Deleuze's philosophy," while the final section is "an extended glossary of Deleuze's key terms" (7). The first two sections examine Deleuze's engagement with thinkers, such as Bergson, Nietzsche, Spinoza, and Leibniz, as well as the impact of modernist artists, like Proust, Kafka, Bacon, Hardy, Woolf, Lawrence, Miller, Borges, Artaud, and Beckett on the formation of his philosophical notions. The first section starts with studies on Deleuze's earlier works, and advances towards analyses of his later thought, mapping the way his concepts developed and altered, especially from the beginning of his collaboration with Félix Guattari (from the 1970s, starting with *Anti-Oedipus*). "Deleuze and Aesthetics" analyzes modernist authors based on their prevalence and significance in Deleuze and Guattari's works. This part of the volume also has a chronological thrust: it starts with John Hughes's essay on "Deleuze's Hardy," emphasizing Hardy's influence on modernist writers analyzed in the subsequent articles. Reflecting on the modernist conception of a non-anthropocentric world, the last work of the section by Colebrook positions modernism as an increasingly relevant issue today, since, owing to the environmental crisis threatening our survival, we are forced to imagine a world without human existence. The fifteen entries featured in the Glossary can also be regarded as "short essays" according to the editors, as due to their "length" and "in-depth" elaboration of Deleuze's concepts, they "[allow] a full engagement with and examination of the many, sometimes contradictory ways Deleuze has applied particular terms" (7). As looking at the essays individually would extend the limits of this review, I shall rather focus on some recurrent themes and ideas in the book.

One of the central Deleuzian concepts the studies reassess is "becoming," which—as Žukauskaitė's essay on Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus,* and Jason Skeet's "Becoming" manifest—functions as a critique of transcendence or, as Skeet suggests, of "eternal and fixed essences" (253). For Deleuze, one of the crucial aspects of modernist art is that "it is process rather than form that is primary" in it (253). Modernism no longer thinks in terms of states, beings, stable essences, or identities, but

in terms of productions, processes, flows, events, functions, that is, becomings.

Similarly to becoming, the metaphor of the machine also emerges in Deleuze's works as a pivotal concept. In discussing Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Tynan points out that Deleuze delineates automatic, "self-engineering" (49) structures or machines, such as desire which, as Skeet notes, is "an impersonal construction" that creates the subject of desire and the object of desire as implied functions or "components" in the social system (65). S. E. Gontarski, one of the editors, also argues in his essay, *'What is Philosophy?*: 'To play it again on a new stage,'" that "[i]n Deleuze and Guattari's critique, it is not a stable subject who experiences the world, but from experience, from the inchoate, heterogeneous flow of phenomena distinct subjects are generated, who through self-perception create images of themselves" (113). Christopher Langlois's excellent essay, "Deleuze's Perspectival Theory of Modernism and the Baroque," contextualizes this phenomenon by pointing out that Deleuze and Guattari attribute the emergence of this machinic "aesthetics of perspectivism" (209), the non-anthropocentric worldview of modernism, to the Baroque, especially to the philosophy of Leibniz.

In her thought-provoking essay, "Incorporeal Modernism," Colebrook also suggests that language "seems to generate its own machinic and inhuman connections" (227). According to Colebrook, for Deleuze, language is the main means of becoming, owing to its double nature, since it simultaneously designates an actual thing, and makes it proliferate through sense, liberating entities from the category of the actual. Wahida Khandker detects the same process in Deleuze's reading of the Bergsonian *durée* which manifests "the variable essence of things" (Deleuze qtd. in 25), through exposing them to virtual time. By providing a thorough analysis of Deleuze and Guattari's *Cinema I-II*, Garin Dowd highlights how modern cinema "'is an essential factor' [for Deleuze] in this new way of thinking" (98). Nadine Bojkovac shares this opinion, and states in "Time-Image" that "the medium [of cinema] discovered its unique potential to expose time in its 'pure' state, unlike any other art" (278).

Buchanan's "Schizoanalitic Modernism: The Case of Antonin Artaud" explores how art becomes machinic and self-reflexive in modernism. Modernist art does not comply with any predetermined category of what art should be: it is no longer regarded as a representation of or reference point to any cultural, social, or religious "tradition" (196), but the act or event of "self-positing" (196), a work claiming itself art,

observes Buchanan. Andrew Marzoni also examines Deleuze's view that "literature is . . . a process and not a goal, a production and not an expression" (194). The essays in "Deleuze and Aesthetics," and some others in "Conceptualizing Deleuze," investigate the presence of the Deleuzian understanding of the machinic tendencies, the inhuman becomings in several modernist *oeuvres*.

A central aspect of the collection is that the contributors not only provide insight into the way Deleuze reflected on modernist art, but they demonstrate—for instance, Joe Hughes, Anthony Uhlmann, and Gontarski—how he actually saw modernism as a mode of production, a method, and how he applied it to his concept formation. As all the three authors contend, Deleuze aspired to create "a different kind of concept" (35), or a different mode of representation which does not pose as the "mediation" of some unquestionable knowledge, but as a self-reflexive "movement" (Deleuze qtd. in 39) which, as Joe Hughes explains, renders its own "production" (44). A concept like this is "practical not theoretical" (35) since, for Deleuze, "concepts are events" (114). As Skeet points out in his essay on Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka*, a crucial concern that preoccupied Deleuze and Guattari, similarly to modernist artists, was the creation of something new (63). In Deleuze's view, Uhlmann informs us, philosophy should, like literature, "act upon us, drawing us back into contact with the process of living" (129).

One question that persists throughout the volume is the very reading of Deleuze. All of the authors agree on Tom Conley's statement that "[Deleuze] has to be read as literature" (11), and they propose an ethical reading of his texts similarly to the one he applies to modernist works of art. In "Deleuze's *Proust and Signs*: The Literary Partial Object," Bray argues that Deleuze and Guattari's reading is an active engagement, an "encounter" with the text they read which works through "inhabiting [the] complex literary style" (11) of a particular writer, instead of imposing a predetermined higher measure on the writer's text. As Uhlmann suggests, their method is to "extract" "a process that drives and haunts the work of a given writer. . . . Once extracted, it can be mobilized as a hybrid type of thinking between the concept and the affect, the concept and the percept" (129). By the same token, Uhlmann spells out in connection with *Essays Critical and Clinical* that while several critics read it as a collection of essays, it should be interpreted—following Deleuze's modernist method—as a "whole that comes after the fragments that comprise it yet leaves those fragments intact" (122). The contributors also make a point of engaging with the

Deleuzian methodology in the second part, "Deleuze and Aesthetics," where, as previously mentioned, the essays are not about authors to whom Deleuze dedicated entire treatises, instead, the contributors assemble Deleuze's own image of Hardy, Woolf, Lawrence, Miller, and Artraud from the fragments they find in his various works. The emphasis the authors put on the literary side of Deleuze is all the more interesting, since it is a crucial point in connection with all the modernist artists analyzed in "Deleuze and Aesthetics" that they are regarded by Deleuze and Guattari not only, and not primarily, as preeminent modernist aesthetes, but as philosophers. This observation further reinforces the mutual connection between philosophy and art, between Deleuze's thought and the *oeuvres* of modernist artists.

On the whole, *Understanding Deleuze, Understanding Modernism* is a significant moment in the ongoing exploration of the relationship between Deleuze and modernism, presenting the concept of modernism through his thought. Although each essay focuses on a different aspect of Deleuze's philosophy and of modernist tendencies, there are overlappings and recurring themes in them, and together they offer a coherent, yet diverse image for the reader, a thorough and compelling critical engagement with Deleuze's modernism.

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Queer Dimensions of the Uncanny

Babett Rubóczki

Palmer, Paulina. *The Queer Uncanny: New Perspectives on the Gothic*. Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2012. 232 pages. ISBN 978-0-7083-2459-2. Pb. Npr.

The Queer Uncanny: New Perspectives on the Gothic offers new insights into contemporary literary representations of queer sexuality by convincingly demonstrating the interrelation between queer theory and the uncanny, a ubiquitous element of Gothic literature. However, the novelty of the book, as the title also foregrounds, does not simply reside in the delineation of this interplay between queerness, the uncanny, and the Gothic. Palmer introduces a unique literary approach to the relation between gender ambiguity and Gothic narrative conventions.

Consciously avoiding the conventional interpretive approach of pinpointing references to deviant sexualities in Gothic texts mirroring heteronormative interests, Palmer situates her study in the critical tradition formulated by Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky, and her concept of the paranoid Gothic which, as Palmer notes, has only recently elicited wider attention. Thus, the book focuses on how Queer Studies penetrate, as well as enrich critical readings of the Gothic by recasting its conventional motifs from queer perspective in an innovative and subversive way. The various narrative strategies of the selected contemporary queer novels illustrate that in these works the utilization of hybridized images of the Victorian Gothic and the Freudian uncanny are not merely atmospheric and contingent, but consciously deployed vehicles to portray, negotiate, and challenge the ambivalences of queer experience.

In the Introduction, Palmer clearly states the objective of her work by defining its scholarly focus on the diverse and manifold use of uncanny imagery to "represent facets of queer sexuality and experience" (3). This "multifaceted focus" (4) becomes manifest on various levels, such as in terms of the different genres and fictional forms that Palmer analyzes, ranging from realistic literary ventures of queer historical novels to the interaction of the fantastic, the magical, and science fiction, as in Jeanette Winterson's *The Power Book*. Palmer provides a clear interpretative structure that helps the understanding of these novels, which apparently diverge in form, as well as in content. She clusters them in three groups on the basis

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of the degree of visibility of conventional Gothic motifs and the extent to which these works tend to incorporate realistic and/or fantastic elements.

Further evidence of the multifarious approach is that Palmer expands the scope of the geographies of queer texts to include not only Western works and their Eurocentric views of non-heteronormative sexualities, but also African American and Caribbean fictional representations by Randall Kenan and Shani Mootoo. Thus, Palmer's exploration of the different textual uses of the motifs of the uncanny and the Gothic also touches upon the intersection of gender and racial identity politics while bringing into play problems arousing from ethnic diversity. It is worth noting that Palmer strives to provide a balanced portrayal of male gay, lesbian, and transgender literary representations to curb the biased attitude toward male gay writings and the overall negligence of transgender dimensions of queer Gothic discourses.

Palmer structures her analysis of novels around a single uncanny motif that, in her view, is the predominant feature of each specific group of fictions. Palmer illustrates how "motifs and imagery relating to the uncanny and Gothic [. . .] infiltrate into different forms of fiction" (4) by excellent close readings displaying her impressive erudition. The book predominantly draws upon Freud's and Nicholas Royle's theorizations of the uncanny, while it also contextualizes the selected novels by referring to a plethora of relevant queer, Gothic, post-structuralist, and cultural theories. This theoretical versatility illuminates the roles the uncanny plays in queer Gothic fiction. One of the most illustrative examples of this is the utilization of the Derridean concept of "phantom text" in connection with the uncanny motif of spectrality. Palmer highlights intertextuality in terms of spectrality exploring how textual reproductions mirror the personal fears and ambiguities of queer subjects, as well as reflect their linguistic inexpressibility and invisibility in the heteronormative politics of textual space.

Related to the examination of narrative elements portraying the interplay between the queer and the uncanny, Palmer's argumentation subverts the readers' expectations. Chapter two concentrates on the uncanny motif of secrets and disclosure, and their central role in lesbian and gay experience. Instead of merely evoking Freud, who emphasized the destructive power of the reemergence of repressed contents, Palmer proposes that these queer novels recast the concepts of taboo and the closet in AIDS narratives and coming out novels. Palmer highlights that, besides equating medical or social death with silence, the motif of secret

also signifies the deadly and damaging effect of repressed, deviant sexual tendencies on the queer mind.

Chapter Three revolves around the motif of spectrality that Palmer views as the most fruitful narrative strategy to describe the Gothic aspect of queer experience. Other notions of the uncanny, such as liminality, return, border-crossing, and the figure of the double that pervade sexual, as well as textual treatment of queer latency, are pertinent to the queer reworking of the ghost as a Victorian Gothic motif. James Purdy's *Mourners Below* (1981) and Stella Duffy's *Beneath the Blonde* (1997) offer some of the finest examples of Palmer's close readings of the different facets of haunting in a queer context. In these novels, the figure of the specter is not only connected to the fear of the return of the dead, but it also embodies deviant or incestuous erotic desires. Thus, Palmer's queer reading demonstrates the "transgender slant" (99) given to the dead as uncanny double by intertwining erotic attraction with murder and the transgressive return of the deceased.

The book progresses with the exploration of the uncanny aspects of queer "Spaces and Places," centering on three major Gothic motifs: the haunted house, the uncanny metropolis, and rituals and ceremonies connected to queer spatiality. Palmer introduces a novel perspective of investigation of the haunted house by unveiling how in North American and Caribbean Gothic tradition the *heimlich/unheimlich* dynamism of the home is infiltrated by racial oppression and colonial domination, and how these occurrences of the past interconnect gender and racial hybridity. It should be noted that as Jim Grimsley's *Dream Boy* is set in the American South, Palmer could have expanded her discussion to include the specter of slavery by reading it in the context of not the Northern but the Southern Gothic, which is replete with images of decay, crime, and grotesque sexualities, and which also underlies Grimsley's novel.

The last chapter, titled "Monstrous Others," offers narratives that subvert the conventional social view of stigmatizing the queer subject as monstrous outcast. A remarkable aspect of Palmer's approach to the uncanny dimension of queerness is that she frequently foregrounds the probably less-known, comic aspect of the Freudian uncanny.

Palmer clearly articulates in the introductory chapter that due to the ever fluid and extremely diverse narrative strategies deployed by contemporary queer writers, her analyses are "proposed tentatively and [are] by no means conclusive" (22). Therefore, as a conclusion, readers are offered a comprehensive reassessment of the multifaceted role the uncanny

plays in the novels analyzed. This summary, however, does not stand as a separate section but follows the last chapter that discusses the monstrous dimensions of queer identity.

Overall, however, Palmer's argument is well-presented: the motifs of the Gothic coupled with their uncanny resonances are not "tangential, to one side" (179), but inextricably bound to queer studies. Therefore, though the book was published as part of Gothic literary studies, it makes a significant and indispensable contribution not only to Gothic but also to queer studies.

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Do Film Sequels Exist?

Gyula Barnabás Baranyi

Jess-Cooke, Carolyn, and Constantine Verevis, eds. *Second Takes: Critical Approaches to the Film Sequel.* Albany: SUNY P, 2010. xi + 251 pages. ISBN 978-1-4384-3029-4. Pbk. $29.95.

Second Takes: Critical Approaches to the Film Sequel leads readers to ask rather unorthodox questions, such as "is there such a thing as the film sequel?" The contributors to the book view the phenomenon of sequelization in a way that leaves more questions than answers, while still providing valuable insights and offering numerous points of entry into the topic. *Second Takes* touches upon the aesthetic significance, theoretical consequences, and social implications of shooting and watching "inauthentic" continuations of "original" movies.

A key issue problematized in the collection is the relationship between the "sequel" and the "original," which may be a consequence of the prominent role given to the poststructuralist theoretical framework, even though some accounts seem to subscribe to more traditional critical approaches. Thus, far from agreeing on the textual and social consequences of sequelization, the various studies engage in a debate over the diverse definitions and statuses that sequels and "originals" may be assigned in relation to each other. In this way, the volume elegantly sidesteps theoretical commitment and, instead, provides a discursive space for often contending theoretical approaches.

As editors Carolyn Jess-Cooke and Constantine Verevis highlight at the start, the collection "propose[s] new dynamic approaches to emergent shifts across the spectrum of textual relations" (3), such as sequelization as a "deconstructive framework" (4) that serves as a ground for reinterpreting and reenacting the "original" film, and the very notion of originality. The editors' understanding of the sequel as a deconstructive mechanism reveals the overall rhetorical stance of the book, which is to challenge the way sequels have been conventionally perceived. Thus, in his "Redefining the Sequel: The Case of the [*Living*] *Dead*," Verevis refrains from setting up "purely taxonomic definitions" (11), focusing instead on the sequel as a "*network* of commercial interests, textual strategies, critical vocabularies, and historical contexts" (12). Analyzing the authorial and commercial aspects of George A. Romero's "Dead-trilogy" and its various remakes, Verevis observes that the logic of sequelization "resides in the commercial (and

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sometimes critical) success and value of an earlier (original) film, and the reciprocal interest the sequel generates in the previous installment" (23). Jennifer Forrest, in contrast, does develop a taxonomic hierarchy by defining the "true" sequel as a cinematic continuation which "functions as a companion piece (emphasis on the singular) to its predecessor" (33). She demonstrates her point through the analyses of *Four Daughters* (Michael Curtiz, 1938), *Four Wives* (Michael Curtiz, 1939), and *Four Mothers* (William Keighley, 1941), which, as Forrest argues, function as "sequels that were not a series" (43).

Investigating the stylistic features of representative films from two film cycles, Claire Perkins claims that the American "smart" cycle of the 1990s constitutes a stylistic "sequel" to the Hollywood Renaissance of the 1960s by way of its recontextualization of the thematic concerns and narrative devices utilized in the Renaissance cycle. Thomas Leitch, by contrast, applies a rather literary take on sequelization by providing an overview of the types of filmic serialization and their literary roots. Examining the *Bridget Jones*-films as a case in point, Leitch proposes that *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (Beeban Kidron, 2004) is an "inflated remake in the guise of a sequel" (59), which is a result of Bridget's "insatiable impulse toward self-criticism that makes her altogether more unstable than any Austen heroine" (58). This feature of the heroine's personality sets the films in sharp contrast with Aristotelian teleology, which, according to Leitch, implicates a tendency of contemporary social norms to "both alienate and colonize the individual consciousness so irresistibly that its most representative heroes and heroines are those least inclined toward closure" (63).

In "Before and After, Before Before and After," R. Barton Palmer maintains that the sequel is a sort of narrative continuation which deconstructs the conclusion of its predecessor, and then promotes itself as the installment finishing that narrative. Palmer analyzes the transtextual relations within the *Godfather*-trilogy and argues that these films "do not form a whole but a series of singularities connected by notions of before and after" (73). Joyce Goggin expands this idea in "From Remake to Sequel: *Ocean's Eleven* and *Ocean's Twelve*," claiming that originality is no longer relevant today, since business and art became inseparable from one another. In her view, the *Ocean's*-films thematize the interconnection between Hollywood and Las Vegas, as they suggest that watching sequels is an instance of "serialized leisure," which, in turn, is a characteristic of the postproduction society. Consequently, there is no place where "notions,

such as 'authenticity,' 'originality,' and 'genius' have been left untouched by late capitalism's propensity to create simulacra" (119). Nicholas Rombes picks up this train of thought, also claiming that the dichotomy of the "original" and the "sequel" is no longer viable. Temporal boundaries have dissolved within individual films due to such technological innovations as leaping between chapters on a DVD, and also between the different installments, due to our constant access to any of the previous installments in a series. In consequence, "the very limitations that made 'before' and 'after' meaningful, have eroded" (203), rendering the distinction between an "original" and its "sequel" irrelevant.

Turning to the spectatorial aspect of consuming sequels, Ina Rae Hark analyzes the fan discourse of the cancelled television series *Firefly*, claiming that the cancellation of the series halfway through the first season "set[s] off emotions very similar to those that accompany grief and mourning" (136), which was either assuaged or amplified by the subsequent introduction of *Serenity*, a film sequel to the television series. Also theorizing the viewer's perspective, Paul Sutton argues in "Prequel: The 'Afterwardsness' of the Sequel," that the logic of sequelization (and "prequelization") mirrors the construction of our cinematic experience. Our interpretation of the filmic clues is driven by a "performative cinematic identity," which is formed via the continuous retranslation of "one's cinema history . . . engendering a remaking of oneself around these fragments" (147). This process is based on a retroactive temporal logic of signification, which enables the "de- and retranslation" of the "enigmatic messages" which enter the psyche, continually reassembling our cinematic identities and, in turn, influencing our subsequent cinematic experience (150).

The social consequences of the international circulation of cultural products are addressed in Daniel Herbert's "Circulations: Technology and Discourse in *The Ring* Intertext." Herbert provides a thorough investigation of the transnational discourse generated by *Ringu* (Hideo Nakata, 1998), and its numerous remakes, including those produced in the United States and in South Korea. According to Herbert, *The Ring* intertext is demonstrative of a new Pacific Rim cultural discourse which, as he demonstrates, is informed by a struggle for power through cultural products. Also examining culture from a discursive viewpoint, Simon McEnteggart suggests that contemporary American society deals with anxieties induced by national traumas of the postmodern dissolution of boundaries, through reformatting dominant cultural codes using repetitive cinematic products, such as superhero sequels. Drawing on analyses of *Superman Returns* (Bryan Singer,

2006), the Blade trilogy, the X-men trilogy, and the Spider-Man trilogy, McEnteggart observes that these sequels soothe the public's cultural "need" to alleviate "postmillennial anxieties" through their continuous "re-presentation" of events causing national traumas, that are worked out each time by the omnipotent superhero (172). Jess-Cooke provides a similarly reception-oriented take on the sequel in "Sequelizing Spectatorship and Building Up the Kingdom," as she attributes the mechanisms of sequelization to the spectatorial experience fostered by "immersion, control, and merchandising" (209). Treating the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise as an "immersive environment," Jess-Cooke argues that the franchise is structured to create a "sequelized spectatorship," which lets the audience create and continually remake their own experience of the franchise by participating in the synergistic activities that the films, videogames, and all the other merchandise provide.

All in all, the essays in this collection mainly concentrate on one of three critical tasks: providing various definitions and typologies of the sequels, analyzing certain socio-cultural aspects of producing sequels, and exploring the spectatorial aspects that underlie their consumption. Arguably, such a delineation of thematic concerns would have allowed for a tripartite categorization of the chapters, which I personally missed. A thematic subdivision of the chapters might have highlighted debated issues better, calling attention to those areas which open up the possibility for further research. At the same time, one of the most intriguing aspects of the volume is that it juxtaposes such opposing viewpoints as, for instance, Forrest's taxonomy of "true" sequels, and Rombes's postmodernist skepticism regarding the "original." Although the volume might seem to be rather loosely organized as a whole, it provides valuable contributions to a rather obscure area of contemporary film studies, which, if addressed at all, is usually regarded as a predictable constellation of fixed notions. Reinterpreting this configuration and introducing new concepts into the critical discourse are the most prominent achievements of this work. I would primarily recommend it to scholars specializing in popular culture and invested in the theoretical consideration of sequels and their impact on contemporary society, but a more extended academic readership might also find appealing details in it, as, one way or another, we are all consumers of film sequels.

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ABSTRACTS

Crossing Common Ground: W. B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney
Edward Larrissy

Yeats and Heaney are often assumed to be so unlike that little can be gained from a comparison. However, Heaney became an increasingly serious student of the older poet, even though the latter's influence on his early work was not formative. They both adopted a quasi-anthropological approach to life in the Irish countryside: Yeats in his folklore writings, Heaney in his early poetry. Both take from Irish traditions an interest in liminal states arising on the boundary between the everyday and the marvelous. Both are poets of memory who represent and explore mental associations but find in them deeper, archetypal patterns. And both interrogate the relationship between form and experience. The differences between them, as some recent research has suggested, may owe something to the contrasting structures of feeling associated with their respectively Protestant and Catholic backgrounds. (EL)

Screening Belfast:
"Heaney in Limboland" and the Language of Belonging
Rosie Lavan

Seamus Heaney rarely expressed any fondness for Belfast, and yet its significance in his development as a writer cannot be overstated. Heaney imagined and represented Belfast across forms and media, and this essay considers the most complicated facets of his relationship with the city he left in 1972 through attention to the documentary "Heaney in Limboland," made for British television in 1970. At once a profile of the poet and of the North in the context of the worsening violence, the film is a crucial companion to Heaney's early writing, prompting fresh consideration of the tensions that emerge in the diction and forms of his poetry at this time. The poet's relationship to his contemporary world was a central preoccupation for Heaney throughout his writing life. Comparing his different versions of the city from the same contemporary moment offers one way of addressing that persistent question. (RL)

Seamus Heaney and the Making of *Sweeney Astray*
Stephen Regan

Seamus Heaney's *Sweeney Astray*, his translation of the medieval Irish romance, *Buile Suibhne*, was a long time in the making. Heaney began work on his version of the story, in verse and prose, in the autumn of 1972, soon after leaving Belfast and settling in Glanmore, Co. Wicklow. The exile of Mad King Sweeney, cursed by St. Ronan and transformed into a bird, had a powerful appeal for Heaney, who initially saw in the story a political allegory concerned with the role of poetry and the imagination in a time of violence. Uneasy about both the direction of his translation and the adequacy of his technique, Heaney put aside his first draft of the work in 1973, finally publishing a revised version with Field Day in 1983. The Notebook containing the first draft of *Sweeney Astray* is highly revealing in terms of Heaney's preoccupations at the time of his move to the Republic, while subsequent revisions show how the work came to carry the imprint of his later poetic and political concerns from 1979 onwards. In making *Sweeney Astray*, Heaney was effectively remaking his own career. As well as being a strikingly innovative translation of a Middle Irish text, the work is also an intensely personal reflection on the role and value of poetry itself, and a catalyst for the changes in Heaney's poetic practice between *Wintering Out* (1972) and *Station Island* (1984). (SR)

"Now, and ever / After":
Familial and Literary Legacies in Seamus Heaney's *Human Chain*
Michael Parker

That *Human Chain* (2010) is among the very finest of Seamus Heaney's collections has come to be widely accepted. The incident which perhaps left the deepest imprint on Heaney and these late poems during the period of their composition was the stroke he suffered in August 2006. The closeness of his encounter with death was, however, not the sole factor causing him to review urgently his work-to-date and what his literary legacy might be. In the preceding years, he collaborated with Dennis O'Driscoll on a substantial volume of interviews, published in 2008 as *Stepping Stones*. During these probing, telling exchanges, recollections from his childhood, adolescence, and early manhood flooded back, and soon found themselves inscribed in new poems. As his seventieth birthday approached, considerable time and energy were devoted to projects relating to that landmark date, including his participation in two documentaries, Charlie McCarthy's *Out of the Marvellous* and

Maurice Fitzpatrick's *The Boys of St Columb's*, both of which stimulated another look backwards.

"Now, and ever / After" addresses Heaney's preoccupation with time past, present, and future, offering a close examination of *Human Chain*'s opening movement where his earliest literary influences—from the English canon—are most prominent. It explores recurring anxieties voiced by the poems' speakers that his allotted time might be approaching its end, and that memory itself might become "irretrievable." (MP)

(Self-)In-Mourning: Paul Muldoon's Early Elegies
Wit Pietrzak

The essay focuses on Paul Muldoon's elegies written in the twentieth century, particularly on "Incantata" and "Yarrow," with a view to demonstrating that in the interwoven passages of mourning and narratives of personal growth the poet manages to create images of the deceased people that are infused with individual vividness as they also become parts of the speaker's own self. As a result, his subjects are endowed with a revived life in verse, and become an intrinsic part of the identity of the poet. In the end, death is shown to be a petrifying prospect, but one which can be alleviated as long as the departed are re-inscribed in a language that captures their own idiosyncrasies, which makes it seem as though the words flow from the poet as much as from the dead. (WP)

A Calculation More Curious Than Instructive:
Epic Chronology in *Paradise Lost*, Books 1-3
Gábor Ittzés

Early critics of Milton's *Paradise Lost* dismissed the possibility of calculating the duration of epic action in the first three, extra-terrestrial, books. When twentieth-century commentators took up the issue, they offered a variety of estimates for the overall duration of the poem's action, and their differences ultimately invited a return to the skepticism of the eighteenth-century forebears. Against this critical background, the paper examines Milton's treatment of time in the opening books of *Paradise Lost*. It explores his various time-keeping techniques and argues that for an adequate reading much more than straightforward temporal signifiers must be taken into account. Imagery, metaphoric and structural indicators, as well as pointers to a relevant timescale, the very continuity of action, temporal dualities, (the assumption of) the consistency of the narrative, and the relevance of mundane experience all

contribute to the overall picture. The result is both an integration of the events in Books 1-3 into an overarching epic chronology, and a set of hermeneutical principles more widely applicable to the interpretation of the whole poem. (IG)

Compulsion to Re-enact:
Trauma and Nostalgia in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*"
Wojciech Drąg

The article sets out to indicate the possibility of interpreting Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2006) as a study of an obsessive longing to repeat and return, which combines the features of Svetlana Boym's concept of restorative nostalgia and the Freudian notion of repetition compulsion. Following an overview of critical approaches to the novel, the article outlines the baffling condition of its unnamed narrator, a man recovering from a mysterious traumatic event. His obsession to re-enact a fleeting moment in the past when he felt authentic is examined as a manifestation of restorative nostalgia's utopian project of reconstructing an absolute truth. His further re-enactments are discussed as motivated by a wish to repeat a painful scenario in order to gain control over a traumatic event. The article concludes with a consideration of *Remainder*'s closing image, re-interpreted as a metaphor for the narrator's immersion in the cycle of repetition. (WD)

Possession: The Dostoevskian Master Trope of Reading and Writing in J. M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg*" (1994)
Angelika Reichmann

Apart from *Foe* (1986), *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) is J. M. Coetzee's most explicit discussion of authorship through the consistent rewriting of a canonical text by a writer who has had the most profound influence on his own writing. Coetzee's reading of Dostoevsky's 1871 *Devils* (or *The Possessed*) and his representation of Dostoevsky is focused on the figure of the "monster," summing up a stereotypical view of both Dostoevsky and his art. The essay argues that this "monstrosity" is inseparable from the master trope of the original Dostoevskian text, "possession," which Coetzee reinterprets in the context of mastery. Thus, monstrosity here seems to be the inevitable product of the attempt to relinquish mastery in textual production, to find a "middle voice" in between being possessed and doing the possessing, and thereby come into being. The resultant text can be conceived of only as a hybrid, monstrous being: an intertextual complex. (AR)

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Manuscript Submissions

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