PLACE AND MEMORY
IN THE POETRY OF
MICHAEL LONGLEY AND SEAMUS HEANEY

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SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND RELATED LITERATURE

MARCH 2005

ABSTRACT

PLACE AND MEMORY IN THE POETRY OF MICHAEL LONGLEY AND SEAMUS HEANEY

This thesis examines the poetry of Michael Longley and Seamus Heaney, Northern Irish poets and direct contemporaries, whose work has never before been meaningfully compared. A number of biographical and poetical differences exist, but over the course of their long careers both have shared an overwhelming interest in the intersections between place and memory.

Collective memory has emerged as a popular area of study in Ireland in recent years. Indeed, by interpreting Irish collective memories with the terms made current by Pierre Nora's *Les lieux de mémoire*, Longley and Heaney's interest in place and memory appears to demonstrate the central importance of collective memory-places in their poetry. However, as I argue, their interactions with these places, like their identifications with community more generally, are complex and changing. In their poetry, Longley and Heaney address place and memory by revealing the delicate interplay between the realms of the particular, national and universal. As a result, their verse resonates by approaching communal and literary concerns from uniquely personal angles.

Each chapter explores a different 'place' in their poetry. Chapters 1 and 2 analyze the most overt examples of Heaney and Longley's tendency to merge distant places with contemporary landscapes and concerns: Heaney's exploration of Iron Age bogs in *North* (1975) and Longley's preoccupation with the battlefields of World War I. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the poets' chronic investment in their primary mnemonic landscapes: Longley's elective homeground in the West of Ireland and Heaney's childhood home of Mossbawn. Finally, Chapter 5 argues that Longley and Heaney's classical poems and plays operate as abstract memory-places that conflate the universality of ancient Greece and Rome with the particularity of contemporary Ireland. Longley and Heaney have consistently returned to these 'places' throughout their poetic careers in order to meditate on Northern Ireland, the poetic vocation, and familial and communal identity.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Seamus Heaney

DN *Death of a Naturalist* (1966; repr., London: Faber and Faber, 1999)

DD *Door into the Dark* (1969; repr., London: Faber and Faber, 1972)

WO *Wintering Out* (1972; repr., London: Faber and Faber, 1989)

S *Stations* (Belfast: Ulsterman's Publications, 1975)

N *North* (1975; repr., London: Faber and Faber, 1996)

FW *Field Work* (1979; repr., London: Faber and Faber, 1983)

SA *Sweeney Astray* (1983; repr., New York: Noonday Press, 1995)

SI *Station Island* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984)

HL *The Haw Lantern* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987)

CT *The Cure at Troy* (1990; repr., New York: Noonday Press, 2001)

ST *Seeing Things* (1991; repr., New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000)

MV *The Midnight Verdict* (1993; repr., Oldcastle, Co. Meath: Gallery, 2000)

SL *The Spirit Level* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996)

OG *Opened Ground* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998)

EL *Electric Light* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001)

BT *The Burial at Thebes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004)

Michael Longley

NCC *No Continuing City* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1969)

EV *An Exploded View* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973)

MLW *Man Lying on a Wall* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1976)

EG *The Echo Gate* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1979)

P *Poems 1963-1883* (1985; repr., London: Secker & Warburg, 1991)

GF *Gorse Fires* (Winston-Salem: Wake Forest Univ., 1991)

GO *The Ghost Orchid* (London: Cape Poetry, 1995)

SP *Selected Poems* (London: Cape Poetry, 1998)

WJ *The Weather in Japan* (London: Cape Poetry, 2000)

SW *Snow Water* (London: Cape Poetry, 2004)

Emory Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research for this thesis, in particular my trip to the Special Collections Department at Emory University, could not have been conducted without the financial support of a postgraduate bursary from the British Association for Irish Studies and a grant from the F. R. Leavis Fund of the University of York.

I owe a major debt to both of my thesis supervisors, Hugh Haughton and Lawrence Rainey. Hugh's wealth of knowledge of Northern Irish poetry provided a truly invaluable resource, and his sensitive and thorough comments strengthened each chapter. Further, Lawrence's acute understanding of poetry and editing, as well as his effort to keep me focused on the 'big picture,' provided a constructive balance. I would also like to thank my examiners, John Roe (York) and Bernard O'Donoghue (Wadham College, Oxford), for their generous and enlightened comments.

My research was facilitated by the assistance of librarians on both sides of the Atlantic, specifically: the accommodating staff of Interlending and Document Supply at York; and the archivists of the Special Collections Department at the Robert W. Woodruff Library at Emory University. In particular, I would like to thank the Curator of Literary Manuscripts Stephen Ennis, and Gavin Drummond for their counsel during my time in Atlanta.

I have also received generous help from friends and family. Meg and John James generously opened their home for my many trips to the British Library. Nicole Devarenne offered insightful comments on an early draft of Chapter 3, while my Mom and Lyn helped to share the burden of proof-reading. I am especially grateful to my family overseas for their continued support of my rather extended stay in England, and for showing a real interest in my work.

As always, my biggest debt is to my husband Jason. He significantly influenced the contours of this thesis, providing perceptive feedback on every chapter through all its many drafts, as well as stretching my thinking in incalculable ways. Thank you for taking up my love of poetry, and for making this long process feel like an exciting adventure.

INTRODUCTION

> …I have never quite climbed down from the arm of that sofa. I may have grown more attentive to the news and more alive to the world history and world-sorrow behind it. But the thing uttered by the speaker I strain towards is still not quite the story of what is going on; it is more reflexive than that, because as a poet I am in fact straining towards a strain…As if the ripple at its widest desired to be verified by a reformation of itself, to be drawn in and drawn out through its point of origin.
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> Seamus Heaney, "Crediting Poetry," 1995 Nobel Lecture (*OG*, 466)

In his Nobel Lecture, Seamus Heaney charts a path from the particular to the universal by insisting that the universal arises from an interaction with the personal and local. The lecture confirms the formative function of his childhood home of Mossbawn and its continuing place at the center of an imaginative landscape that stretches well beyond Ireland. Like the "ripple" that resonates from its center point before moving outwards, so too Heaney claims his poetry and poetic voice are constantly drawn through their original source. This understanding enables his poetic imagination to perch on the sofa in his childhood family farm, while simultaneously inhabiting other places. Just as his first awareness of the "wideness of the world" (*OG*, 449) emanated from the wartime radio-broadcasts of foreign place-names, with both spatial and linguistic implications, new experiences filter through his accumulation of memories. However, while the lecture emphasizes the prominence of his homeground, it also demonstrates his feelings of displacement from Northern Ireland, caused by the "quarter century of life-waste and spirit-waste…" (*OG*, 455). He admits he has "lived with that place even though I have lived out of it for the past quarter of a century" (*OG*, 451). This balance between feelings of affiliation and distance is the subject of one of Heaney's most insightful earlier essays, "Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry from Northern Ireland" (1984).

In "Place and Displacement," Heaney muses on the reasons behind the unique relationship to place of many Northern Irish writers of his generation. Discussing the work of Northern Irish contemporaries Derek Mahon and Michael

Longley, along with the younger poet Paul Muldoon, Heaney explains that their poetry reveals a "strain of being in two places at once, of needing to accommodate two opposing conditions of truthfulness simultaneously...."[1] In his 1973 volume *An Exploded View*, Michael Longley expressed a similar sentiment in the poem "Alibis," which ironically describes the reality of "being in two places at the one time" as a "simple question" (*EV*, 59). This condition arises, in Heaney's analysis, because the poets "belong to a place that is patently riven by notions of belonging to other places. Each person in Ulster lives first in the Ulster of the actual present, and then in one or other Ulster of the mind."[2] By "other places" Heaney indicates Northern Ireland's complicated allegiances to Scotland, England and the Republic of Ireland, but also the oppositional locations of collective memory for Northern Irish Catholic and Protestant communities, or *lieux de mémoire*, which represent different "Ulsters of the mind." Heaney argues that the violent "historical situation" after 1968, and the divided collective memory of Northern Ireland, generates feelings of displacement which impact on "poetic technique."[3] For Heaney, this helps to explain "the large number of poems in which the Northern Irish writer views the world from a great spatial or temporal distance, from the perspective of mythological or historically remote characters...."[4] This thesis takes Heaney's "Place and Displacement" as a starting point for an exploration of the function of place and memory in the poetry of Seamus Heaney and his contemporary Michael Longley.

Until recently, Longley's poetry has generated remarkably little critical attention, in contrast to the work of other Northern Irish poets such as Heaney, Mahon, Muldoon and John Montague.[5] Many major studies of contemporary Irish poetry omit Longley's work, or only mention it in passing. To offer only a few examples, Longley is not included in either Terence Brown and Nicholas Grene's

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[1] Seamus Heaney, "Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry of Northern Ireland" (1984), in *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 115.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., 118. Longley makes a forceful connection between place and memory when speaking about the hidden impact of the Troubles on the landscape. He notes that the "storm clouds of civil war...hang overhead. They have been suspended there for nearly twenty years now, mercifully reluctant to release their electric tension in a storm, but still casting shadows on familiar people and places." As a result, Longley contends, "A walk or a drive anywhere in the province is punctuated by memories of a shooting here, a bombing there. Normality is ambushed. Landmarks. Deathmarks." Longley, "John Hewitt and Northern Ireland," Box 37, Folder 27, Emory.
[4] Heaney, "Place and Displacement," 119. Importantly, by 1984 when Heaney made his comments, Mahon and Heaney lived outside of Northern Ireland, while Muldoon left for Kerry and then America shortly thereafter.
[5] One might also add Tom Paulin and Ciaran Carson to this list.

Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Poetry (1989) or Richard Kearney's *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* (1988), and is only briefly referred to in Robert F. Garratt's *Modern Irish Poetry: Tradition and Continuity from Yeats to Heaney* (1986) and Dillon Johnston's *Irish Poetry after Joyce* (1985).[6] Similarly, Seamus Deane's *A Short History of Irish Literature* (1986) and *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991) question Longley's artistic relation to his fellow Irish poets, suggesting Longley has more in common with the English poets of the post-war period.[7] In this light, Peter McDonald aptly summarizes the critical attention devoted to Longley's poetry, for, "though it has never gone short of respect, [it] has yet to work its way into the discourse of those cultural critics for whom Irish writing occupies a central position."[8] This lack of critical interest could largely be attributed to Longley's long poetic silence, a gap stretching from *The Echo Gate* (1979) until *Gorse Fires* (1991), which contrasts with Heaney's prolific output during this period.[9]

However, the lack of scholarly attention also has something to do with the fact that Longley's poetry is not easy to *place*. As Alan Peacock explains, "Longley's is a non-declaratory kind of writing which does not lend itself uncomplicatedly to critical approaches where 'placing' within cultural and socio-political determinants is a central rather than an ancillary or constituent concern."[10]

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[6] Terence Brown and Nicholas Grene, eds., *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Poetry* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1989); Richard Kearney, *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1988); Robert F. Garratt, *Modern Irish Poetry: Tradition and Continuity from Yeats to Heaney* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1986); Dillon Johnston, *Irish Poetry after Joyce* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1985). Johnston does include more analysis of Longley's poetry in the Afterword to the second edition (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1997).

[7] Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (London: Hutchinson, 1986); and Deane, ed., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Derry: Field Day, 1991). In *A Short History*, Deane justifies his brief consideration of Longley's poetry by questioning his link with his fellow Northern poets, arguing that "Longley's is, or was, the most English or the most civil poetry of the Northern group…" (243).

[8] Peter McDonald, *Mistaken Identities: Poetry and Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 121. Lucy McDiarmid echoed this sentiment in a review of *Gorse Fires* when she noted that "until recently, Michael Longley was the least visible poet of the current Northern Irish renaissance." McDiarmid, review of *GF*, *New York Times*, 2 August 1992.

[9] Longley did publish *Selected Poems 1963-1983*, which included some new material. In the same period Heaney published two books of poetry, *Station Island* (1984) and *The Haw Lantern* (1987), the Sophoclean play *The Cure at Troy* (1990), as well as two books of critical writing, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-78* (1980), and *The Government of the Tongue: The T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (1988). *Seeing Things* (1991) was published in the same year as *Gorse Fires*.

[10] Alan J. Peacock, "Introduction," in *The Poetry of Michael Longley*, eds. Peacock and Kathleen Devine (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2000), xi. The collection includes essays by Neil Corcoran, Douglas Dunn, Michael Allen and Elmer Kennedy-Andrews among others.

Since the publication of *Gorse Fires* (1991), and increasingly with the subsequent volumes *The Ghost Orchid* (1995), *The Weather in Japan* (2000) and *Snow Water* (2004), awards and critical attention have dramatically shifted in Longley's direction.[11] The first book-length collection of critical essays on Longley, *The Poetry of Michael Longley* (2000), edited by Peacock and Kathleen Devine, launched a new era in Longley scholarship, and in 2001 the *Honest Ulsterman* devoted a special issue to his poetry.[12] Besides this, a handful of relevant journal articles and several insightful chapters within books concerning Irish poetry address Longley's work. Nevertheless, much territory remains underexplored.[13] My own investigation is greatly strengthened by a research trip to the Special Collections Department at Emory University where I examined a large collection of Michael Longley's papers.[14] Along with numerous first drafts of poems, the Emory collection contains a vast range of prose by Longley, including: personal correspondence; pieces on other artists written in his capacity as Combined Arts Director for the Northern Irish Arts Council; and autobiographical writings. Since Longley has not published nearly as much critical and prose writing, or given as many interviews as Heaney, the Emory archive provides an indispensable supplement to Longley's published poetry. The challenge to the critic in the wake of Longley's rejuvenation since *Gorse Fires*, which my thesis takes up, is to analyze his work in terms of his full career, placing his earlier books within the context of his oeuvre as a whole. Increasingly, critics now regard Longley as a major poet, and my thesis will contribute to a new and growing critical focus on his work.

There is no shortage of critical attention devoted to Heaney's poetry, especially following his reception of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. Since his debut in 1966 with *Death of a Naturalist*, Heaney's work has sparked considerable critical and public interest, with many commentators almost

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[11] Among Longley's awards from his last four collections: *Gorse Fires* won the Whitbread Prize; *The Ghost Orchid* was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize; *The Weather in Japan* was awarded the T. S. Eliot Prize, the Hawthornden Prize and the Irish Times Poetry Prize; and *Snow Water* was shortlisted for the Forward Prize.

[12] *Honest Ulsterman* 110, Special Feature: Michael Longley, A Celebration (Summer 2001).

[13] Fran Brearton analyzes Longley's preoccupation with World War I in *The Great War in Irish Poetry: W B. Yeats to Michael Longley* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000). Jonathan Hufstader in *Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones: Northern Irish Poetry and Social Violence* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1999), and Peter McDonald in *Mistaken Identities: Poetry and Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) include chapters on Longley in their books on Northern Irish poetry.

[14] While at Emory, I also looked at the papers of Peter Fallon, Ted Hughes, Derek Mahon, Medbh McGuckian, as well as the small collection of Heaney material.

immediately comparing him to Yeats.[15] Many insightful books and articles have explored Heaney's poetry, and my approach to it, which emphasizes close readings of individual poems, owes much to the perceptive close readings of, among others, Neil Corcoran, Bernard O'Donoghue and Michael Allen. However, despite the depth and general quality of Heaney criticism, his poetry is far from being exhausted by scholarship. Critics continue to turn towards Heaney precisely because his poetry consistently doubles back on itself, reencountering his characteristic themes in new ways. As already discussed, Heaney's lecture "Place and Displacement" offers a provocative reading of his contemporaries' relation to place. His own work is deeply invested in exploring a comparable vacillation, and this thesis adds to existing scholarship by looking closely at Heaney's own relationship to place by examining several key locations in his poetry.

Longley and Heaney are direct contemporaries; both were born in 1939 in Northern Ireland and had first collections of poetry published immediately before the outbreak of violence. Despite this, critics have largely failed to compare their poetry. Both poets share a preference for the lyric, and together they attended Philip Hobsbaum's Belfast Group in the early 1960s.[16] Further, they have both demonstrated an appreciation for each other's work, as Heaney dedicated *Wintering Out* (1972) to Longley and Northern Irish folk musician David Hammond, while Longley dedicated *An Exploded View* (1973) to Heaney, Derek Mahon and James Simmons.[17] Further, they have participated together in several poetry readings: at the 1965 Belfast Festival; with the innovative 'Room to Rhyme' poetry tour in 1968 (with Hammond); and in a 1989 reading given to benefit the Linen Hall Library in

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[15] For example, Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion call Heaney the "most important new poet of the last fifteen years." Morrison and Motion, eds., *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (1982; repr., London: Penguin, 1988), 13. Robert Lowell called him the "best Irish poet since W. B. Yeats." Quoted in Karl Miller, *Seamus Heaney in Conversation with Karl Miller* (London: Between the Lines, 2000), 104. See also: Ronald Tamplin, *Seamus Heaney* (Milton Keynes: Open Univ. Press, 1989); John Carey, "Poetry for the World We Live In," review of *FW*, *Sunday Times* (18 November 1979): 40; and John Wilson Foster, "Heaney's Redress," in *Colonial Consequences: Essays in Irish Literature and Culture* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1991), 168.

[16] Longley has always maintained that the Group didn't alter his poetic style, but has admitted that the friendships with fellow poets had a lasting impact, and helped to create a sense of coterie in Northern Ireland. Heaney has credited the Group with infusing "energy" into the Belfast scene, and giving "a generation a sense of themselves." Heaney, "Belfast: The Group" (1978), in *Preoccupations*, 29. See also: Longley, "The Empty Holes of Spring: Remembering Trinity and The Group," in *Tuppenny Stung: Growing up in Belfast* (Belfast: Lagan, 1994), 40-42.

[17] Heaney and Longley have also dedicated poems to each other. See: Longley, "A Personal Statement" (*NCC*, 19); "For Derek, Seamus and Jimmy" (*EV*); and "To Seamus Heaney," (*EV*, 38-39). For Heaney, see: "Personal Helicon" (*DN*, 46); and "For David Hammond and Michael Longley" (*WO*, 5).

Belfast ('An Upstairs Outlook'). Both poets have questioned the idea of a Northern Irish Renaissance,[18] but their work does reveal a dialogue and a shared sense of artistic community with other Irish, and specifically Northern Irish poets. Admittedly, the two poets are significantly different. In addition to the discrepancy in critical reception, already mentioned, the most obvious difference is in their family backgrounds in terms of both religion and location. Longley was raised in a middle-class Protestant house in Belfast, while Heaney grew up in a Catholic household in rural south Derry.[19] However, while recognizing their biographical and poetical differences, my consideration of their shared interest in the intersections between place and memory sheds new light on the work of both poets.

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During recent years, the discussion of collective memory and commemoration has assumed a new importance in Irish literature, literary criticism and historiography. Evidence can be found in many different places, from the advertisements of Tourism Ireland,[20] which lure travelers to the "Island of Memories," to scholarly studies and debates. Consider a short list of books published since 1990: *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (1994); *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (1995); *Memorials to the Casualties of Conflict: Northern Ireland, 1969-1997* (1997); *Reconciling Memories*; *Remembrance and Forgetting: Building a Future in Northern Ireland* (1998); *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children who died as a result of the Northern Irish Troubles* (1999); and *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual*

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[18] See: Heaney, "An Interview with Seamus Heaney," by Frank Kinahan, *Critical Inquiry* 8.3 (Spring 1982): 405-14; and Longley, "The Longley Tapes: An Interview with Robert Johnstone," *Honest Ulsterman* 78 (Summer 1985): 21-24.

[19] These distinctions in background are complicated by other biographic details. Longley's parents were English and though attended service only occasionally, were members of the Church of Ireland rather than practicing the more widespread Presbyterianism. Further, Longley has always been more interested in the country than the city, evidenced by his great investment in the West of Ireland (Chapter 3), but he has remained in Belfast during the Troubles. Heaney still has a huge poetic investment in the area around his childhood home, but has not actually lived in rural Derry since he was a boy. He left home to go to school in the city of Derry and then to university in Belfast, before living in California, Wicklow, Boston and Dublin.

[20] Tourism Ireland (http://www.tourismireland.com) was formed after the Belfast Agreement (1998) to promote all-Ireland tourism. It is run jointly by the Republic of Ireland and Northern Irish Tourist Boards.

Displays in Northern Ireland (1997).[21] Moreover, the heated debates surrounding Roy Foster's *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*,[22] Seamus Deane's edited *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*,[23] and the layout and content of the Ulster Folk Museum, further show the complexity of issues relating to Irish (and specifically Northern Irish) history and memory. As Ian McBride notes, in "Ireland, perhaps more than in other cultures, collective groups have…expressed their values and assumptions through their representations of the past."[24] This surge in recent scholarship on the subject of Irish memory has its origins in the broader debates concerning historical revisionism and national identity, but it also relates to an increased interest in the study of Irish conceptions of place.[25]

Several theorists, not working in the field of Irish studies, have significantly colored my approach. The first, Pierre Nora, provides a showcase of

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[21] John Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994); Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Cape, 1995); Jane Leonard, *Memorials to the Casualties of Conflict: Northern Ireland, 1969-1997* (Belfast: Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, 1997); Alan D. Falconer and Joseph Liechty, eds., *Reconciling Memories* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Columba, 1998); The Faith and Politics Group, *Remembrance and Forgetting: Building a Future in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: The Faith and Politics Group, 1998); David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney and Christ Thornton, eds., *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children who died as a result of the Northern Irish Troubles* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1999); and Neil Jarman, *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Berg, 1997). See also Jarman and Dominic Bryan, eds., *Parade and Protest: A Discussion of Parading Disputes in Northern Ireland* (Coleraine: Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster, 1996).

[22] R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988). For an introduction to the debate, see: Ciaran Brady, "'Constructive and Instrumental:' The Dilemma of Ireland's First 'New Historians,'" in *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism*: *1938-1994*, ed. Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), 3-31.

[23] Deane, ed., *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* and *The Field Day Anthology: 1991-2002* (Derry: Field Day Publications, 2002). For criticism, see: Edna Longley, "Introduction: Revising 'Irish Literature,'" in *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1994), 9-68.

[24] Ian McBride, "Introduction: memory and national identity in modern Ireland," in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 3. See also: Oliver MacDonagh's first two chapters ("Time" and "Place"), in *States of Mind: Two Centuries of Anglo-Irish Conflict, 1780-1980* (1983; repr., London: Pimlico, 1992), 1-33; and Falconer, "Preface to the First Edition," *Reconciling Memories*, 9-10. Luke Gibbons' *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork Univ. Press with Field Day, 1996) opens with the declaration that "Ireland is a First World country, but with a Third World memory."

[25] See: Brian Graham, ed., *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1-15; Andrew Carpenter, ed., *Place, Personality and the Irish Writer* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1997); Ullrich Kockel, ed., *Landscape, Heritage and Identity: Case Studies in Irish Ethnography* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1995); Edna Longley, "Northern Irish Poetry: Literature of Region(s) or Nation(s)?," in *Writing Region and Nation: A Special Number of the Swansea Review* (Swansea: Univ. of Swansea Press, 1994), 63-83; Patrick Sheeran, "Genius Fabulae: The Irish Sense of Place," *Irish University Review* (Autumn 1988): 191-206; and Heaney, "The Sense of Place" (1977), in *Preoccupations*, 131-49. For interdisciplinary and general studies, see: Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1997); and Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Fontana, 1996).

national/collective memory in his massive editorial project *Realms of Memory* (1984-1992), which informs my understanding of the relationship between place and memory.[26] The title of the English edition, *Realms of Memory*, captures the abstract nature of the locations that Nora's volume explores, but the original title *Les Lieux de Mémoire* makes the connection between place and memory explicit. Nora's project catalogues a vast array of "memory-places" of French national identity and seeks to describe the "imaginary communities" that bind the people of France.[27] The work of two other French scholars of the *Annales* school, Roger Chartier and Jacques Le Goff, further enhance an understanding of the mutability of national memory-places by showing "how, in different times and places, a specific social reality was constructed, how people conceived of it and how they interpreted it to others."[28] Further, Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory* (1996) argues that landscapes are the products of specific cultures, and "can be self-consciously designed to express the virtues of a particular political or social community."[29]

Applying Nora's methodology to Northern Ireland reveals at least two distinct and oppositional realms of memory. Ian McBride explored this issue in his edited collection of essays *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (2001), which charts how the opposed memories of Catholics and Protestants compete against one

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[26] Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996). For related studies on the connection between landscape and memory in Canada, America and Australia, respectively, see: Brian S. Osborne, "Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in Its Place" (lecture, Ethnocultural, Racial, Religious, and Linguistic Diversity and Identity Seminar, Halifax, Nova Scotia, November 2001); Richard R. Flores, "Memory-Place, Meaning, and the Alamo," in *American Literary History* 10.3 (Autumn 1998): 428-45; and Peter H. Hoffenberg, "Landscape, Memory and the Australian War Experience, 1915-18," *Journal of Contemporary History* 36.1 (2001): 111-31. Additionally, the work of David Lowenthal has been influential in tracing the relationship between landscape and memory. Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory," *Geographical Review* 65.1 (January 1975): 1-36; *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (1996; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998); and *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990).

[27] Nora defines collective memory as "what remains of the past in the lived reality of groups, or what these groups make of the past." Quoted in Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (1977), trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1992), 95.

[28] Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations* (1988), trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), 4. See also: Le Goff, *History and Memory*, xi-xii. Le Goff explains that "collective memory is not only a conquest, it is also an instrument and an objective of power," 98. In regards to Ireland, Brian Graham notes that the "embodiment of public memory in landscape provides a robust example of the ways in which representations of place are intimately related to the creation and reinforcement of official constructions of identity and power...." Graham, "The Imagining of Place: Representation and identity in contemporary Ireland," in *In Search of Ireland*, 193. Though he looms large in the field of memory theory, I do not explicitly engage Freud's work, as I felt that other theorists had a more direct relation to my argument about Heaney and Longley's poetry.

[29] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 15.

another, and thus simultaneously sharpen and alter their own mnemonic traditions.[30] However, relying upon monolithic mnemonic frameworks to view the situation in Northern Ireland tends to overshadow the more nuanced world of individual memory. Thus, my thesis also rests upon a second plinth of memory theory, provided by James E. Young's *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (1993), which understands the necessary gradations of individual memory within the mnemonic frameworks of larger collectivities.[31] Young's consideration of the interaction of individual and collective memory, couched in the specific context of Holocaust memory and memorials, provides a necessary counterbalance to Nora's understanding of national memory, and helps to cut a path through recent approaches to memory in modern Ireland.

The first page of McBride's provocative introduction to *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* establishes the stakes of the debate by quoting Ernest Renan's famous postulation that members of a nation require "the possession in common of a rich legacy of national memories."[32] Indeed, McBride places such a strong emphasis upon the function of memories in constructions of Irish identity that he simply replaces the word "history" (in the book's title) with "national identity" (in the introduction's title) to read "Memory and national identity in modern Ireland." My thesis does not challenge the relationship between memory and national identity, but takes issue with a vast corpus of scholarly thought that identifies polarized mnemonic frameworks in Northern Ireland at the cost of neglecting individual constructions of memory. This approach subsumes the individual within his or her collectivity, and concludes with Renan that national memories must be possessed "in common." Scholars of national memories (and national identity) in Ireland and Northern Ireland, as elsewhere, too often represent individuals as passive recipients of the collective memories of social and/or religious groups. When reading the poetry of Michael Longley and Seamus Heaney, one must be aware of larger mnemonic frameworks, but also recognize the poets' repeated insistence on grounding their poetry in personal experiences and memories, and the way that individual memory can work as a complex critique of cultural commemoration.

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[30] McBride, "Introduction," 1-42. Further, the essays in Falconer and Liechty's *Reconciling Memories* accept that the collective memories of Catholics and Protestants in Ireland are opposed, and explore ways to 'reconcile' the different mnemonic traditions.
[31] James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993).
[32] McBride, "Introduction," 1.

The first theorist of "collective memory," Maurice Halbwachs, argued that group identities structure all memory and that "memory of the individual exists only in so far as she or he is the unique product of a particular intersection of groups" (1925).[33] In the last twenty years, psychologists, sociologists and historians have moderated and elaborated upon this extreme view. James Fentress and Chris Wickham, for instance, choose to analyze "social memory" rather than "collective memory," because they feel the term "social memory" affords greater room for the individual.[34] The wide interdisciplinary scope of authors in McBride's volume testifies to the importance of social memory as a subject for study in Ireland. According to McBride, the Catholic version of history focuses relentlessly upon memories of subjugation and struggle, while the Protestant self image (quoting Oliver MacDonagh) envisages "an endless repetition of repelled assaults, without hope of absolute finality or of fundamental change."[35] Edna Longley states that these opposing mnemonic traditions, which represent the different denominational cultures of Protestants and Catholics, can be described as "providential" and "redemptive" respectively.[36] Thus, as McBride explains, "remembering and forgetting are social activities, and our images of the past are therefore reliant upon particular vocabularies, values, ideas and representations shared with other members of the present group."[37] I don't deny the usefulness of investigating the diametrically opposed national memories of these two groups, as compellingly articulated by the contributors to *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*. Instead, I would argue that an overemphasis upon the *objects* of remembrance, rather than the *subjects* (or

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[33] Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective*, quoted in James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), ix.
[34] Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, viiii.
[35] McBride, "Introduction," 15
[36] Quoted in McBride, "Introduction," 16. See: E. Longley, "'The Rising, the Somme and Irish memory," in *The Living Stream*, 69-85. Similarly, Falconer contrasts the "siege mentality" of the Protestant community with the "coercion mentality" of the Catholic community. Falconer, "Remembering," in *Reconciling Memories*, 11-12.
[37] Ibid., 12. See also: Michael Longley's explanation of dual allegiance in "Memory Acknowledgement," *Irish Review* 17.18 (Winter 1995): 156: "At the time [1991, the 75th Anniversary of the Easter Rising] this underplaying of a central historical moment seemed wrong to me. It was as though Yeats' great, ambiguous refrain 'A terrible beauty is born' was being diluted into 'Yes, something rather exciting and significant did happen round about then.' A mean between uncritical glorification of the past, and frightened repression, is what we should be seeking. So I accepted an invitation to take part in one of the commemorative events, a marathon poetry read-in in the GPO...Without comment I read elegies for people killed in the Troubles. I saluted the leaders of the Easter Rising, and then... I said that, coming from Belfast, I felt Irish sometimes and sometimes British. I sensed that the large crowd took little or no exception to what I was saying. Indeed, they seemed quite sympathetic to what amounted to my declaration of dual allegiance."

individuals) remembering in the first place, has caused current scholarship to categorize national memories simply in terms of divergent national identities.

McBride's introduction, along with the essays in his volume, successfully elucidates different types of memories in Ireland and gauges the relative importance that different communities place upon safeguarding their key memory-places. Each essay focuses on a particular memory-place: martyrdom during the reformation, the Rising of 1798, the famine, the diaspora, Wolfe Tone, the Somme, etc. These, as McBride's introduction warns us, are described as collective memories and are accordingly attributed to either Catholic or Protestant collective memory. Following Nora's explanation, these key events and figures function as national memory-places, which contemporary Irish people use to ground their identity. This approach to place and memory yields interesting results, and certain poems and themes by Longley and Heaney appear to coincide with the traditional locations of Catholic and Protestant social memory in Northern Ireland. For example, Longley's poetic obsession with the First World War appears to fit comfortably within a larger Protestant memorial tradition of the Great War, especially in his identification with the participants in the Battle of the Somme, which claimed the lives of many members of the Ulster Division. Likewise, as Richard Kearney points out, Heaney shares with the greater Catholic community recognition of "the sacramental charge of Irish History."[38] Yet, though Longley and Heaney certainly demonstrate the pull of larger communal memory-places in their poetry, their interactions with such locations (like their identifications with community more generally) are complex and changing. In their poetry, Heaney and Longley address place and memory by revealing the elaborate interplay between the realms of the particular, national and universal, thereby achieving a larger resonance by approaching communal concerns from a personal angle. The poets consistently contribute to, extend, and subvert the traditional mnemonic frameworks of Northern Ireland.

Nora's argument, like my own, rests upon Frances Yates' groundbreaking study of the classical mnemonic technique of *loci memoriae* or *genius loci*.[39] Longley and Heaney's poetry rarely adheres to the strict and classically trained mnemonic techniques identified by Yates. However, Yates' account of how

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[38] Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997), 130.

[39] Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (1962; repr., London: Pimlico, 2003).

individuals use memory-places to meditate on specific concerns sheds light on the way that Longley and Heaney fill their poetry with significant and revisitable 'places,' and (remembering Heaney's argument in "Place and Displacement") how the peculiar place of Northern Ireland deeply influences the primary 'places' of their poetry. As Yates explains, the art of memory "seeks to memorize through a technique of impressing 'places' and 'images' on memory…and the manipulation of images in memory must always to some extent involve the psyche as a whole."[40] In regard to Longley and Heaney's places of memory, her distinction between artificial and natural memory is also useful. Artificial memory (the subject of Yates' study) is "a memory strengthened or confirmed by training," whereas "natural memory is that which is engrafted in our minds, born simultaneously with thought."[41]

In his influential study of Holocaust memorials, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, James E. Young acknowledges the utility of Halbwachs' notion of collective memory, but explains its insufficiency for understanding the infinite plurality of memories of the Holocaust.[42] He explains, "I prefer to examine 'collected memory' [as] the many discrete memories that are gathered into common memorial spaces and assigned common meaning." He explains that:

> Even though groups share socially constructed assumptions and values that organize memory into roughly similar patterns, individuals cannot share another's memory any more than they can share another's context. They share instead the forms of memory, even the meanings in memory generated by these forms, but an individual's memory remains hers alone.[43]

Young remains consistently intrigued by the ability of the individual mind to evaluate collective "forms" of memory, and denies any wholesale determinative power of these "forms" over the individual. Individual memory is intricately related to the immediate social context, but not bound to its general convictions. Accordingly, Longley and Heaney's poems achieve an expansive resonance

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[40] Ibid., 11.
[41] Ibid., 20. Heaney's use of the landscape of Iron Age Jutland in *North*, for instance, can be seen in terms of an artificial memory-place, as he uses the landscape (as well as the bog bodies) to think about issues relating to contemporary Northern Ireland (Chapter 1). Longley's use of the battlefields of the Great War reveal an interesting merging of 'natural' and 'artificial' memory techniques, as he starts with his father's memories, but also positions the Great War as a crucial memory-place to explore issues from his poetic vocation, the fragility of plant and human life, as well as events happening in Northern Ireland (Chapter 2).
[42] Young, *The Texture of Memory*, viii.
[43] Ibid., xi.

precisely because they reconcile personal experience with universal themes (such as family, nature, suffering and love) that necessarily interact with collective memory.

Roy Foster's controversial book *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* (2001) provides a bridge from the ideas presented by Young to the context of modern Ireland. Like Young, Foster denies the authoritative power of collective memories, and condemns the reductionism he perceives in scholarly discussions of Irish national identity. He explains that the "relationships between people and their history are uncomfortable, and the boundaries are blurred and complicated; they deserve discussion in terms of what they wrote and the records they left elsewhere, instead of being boiled down into a theoretical reduction."[44] Rather than dividing his book into chapters based upon Catholic and/or Protestant commemorations, Foster instead designs each chapter around specific individuals and their relationship to national stories or memories. Foster does not equate individual memory with national/collective memory, but instead seeks to "remind us of the mesh of nuance, complexity and contradiction involved when the stories of nations intersect with those of supposedly emblematic individuals."[45] However, his choice of structure also leads to polemical and deliberately explosive constructions, as in his comparison of the autobiographical writings of Frank McCourt and Gerry Adams in a chapter called "Selling Irish Childhoods." Ultimately, Foster's book upends the common trope in Irish history and fiction that views individual experience (biography and autobiography) as "a kind of national microcosm," and (especially in the case of the Famine) rejects the process whereby "the language of individual psychology [is] unthinkingly scaled up to communal identification."[46]

However, this starkly different approach to the subject of Irish collective memory veers too far in the direction of a post-nationalist Ireland to adequately explain the relationship of Heaney and Longley to the subject of national sites of memory. Similarly, Richard Kearney's post-modern approach to Ireland in *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (1997) maps a compelling new landscape, but one that is largely incompatible with the individual maps traced in the works of the two poets. For, in spite of the considerable differences in the poetry of Longley and Heaney, both reveal a desire to strike solid ground in their locating of

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[44] R. F. Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), xvii.
[45] Ibid., xvii.
[46] Ibid., 30.

personal and cultural memory-places. They represent a particular poetic generation, who came of age during the civil rights movement and the moment of renewed violence in Northern Ireland, and they shy away from monolithic or narrative understandings of memory and cultural events. Further, unlike younger Northern Irish poets such as Paul Muldoon, Ciaran Carson and Medbh McGuckian, from the poetic generation immediately following, Heaney and Longley rarely involve themselves in the post-modern effort to dissolve the cultural terms that offer places of memory.[47] Their poetry is mutually and overwhelmingly interested in place, and in the way that people are invested in a culture through their memories. Though I do not believe that Heaney and Longley fall neatly into binary categories, their process of using the language of their personal experience to approach issues of communal identification, situates their poetic projects somewhere in between the approaches offered by McBride and Foster.

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Each chapter explores a different 'place' in the poetry of Michael Longley and Seamus Heaney. Chapters 1 and 2 analyze Heaney and Longley's most overt examples of the landscape grafting Heaney discussed in "Place and Displacement," merging distant places (in terms of both time and space) with contemporary (often Northern Irish) landscapes and concerns. Chapter 1 focuses on Heaney's most controversial and celebrated volume *North* (1975), where he uses the bogs of Iron Age Jutland as a memory-place to explore recent Northern Irish history. Chapter 2 looks at Longley's most persistent overlapping of landscapes, his frequent returns to the battlefields of the Great War, returns which reveal his uneasy negotiation between collective and individual memory. Then, Chapters 3 and 4 engage with the primary imaginative landscapes of the two poets, Longley's West of Ireland and Heaney's Mossbawn. Simon Schama's observation that landscapes are "constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock" is borne out by Heaney

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[47] It is true that both Carson and Muldoon do poetically return to their homelands (Belfast, and Moy in County Tyrone respectively), but they return in ways that deliberately destabilize the landscape, and reconfigure the map. As Heaney's "Place and Displacement" argued, Heaney and Longley's poetry often evokes an unstable sense of landscape, but in their attention to the specifics of place they also reveal how 'place' determines the contours of their poetic imagination. Especially in their respective homegrounds (Mossbawn for Heaney and the West of Ireland for Longley), the poets show their concern for situating their identity and poetic concerns in a solid landscape.

and Longley's career-long engagements with their respective homegrounds (Heaney's childhood landscape, and Longley's holiday sanctuary).[48] Finally, in Chapter 5, I turn to Longley and Heaney's classical interests, arguing that the classics function as an abstract place that both poets have increasingly explored in their poetry.[49] By turning to the Greek and Roman classics, the poets lay claim to universal themes. They extend the reach of the Irish literary tradition, as well as heighten awareness of the local and personal. These various overlapping places are locations where the poets situate their main poetic concerns, offering them vantage points to meditate on Northern Ireland, the poetic vocation, and familial and communal identity.

As a result of the excess of scholarship already devoted to *North*, Chapter 1 functions differently from the chapters that follow, which adopt a thematic and cross-volume approach. It provides a window into the concerns that I address in the remaining four chapters, by dwelling on Heaney's most extreme example of "place and displacement." *North*, and the ominous ground it explores, reflects the historic moment of its creation during the early 1970s, a time of pressure and frustration over the escalating violence in Northern Ireland, which Heaney described as a "moment of crisis…a very intense and twisted time."[50] The book pushes the connection between place and memory to the forefront. Indeed, Heaney's mythic method in Part I of *North* provided the initial point of departure for this thesis. Heaney's conflation of time and place, bringing Iron Age Jutland and Viking Ireland to bear on contemporary events, makes *North* a complex *lieu de mémoire* to explore the roots of violence and division. *North* contains several poems that relate to the themes of other chapters, including the appeal to a familial and a more collective sense of his 'homeground' (Chapter 4), and the reworking of classical mythology (Chapter 5). Further, in addition to the poems themselves, the critical responses to *North* offer an exaggerated viewpoint on issues and interests that remain central to my discussion of Northern Irish poetry. I do not claim to provide a comprehensive analysis of the poems of *North* or their critical reception, but to use the volume to demonstrate the

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[48] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 61.

[49] Longley hints at the way we can abstractly travel to distant and creative realms when talking of the classical poet Propertius, arguing that his "may be a small world, but it is one we can all visit." Longley, "Propertius," Box 36, Folder 20, Emory.

[50] Heaney, "Interview with Seamus Heaney," by Mike Murphy, in *Reading the Future: Irish Writers in Conversation with Mike Murphy*, ed. Clíodhna Ní Anluain (Dublin: Lilliput, 2000), 86.

explosive intersections of poetry, politics, place and memory in Heaney's work and the critical literature on it.

Though considerably different in scope, as it considers a topic that Longley has engaged in every collection of poetry rather than a single volume, Chapter 2 complements Chapter 1. This chapter explores how Longley forged a primary memory-place for his poetry out of the events and locations of the Great War. Like *North*, Longley's investment in the No Man's Land of World War I reveals the connection between historical situation and poetic technique. Though memories of the Great War, especially the Battle of the Somme, figure as prominent *lieux de mémoire* in the collective memory of Northern Irish Protestants, Longley both affirms and subverts their position. In many of his Great War poems, Longley insists on grounding his poetry in personal memories, though significantly they come at one remove since he draws on his father's recollections of the War for his own images and symbols. In addition to the familial significance he attaches to recording his father's wartime memories, Longley credits the poets of World War I as poetic exemplars. Through his preoccupation with the Great War, Longley justifies his own position as a war poet by revealing not only his unstable connection to matters of community, but also by showing his concern for the fragility of life. In poems such as "Wounds" (*EV*) and "Wreaths" (*EG*) Longley uses memories of his father to address acts of violence in contemporary Northern Ireland. From the pivotal early poem "In Memoriam," through to his most recent volume, the Great War functions as a dense *lieu de mémoire* where Longley locates concerns about his family and the Troubles, as well as serving to situate discussions of how art and artists should function in violent times.

Chapter 3 examines the prominence Longley gives to his "home from home" in the West of Ireland. The West, specifically Longley's cottage in Carrigskeewaun (Co. Mayo), where the "houses lie scattered / Over miles and are called a townland,"[51] occupies as central a place in Longley's poetry as Mossbawn does for Heaney, and it serves as Longley's elective homeground. Significantly, while Heaney (despite living in the Republic) continues to ground his poetry in the south Derry landscape of his youth, Longley (while residing in the North) locates many of his poems in the West. I begin by situating Longley's investment in the rural West

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[51] Longley, "For Ronald Ewart" (*WJ*, dedicatory poem).

by placing it within the context of the landscape's artistic importance for the Celtic Revivalists (Yeats, Synge and Gregory), Irish visual artists (J. B. Yeats, Henry, Keating), and other Northern Irish poets (MacNeice, Heaney and Mahon). The West's cultural currency, as the most 'Irish' landscape, offers a background for Longley's detailed and personal observations of place. Longley's western outlook elevates the virtues of patience and alertness, as he watches snow geese, dolphins, peregrines, and flowers, persistently bringing focus to the fleeting beauty of the natural world. Longley's poems of the West are incredibly detailed and personal, but he uses them to address larger universal concerns. The West is Longley's most recognizable paradigm of place, the most frequent setting for his love poetry, and its poetic significance has grown with every collection. Like the Western Front battlefields of the Great War, Longley uses the West of Ireland to meditate on issues as diverse as love, violence, and personal and cultural identity.

Chapter 4 turns to Heaney's poetic homeground, the area surrounding his childhood farm of Mossbawn. Despite his family's move away from the farm when he was fourteen, and his own residence in the Republic since the early 1970s, Heaney has consistently asserted the prominence of his foundational landscape as both the center of his imaginative landscape and the origin of his poetic voice (not least in his Nobel Lecture, which I discussed earlier). Like Longley's West, Mossbawn is the most densely recorded place in Heaney's poetry. Unsurprisingly, Heaney's relation to his homeground has undergone many changes, and he has looked to it for diverse purposes since his poetic debut with *Death of a Naturalist* in 1966. I begin by setting Heaney's development of his homeground against such exemplars as Wordsworth, Clare, Kavanagh and Hughes, and by considering the importance of the pastoral tradition in his poetry. I look specifically at the way that Heaney's first two books of poetry introduced a new poet and his landscape through poems that used a host of rural characters and activities to elaborate on the poetic discipline. Then, considering *Wintering Out* (1972), I show how Heaney used his homeground as a way to relate to the larger matter of Ireland, and how he explored the etymology of words in order to use his childhood landscape to read the fractured and complicated history of Northern Ireland. In later books, Heaney's understanding of his poetic voice as emanating from his homeground led to a more intangible connection, which he explained in a 1986 lecture as an " idea…generated out of my

experience of the old place but…not a topographical location."[52] Finally, the chapter analyzes how Heaney has positioned the Mossbawn landscape as his main entry into issues relating to his family. In Heaney's poetry, the Mossbawn area functions as a dynamic place of memory where he consistently grounds issues of community, history, poetic voice, and family.

Chapter 5 analyzes Longley and Heaney's large-scale involvement with the Greek and Latin classics, which function as abstract and culturally international memory-places that situate their main poetic concerns. I begin by examining the general preoccupation of twentieth-century Irish poets with classical sources, before considering the many classically inspired poems by Longley and Heaney (in addition to Heaney's two 'translations' of Sophoclean plays). Critics have largely attributed Longley's poetic rejuvenation since *Gorse Fires* to his involvement with classical material, but the classics have been an important point of reference since his first collection. However, as with Heaney, Longley's escalating use of classical stories and allusions indicates his increasing confidence as an established poet. As Longley has explained, "Homer gave me a new emotional and psychological vocabulary."[53] The classical tradition, because of its established status, offers a culturally proven location that both poets look to, in part, to open up the Irish literary context but also explore their preoccupations with violence, politics, family, love, and the poetic vocation.[54] Classically inspired texts, such as Heaney's play *The Cure at Troy* and poems such as "Mycenae Lookout" and Longley's "The Butchers" and "Ceasefire," make explicit connections between classical stories and the situation in contemporary Northern Ireland. Heaney and Longley use classical places such as Mycenae or Ithaca, like the other places explored throughout this thesis, for various purposes, and the classical tradition has increasingly become a resource that they look to in order to shed new light on their other primary preoccupations.

In the Conclusion, I explore Heaney and Longley's latest volumes of poetry: *Electric Light* (2001) and *Snow Water* (2004). These two volumes confirm the

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[52] Heaney, "The Placeless Heaven: Another Look at Kavanagh," in *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 4.

[53] Longley, "Au Revoir, Oeuvre: An Interview with Michael Longley by Peter McDonald" (c. 1997), Box 43, Folder 5, Emory.

[54] Michael Cronin argues that for Northern Irish writers (especially since the outbreak of the Troubles) translation offers "a form of release, a creative opportunity that would open up different areas of Irish culture to each other and to the rest of the world." Cronin, *Translating Ireland: Translation, Languages, Cultures* (Cork: Cork Univ. Press, 1996), 169.

centrality of the places and topoi that I examine in each chapter. The volumes include extended explorations of their homegrounds of Mossbawn and Mayo, classically inspired poems, and (for Longley) new twists on his preoccupation with the Great War. The landscapes, or topoi, examined in this thesis remain of crucial significance in understanding the poetry of Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley, and reveal their ongoing creative negotiation of place and memory.

CHAPTER 1

"THE GROUND POSSESSED AND REPOSSESSED": PLACE AND MEMORY IN HEANEY'S *NORTH*

I. "COMPOUNDED HISTORY": THE MOMENT OF *NORTH*

Published in 1975, *North* marked a turning point in terms of Heaney's personal poetic development, while also propelling his international reputation. Winning the W. H. Smith Memorial Prize, the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize, and named the Poetry Book Society choice, it met with, according to Blake Morrison, "the kind of acclaim which, in Britain at least, we had ceased to believe poetry could receive."[1] *North*'s innovations in terms of style and theme, as well as its effort to 'say something' about the contemporary situation in Northern Ireland, make it Heaney's most contentious book of poetry. Eliciting lavish praise, *North* also generated uncomfortable critiques from even some of Heaney's most steadfast admirers, as well as pointed condemnation from several commentators. From its publication until the present, the volume has been especially well-trodden territory for critics, and continues to occupy a pivotal place in Heaney scholarship.[2]

North's most fierce review came from a younger Northern Irish poet, Ciaran Carson, who notoriously labeled Heaney as "the laureate of violence- a mythmaker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, an apologist for the situation, in the last resort, a mystifier."[3] Critics such as Carson and Edna Longley decry the overt politics of the poetry in *North*.[4] Others, such as David Lloyd, Eileen Cahill, and Desmond Fennell

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[1] Blake Morrison, "Speech and reticence: Seamus Heaney's *North*," in *British Poetry since 1970: A Critical Survey*, eds. Peter Jones and Michael Schmidt (Manchester: Carcanet, 1980), 103.

[2] For instance, most of the essays included in Michael Allen, ed., *New Casebooks: Seamus Heaney* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997) focus heavily on *North*. Faber's decision to include *North* in its Faber Library Collection (alongside T.S Eliot's *Four Quartets* [1943], Ted Hughes' *Crow* [1972], Louis MacNeice's *Autumn Journal* [1938], and such iconic novels as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* [1954], and Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* [1984]) also affirms the important status of the volume.

[3] Ciaran Carson, "Escaped from the Massacre?," review of *N*, *Honest Ulsterman* 50 (1975): 183.

[4] Edna Longley, "'Inner Émigré' or 'Artful Voyeur'? Seamus Heaney's *North*," in *New Casebooks: Seamus Heaney*, ed. Allen, 30-63; and Conor Cruise O'Brien, "A Slow North-east Wind: Review of *North*" (1975), in *New Casebooks: Seamus Heaney*, ed. Allen, 25-29.

criticize the book for its lack of a strong political message.[5] And still others, notably Elizabeth Butler Cullingford and Patricia Coughlan, question Heaney's symbolic use of gender in *North*.[6] Heaney perhaps anticipated that many of the responses to the volume would be strong when he wrote about the nature of the pressure placed on Northern Irish poets to offer personal "'views / On the Irish Thing'" (*N*, 51). The very attempt to 'say something' about contemporary events guaranteed that many critics, particularly reviewers from Northern Ireland, felt compelled to 'say something' definite about his attempt.[7] In a 1999 interview Heaney reflected that "the resistance factor to [the poems of *North*] gave me a kind of extra sureness about them. *North*, luckily, was a book of great strangeness – great strangeness and great pressure...they have a hard survival factor in them for me still."[8] Certain poems support the opinion that in *North* Heaney concentrates on the "Catholic psyche"[9] to the exclusion of other positions, but the book offers a complicated response to historical events and provides a compelling glimpse of an artist under pressure. The sheer ambitiousness of *North* is both its most compelling feature and the reason why not all poems succeed. The book addresses not only the history of Ireland's invaders, but such large issues as violence, community, ritual, family, love and identity. Heaney's method in *North* does at points succumb to the weight of its wide-ranging scope and ambition, yet the overall power of the volume is to show the urgency of its historic moment.

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[5] Eileen Cahill, "A Silent Voice: Seamus Heaney and Ulster Politics," *Critical Quarterly* 29.3 (Autumn 1987): 55-70; Seamus Deane, "Seamus Heaney: The Timorous and the Bold" (1985), in *New Casebooks: Seamus Heaney*, ed. Allen, 64-77; David Lloyd, "'Pap for the Dispossessed': Seamus Heaney and the Poetics of Identity," in *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1993), 13-40; Henry Hart, "History, Myth, and Apocalypse in Seamus Heaney's *North*," *Contemporary Literature* 30.3 (Fall 1989): 387-411; and Desmond Fennell, "Whatever you say say nothing: Why Seamus Heaney is no. 1," *Stand* 32.4 (Autumn 1991): 38-67.

[6] Nathalie F. Anderson, "Queasy Proximity: Seamus Heaney's Mythical Method," in *Critical Essays on Seamus Heaney*, ed. Robert F. Garratt (New York: G.K. Hall & Co. 1995), 139-50; Patricia Coughlan, "'Bog Queens': The Representation of Women in the Poetry of John Montague and Seamus Heaney," in *New Casebooks: Seamus Heaney*, ed. Allen, 185-205; John Haffenden, "Seamus Heaney and the Feminine Sensibility," in *The Yearbook of English Studies: British Poetry since 1945*, Special Number 17, ed. C.J. Rawson, (London: The Modern Humanities Research Group, 1987), 89-116; and Elizabeth Butler-Cullingford, "'Thinking of her…as…Ireland:' Yeats, Pearse and Heaney," *Textual Practice* 4.1 (Spring 1990): 1-21.

[7] See: Dillon Johnston, "Violence in Seamus Heaney's poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. Matthew Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 113-14.

[8] Heaney, *Seamus Heaney in Conversation with Karl Miller* (London: Between the Lines, 2000), 21.

[9] E. Longley, "'Inner Emigré,'"45. Longley is here echoing Conor Cruise O'Brien's review of *North*.

North was Heaney's most consciously arranged collection up to that point with each poem placed within a larger framework, an attempt at cohesiveness significantly more formidable than in his preceding three books. Much of the strength of the volume comes from its call to read the poems in sequence as a continuing exploration of related themes, and critical responses reflect this challenge. However, the sense of overarching organization, with a sharp change in style between Parts I and II, led critics such as Edna Longley to attack the deterministic feel of the book, claiming that "certain poems seem dictated by the scheme (rather than vice-versa), commissioned to fill in the myth or complete the ritual."[10] Heaney explained that the two parts "constitut[ed] two different types of utterance, each of which arose out of a necessity to shape and give palpable linguistic form to two kinds of urgency – one symbolic, one explicit."[11] The bog poems, which I concentrate on in this chapter, are the symbolic thrust of *North*, and physically anchor Part I. The first part also explores aspects of Ireland's Viking and Norse past, and is framed by two poems about the Greek myth of Hercules and Antaeus. Rooted in the past with implicit connections to the present, and heavily invested in myth, Part I contrasts with the more autobiographical approach of the second part, which contains a series of memories and meditations that reflect on Heaney's Northern Irish identity.[12] My decision to focus on Part I in this chapter is consistent with the majority of scholarship on the volume, and the symbolic nature of the first part opens helpfully onto the larger questions of my argument.

In "Place and Displacement," Heaney analyzed the unique relationship of the Northern Irish poet to issues of place and memory. "Stretched between politics and transcendence," the poet is:

> …often displaced from a confidence in a single position by his disposition to be affected by all positions, negatively rather than positively capable. This,

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[10] Ibid., 53.

[11] Heaney, "Unhappy and at Home: Interview with Seamus Heaney by Seamus Deane," in *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies: 1977-1981*, eds. Mark Patrick Hederman and Richard Kearney (Dublin: Blackwater, 1982), 71. The binary structure also replays a tension between what Paul Valéry has classified as the *les vers donnés* and *les vers calculés*. See: Heaney, "The Makings of a Music: Reflections on Wordsworth and Yeats" (1978), in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 61.

[12] The style of Part II owes much to Heaney's short volume of prose poems *Stations* (1975), published in the same year as *North*, which he composed largely during his time at Berkeley from 1970 to 1971, and soon after his return to Belfast. *Stations* has a direct, autobiographical and journalistic style. It had a small publication run and has never been fully reprinted, though Heaney included nine poems from *Stations* in *Opened Ground* (1998). Other poems from Part II of *North*, which are primarily autobiographical, are looked at in Chapter 4 in relation to Heaney's defining and privileging of his childhood homeground.

> and the complexity of the present conditions, may go some way to explain the large number of poems in which the Northern Irish writer views the world from a great spatial or temporal distance, the number of poems imagined from beyond the grave, from the perspective of mythological or historically remote characters.[13]

Though his comments refer to fellow Northern Irish poets Mahon, Longley and Muldoon, the sentiment applies equally well to *North*. As noted earlier, this distinctive strategy bears on the fact that the poets "belong to a place that is patently riven between notions of belonging to other places. Each person in Ulster lives first in the Ulster of the actual present, and then in one or other Ulster of the mind."[14] In *North* several different temporal and geographical worlds coalesce with the contemporary. Heaney describes the "old man-killing parishes" (*WO*, 48) of Iron Age Jutland, and the tough world of "thick-witted couplings and revenges" (*N*, 10), alongside events that took place in 1970s Northern Ireland such as the tarring of Catholic girls (*N*, 31). Ultimately, the volume's varied memory-places create a mythology of "historically remote characters," which reveal the weight of present circumstances. The fundamental quarrel in *North* could be variously described as a struggle between politics and poetry, history and myth, colonist and colonized, rational and instinctive, or place and displacement. Yet as John Haffenden perceptively notes, "Heaney's quarrel with himself shapes *North* as a volume."[15]

II. "THE WET CENTER IS BOTTOMLESS": EARLY EXCAVATIONS OF THE BOG

Describing how his poetic direction changed after the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland in 1968, Heaney characterized the shift from a search for "the satisfactory verbal icon to a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament." Adequate symbols should, according to Heaney, "encompass the perspectives of a humane reason and at the same time…grant the religious intensity

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[13] Heaney, "Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry of Northern Ireland" (1984), in *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 119.
[14] Ibid., 115.
[15] Haffenden, "Seamus Heaney and the Feminine Sensibility," 105.

of the violence its deplorable authenticity and complexity."[16] Sectarian violence intensified very quickly. On 14 August 1969 the first 'official' victim of the Troubles was killed in Armagh, and the death toll increased to a staggering 1,402 by the year of *North*'s publication in 1975.[17] In his search for symbols "adequate to our predicament," Heaney discovered a compelling source of inspiration in P. V. Glob's *The Bog People* (1969), an archeological study of Iron Age bodies excavated from primarily Danish bogs.

According to Heaney, "the unforgettable photographs of these victims" included in Glob's book, forged his connection between Northern Ireland and Iron Age Jutland. These images merged in his mind with "the photographs of atrocities, past and present, in the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles."[18] The bodies exhumed from the Danish bogs afforded Heaney a symbolic way to investigate the roots of Northern Ireland's sectarian conflict, while also providing an artistic and historical distance in which to ground sensitive discussions. As Helen Vendler notes, the anonymity of the bog bodies "rising to view after centuries of secrecy" gave Heaney an "imaginative scope he would have been unwilling to assume in a literal retelling of local assassinations."[19] Thus, the title *North* alludes to both Northern Europe and Northern Ireland, and intimates a possible pan-Northern interpretation of history, identity and ritual.

Heaney's direct poetic association with Glob's subjects began with "The Tollund Man" in *Wintering Out* (1972). However, the metaphoric mysteries of bog soil were an element of Heaney's poetic interests much earlier. Most obviously, Heaney concluded his second collection, *Door into the Dark* (1969), with a poem entitled "Bogland." Written prior to his epiphany of reading Glob's book, and before the eruption of violence in Northern Ireland, "Bogland" does not anticipate the dark side of the bog. The benign excavations of "the skeleton / Of the Great Irish Elk" and butter "recovered salty and white" (*DD*, 41-42) seem curiously removed from the mutilated human remains that Heaney would uncover in *Wintering Out* and *North*. However, while the findings are markedly different, the sense of historical stratification in "Bogland" relates to the bog poems of the next two volumes. In

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[16] Heaney, "Feeling into Words" (1974), in *Preoccupations*, 56-57.
[17] Paul Bew and Gordon Gillespie, *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1998* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1999).
[18] Heaney, "Feeling into Words," 57-58.
[19] Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Harper Collins, 1998), 35.

"Bogland" the poet marvels that "Every layer they strip / Seems camped on before...The wet centre is bottomless." This offers an important precursor to *North*'s construction of the female spirit of the soil as both a devouring goddess calling for the "blood / of her faithful" ("Kinship," *N*, 38), and as a maternal figure of preservation and rejuvenation.

Further, the poetic power Heaney locates within the preserving "black butter" (*DD*, 41) of the bog connects to his affinity for the metaphors of excavation and unearthing that featured so prominently in *Death of a Naturalist*.[20] Bogland surrounded Heaney's childhood home, and, through witnessing the diverse mix of treasures both deposited and discovered in the soft soil, he claims that he "began to get an idea of bog as the memory of the landscape, or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in and to it."[21] In contrast to the personal 'digging' of many poems in *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*,[22] "Bogland" anticipates the larger scope of *North*'s bog poems by confidently assuming a collective voice, declaring that "We have no prairies." Recently, Heaney explained "Bogland" as a crucial departure, as it "was not autobiographical. It was beyond me in a good way.... It was a second growth-ring for me."[23] The poem's definition of the bog as an opaque memory bank, storing all that comes in contact with its mysterious juices, offers Heaney remarkable flexibility to cross boundaries of time, place and culture.

Whereas "Bogland" showed the bog's stratification of history, "Bog Oak" from *Wintering Out*, uses a preserved piece of oak to explore the cultural absence left by Ireland's colonial history. The "long-seasoned rib" of ancient wood reminds the poet that there are no longer any "'oak groves'" (*WO*, 14). The artifact causes him to reflect on the "moustached / dead" of his Irish ancestry, and his attention turns to the lineage of colonizers as essential shapers of Ireland's history, as it would later in *North*. Heaney focuses his gaze on Edmund Spenser, who lived in County Cork

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[20] In an article written just prior to the publication of *North* John Wilson Foster asserted that it was "Time, shall we say, to lay aside the spade and bring out the heavy machinery." However, rather than abandon one tool or technique for another, *North* furthers Heaney's archeological technique. Wilson Foster, "The Poetry of Seamus Heaney" (1974), in *Colonial Consequences: Essays in Irish Literature and Culture* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1991), 95.

[21] Heaney, "Feeling into Words," 54.

[22] Many of these poems are discussed in Chapter 4.

[23] Heaney, "An Interview with Seamus Heaney," by Mike Murphy, in *Reading the Future: Irish Writers in Conversation with Mike Murphy*, ed. Clíodhna Ní Anluain (Dublin: Lilliput, 2000), 85-86.

during the 1580s and 1590s, using Spenser's status as one of England's 'National Poets' to comment on the intersection between poetry and political declarations:

> Perhaps I just make out
> Edmund Spenser,
> dreaming sunlight,
> encroached upon by
>
> geniuses who creep
> 'out of every corner
> of the woodes and glennes'
> towards watercress and carrion.
> (*WO*, 15)

Significantly, this passage does not evoke the "dreaming sunlight" of Spenser's best-known work, *The Faerie Queen*, but his notorious political essay presented to Queen Elizabeth, *A Veue of the Present State of Ireland* (1598). The essay called upon Elizabeth to employ a harsher policy towards the native Irish, and Heaney's allusion reveals the uneasy relationship between art and politics. As John Goodby explains, "the brutal facts of Elizabethan colonial realpolitik 'encroach upon' not just [Spenser's] 'dreaming' but our view of him as an escapist, arcadian poet."[24] Through his meditation on the preserved wood, Heaney effectively creates a landscape where Spenser and his colonial legacy linger in the present.[25] Spenser's fear of the Irish, creeping "'out of every corner of the woodes and glennes,'" dictates his recommendation to the Queen, and pushes the native population towards sustaining watercress but also towards becoming "carrion," both historically and symbolically.[26] The poem shows the poet's sympathy for the dispossessed native Irish, but Heaney also concludes that the "wisdom" of the "moustached dead, the creel-fillers" is "hopeless."[27] Spenser also leaves his mark on Heaney's imaginative landscape despite Heaney's distrust of his presence. For, as the bog soil in "Bogland" handles deposits from hundreds of years of history, "Bog Oak" also

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[24] John Goodby, *Irish poetry since 1950: From stillness into history* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2000), 153.

[25] "Bog Oak" contributes to *Wintering Out*'s larger etymological project by showing the complicated and varied traditions that come together to form Irish identity.

[26] Interestingly, the description of "geniuses who creep / 'out of every corner of the woodes and glennes' / towards watercress" also evokes the figure of Mad King Sweeney. Heaney began translating the medieval *Buile Suibhne* (published in 1983 as *Sweeney Astray*) in 1972 after moving to Wicklow, and would have been aware of the story during the writing of *Wintering Out*. See: Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 32.

[27] See: Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 32. The historical determinacy comes back in "Hercules and Antaeus," from *North*, where clinging to the Antaeus-like characters is dismissed as a "pap for the dispossessed" as "Balor will die / and Byrthnoth and Sitting Bull" (*N*, 46-47).

condenses the past and present, and thus indicates the complicated legacy of Ireland's historical and literary traditions. Heaney captures a glen where characters with dissimilar backgrounds and interests occupy the same topographical space (as mention of "geniuses" evokes the notion of *genius loci*), which confirms his ability to cut through years in order to "tarry" with figures from Ireland's past.[28] "Bog Oak's" insight into the way that art and politics impinge on each other foreshadows a primary tension in *North*, where Heaney turns a critical eye on his own practices, as well as anticipating the later volume's conception of conflated and overlapping landscapes.

III. "HIEROGLYPHIC PEAT": UNCOVERING THE BOG BODIES OF *NORTH*

Much of the criticism of *North* has rightfully focused upon the bog series, as Heaney himself has done when looking back on the volume. In part, the poet attributed his interest in the bog bodies as poetic symbols to his sense of a pan-northern European genetic identification. He acknowledged feeling a physical affinity to the face of the Tollund Man (figure 1.1): "[he] seemed to me like an ancestor almost, one of those moustached archaic faces you used to meet all over the Irish countryside."[29] However, Glob's conjectures on the cause of death of the bog bodies supplied the more important link for Heaney's construction of a bridge between Iron Age Jutland and twentieth-century Ireland. Glob hypothesized that many of the bodies found in Danish bogs were victims of ritual sacrifice, as evidenced by the noose on the Tollund Man, the shaved head and blindfold of the Windeby Girl, and the Grauballe Man's fatal slit from "ear to ear, so deep that the gullet was completely severed."[30] Heaney has shied away from viewing the bog poems as direct political statements, but has argued that "the actual bodies and the

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[28] See: Maurice Harmon, "'We pine for ceremony': Ritual and Reality in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney, 1965-75," in *Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (1992; repr., Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), 71-72.
[29] Heaney, "An Interview with Seamus Heaney," by James Randall, *Ploughshares* 5.3 (1979): 17.
[30] P. V. Glob, *The Bog People: Iron-Age Man Preserved*, trans. Rupert Bruce-Mitford (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 48.

background of violence or sacrifice in the Iron Age had some relevance for the contemporary moment. Just by being written in Ireland at that time they were linking to what was going on."[31] The bog bodies therefore become for Heaney a place of memory, pictorial symbols akin to the mnemonic images discussed by Frances Yates, which he uses to meditate on his own complicated historical moment.

Glob speculates that some of the sacrifices were made during the winter festival as gifts to the fertility goddess Nerthus in the hopes of a plentiful spring.[32] The symbol of Ireland, figured as a female, has long played an important part in Irish nationalism, which Heaney acknowledges as "Mother Ireland, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the poor old woman, the Shan Van Vocht, whatever."[33] Heaney contrasts Ireland's female and native tradition with the masculine and Protestant forces "whose founding fathers were Cromwell, William of Orange and Edward Carson." The gendered aspect of Heaney's poetics, especially in *North*, has generated much critical discussion and the political implications of his gendering should be borne in mind from the outset. Archeologists, including Glob, have described Iron Age Jutland as part of Celtic civilization. Therefore, for Heaney, Nerthus merges with Mother Ireland who also receives modern sacrifices into her soil in much the same way as her Iron Age counterpart. The female gendering of the land as a goddess, with its Celtic foundation, contrasts sharply with Heaney's identification of the action-oriented masculinity of Protestant tradition. However, the Protestant versus Catholic (colonist versus colonized) dichotomy is complicated by the fact that Heaney's appropriation of the bog bodies emphasizes their pre-Christian context.

Placed at the center of *Wintering Out*, "The Tollund Man" boldly introduces Heaney's dialogue with Glob's subjects. The poet vows, "Some day I will go to Aarhus / To see his peat-brown head" (*WO*, 47), thus initiating an atmosphere of religious pilgrimage. The opening line of Heaney's poem echoes the rhythm of Yeats' "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," and asks the reader to ponder the contrast between the journeys that the two poets pledge to take. Yeats' poem begins, "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree," and ends with a restatement of his promise:

> I will arise and go now, for always night and day
> I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;

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[31] Heaney, "Interview with Seamus Heaney," by Mike Murphy, 86.
[32] Heaney shows his early interest in the goddess in the four-line poem "Nerthus," which followed "The Tollund Man" in *Wintering Out*. The poem connects "beauty" to both ritual and the ground, with an "ash-fork staked in peat" (*WO*, 49).
[33] Heaney, "Feeling into Words," 57.

> While I stand on the roadway or on the pavement grey,
> I hear it in the deep heart's core.[34]

Whereas Yeats travels mentally to a place of preserved Celticity, an untouched natural haven near the poet's childhood home of Sligo, Heaney's imaginary journey takes him to an archeological museum at Aarhus, to view its shrine of human

Figure 1.1 The Tollund Man[35]

sacrifice. Yeats' poem, discussed further in Chapter 3, celebrates an increasingly rare rural spirituality, and turns his memory of the western landscape into a mental sanctuary that he can escape to while being physically anchored in the bustle of city life. Heaney's journey, also a mental voyage, takes him back in history to see the violence of the past in order to confront the reality of contemporary brutality and his feelings of displacement from his homeground. Heaney and Yeats both write reverently of their subjects as symbolic points of origin. However, Heaney's choice

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[34] W. B. Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats: Revised Second Edition*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 1996), 39.
[35] Glob, *The Bog People*, 191.

to echo this particular poem by the elder poet emphasizes that his place of pilgrimage is to a decidedly darker past.[36]

Heaney's characterization of the Tollund Man's condition of preservation makes the poem's air of religiosity explicit: the "dark juices working / Him to a saint's kept body" (*WO*, 47). Throughout, the speaker's tone is reverential and amazed by the sanctity of the Iron Age man's sacrifice. Heaney credits the pre-Christian earth goddess, to whom Glob suspected the Tollund Man was originally sacrificed, as the same force that ultimately preserved the body's features, which Heaney describes as a forceful sexual consummation. As "Bridegroom to the goddess," the Tollund Man greets his earthen partner who "tightened her torc on him / And opened her fen." This violent sexuality metaphorically links with the Tollund Man's ability to speak to Heaney, for his symbolic marriage to the fertility goddess offers a new way to look at the violence taking place during the early 1970s. On the one hand, Henry Hart accurately observes that, "Mother Ireland is a femme fatale, seducing her devotees to violent death, rather than a holy land populated by sacred ghosts."[37] However, Hart fails to take into account the contrasting maternal instinct, which preserves the corpse like a "saint's kept body." Recalling Glob's interpretation of Iron Age fertility rituals, Heaney bids the body to germinate not only the seeds of spring, but also the victims of sectarian violence in Ireland: "The scattered, ambushed / Flesh of labourers, / Stockinged corpses / Laid out in the farmyards." Heaney asks the Tollund Man to bring to the surface Irish victims of violence, making the connection between the seemingly disparate cultures and places explicit by drawing attention to specific instances of Irish Nationalist deaths through the example of "four young brothers" killed in the 1920s by the B-Specials.[38]

Heaney's rhythm and diction in "The Tollund Man" convey a spirit of religious pilgrimage that resonates with Catholic connotations ("consecrate," "saint's kept body," "holy ground"). However, the speaker's assertion that he "could risk

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[36] Though the locations are very different, both poems make a case for their respective places as representing an originary point for a specifically Irish characteristic or tradition, with Yeats locating a particular kind of Celtic mysticism in Innisfree, and Heaney treating the body of the Tollund Man and the museum at Aarhus as an origin symbol for northern violence.

[37] Hart, "History, Myth, and Apocalypse in Seamus Heaney's *North*": 388.

[38] The B-Specials were a Protestant militia, replaced by the Ulster Defense Regiment in 1969. The Tollund Man's ability to sprout new life also connects to Heaney's 1966 elegy for the Croppies (Irish foot soldiers killed by the English army in the 1798 Battle of Vinegar Hill) to mark the fiftieth anniversary of 1916, "Requiem for the Croppies." See: Andrew Murphy, *Seamus Heaney* (Horndon, Devon: Northcote House, 2000), 39.

blasphemy" exposes the poem and poet's embrace of the pre-Christian origin of the ritual.[39] Ultimately, the poem does not eulogize one side of the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland. Rather, the Tollund Man's death bog serves as a necessary reminder of the bleakness of the speaker's own homeland, eliciting a confession:

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

Thus, the Tollund Man's mythic power, as a victim of a pagan ritual, relates to the Christian "man-killing parishes" of Northern Ireland, and implicates both its Catholic and Protestant factions. Through a language of urgency and Yeatsian imperatives ("I could risk blasphemy," "Consecrate the cauldron bog," "pray Him to make germinate") Heaney asks the bog body for revelation, and, while the hope of positive germination remains possible, the speaker's final insight concerns man's "sad freedom" when faced with inevitable death.

Significantly, the actual landscapes of Iron Age Jutland and Heaney's Northern Ireland overlap. Heaney remembers the Tollund Man's "flat country," a "Trove of the turfcutters' / Honeycombed workings," as he makes his mental pilgrimage to the scene of the man's sacrifice and also as he physically drives through a similar topography in his homeground in the North of Ireland. Reciting the locations of the violent rituals in a liturgical rhythm, "Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard," Heaney reminds himself not to ignore the historic particularity of the murdering fields in Northern Ireland, Jutland, or elsewhere.[40] Yet, at the same time, the Danish place-names operate as mnemonic devices, which transport Heaney to a mental location where he can think about the universal significance and cyclical nature of such rituals. The weight of history is heavy on the poet, and as *Wintering Out* calls to *North*, he is left "unhappy and at home," a neat articulation of his contradictory feelings of place and displacement.

Wintering Out ends with an uneasy tension regarding the symbolic link forged between the Iron Age bodies and contemporary Northern Ireland, but Heaney

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[39] This ultimate pre-Christian emphasis is similar to Heaney's technique in "Funeral Rites," discussed in more detail later in this chapter. "Funeral Rites" starts in the overtly Catholic realm of mourning but ultimately fans out to a vision of the pre-Christian chamber of Newgrange, a symbol that the poet hopes both sides of the sectarian divide can relate to.

[40] The bog bodies that Heaney examines in *Wintering Out* and *North*, with their symbolic connections to Northern Irish events, sharply contrasts with the poet's elegizing of personally known victims of violence in *Field Work* (1979).

expresses a confident belief in their usefulness when "The Tollund Man" germinates "The Grauballe Man" of *North*. Heaney describes the Grauballe Man as reborn out

Figure 1.2 The Grauballe Man[41]

of the bog. Indeed, he is an agent of his own rebirth, "poured / in tar, he lies / on a pillow of turf / and seems to weep / the black river of himself" (*N*, 28). The birthing symbolism extends even further, as he is "bruised like a forceps baby," "head and shoulder" emerging first out of the peat soil. The questioning and urgent speaker of "The Tollund Man" gives way to a more assured voice in "The Grauballe Man." In Glob's account, the "air of gentle tranquility" on the Tollund Man's face contrasts with the "pain and terror...and the twisted posture" captured in the Grauballe Man's expression.[42] Heaney's description of the Grauballe Man's fatal wound is likewise matter-of-fact. Rather than a reflective reverence for the bog body, as in "The Tollund Man," Heaney insists that the Grauballe Man's "chin is a visor / raised above the vent of his slashed throat / that has tanned and toughened." The contrast between the two poems in terms of literary devices makes their respective purposes even more divergent. For example, Heaney doesn't use any similes in "The Tollund Man," and the physical description of the body occupies only the first of three sections. In sharp contrast, Heaney pieces together "The Grauballe Man" with a

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[41] Ibid., 46.
[42] Glob, *The Bog People*, 20 and 39.

series of metaphors and similes that compare his body to various flora and fauna. Zoological descriptions dominate, with the Grauballe Man's instep described as "cold as a swan's foot," his spine "an eel arrested / under a glisten of mud" and his hips like the "purse of a mussel" (*N*, 28).

Underlying the shift in style between the two poems is a transformation of tone. Edna Longley criticizes the change in "The Grauballe Man," claiming that the "ambiguous resolution" and hypothetical mode of "The Tollund Man" "has hardened into accepted doctrine."[43] This shift confirms her opinion that the myth unveiled in "The Grauballe Man," as well as the bog series of *North* generally, is markedly less complex and more damaging. According to Edna Longley, "The Grauballe Man" has "more the air of a set-piece, arrival, its subject celebrated because he's there, rather than summoned into being by the poet's need."[44] Yet, though Heaney pursues the connection between Iron Age Jutland and contemporary Northern Ireland with greater certainty, the real problem in "The Grauballe Man" concerns the conflict between art and reality which is also the focus of "Strange Fruit." The speaker in "The Grauballe Man" asks:

> Who will say 'corpse'
> to his vivid cast?
> Who will say 'body'
> to his opaque repose?
> (*N*, 29)

The remainder of the poem tries to answer this rhetorical question. The poem asserts that the bog body is "hung in the scales / with beauty and atrocity," and thus straddles the line between art and violent reality. However, the carefully crafted natural similes from the first part of the poem ("grain of his wrists / like a bog oak, / the ball of his heal / like a basalt egg") ultimately overpower the shock value of the final vision of "each hooded victim, / slashed and dumped." Edna Longley's criticism does not allow for the complexity of the poet's inner conflict, between the assuaging capabilities of art and mythology, and the reality of the violent historical moment.[45] Of course, finding an artistic symbol to hold the "actual weight" of each

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[43] E. Longley, "'Inner Émigré,'" 44.
[44] Ibid., 43.
[45] Edna Longley uses *North* (as a negative example) to discuss her larger outlook on poetry, that "poetry and politics, like church and state should be separated. And for the same reasons: mysteries distort the rational processes which ideally prevail in social relations; while ideologies confiscate the poet's special passport to *terra incognita*." Edna Longley, "Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland," *Crane Bag* 9.1 (1985): 26.

murder is impossible, but Heaney's attempt is powerful because of his awareness of its limitations. The body, which remains "perfected" in the poet's memory, like a poignant sculpture, harkens back to the image of the Tollund Man's "saint's kept body," as holy relic merges with museum centerpiece. The artful aspect of the Grauballe Man's preserved body enables Heaney to self-consciously address the poetic tendency to aestheticize atrocity. Foreshadowing the criticism that Heaney levels at himself through the guise of his cousin's ghost in "Station Island," that his poetry "whitewashed ugliness" (*SI*, 83), "The Grauballe Man" ultimately focuses more upon the role of poetry in times of violence than on violence itself.

"Bog Queen" is the first poem in *North* to engage one of Glob's subjects. Heaney placed the poem directly after the mysterious invitation offered in "Come to the Bower," and it adds several dimensions to the myths forged in the bog series. Unlike the other bog bodies that Heaney writes about, which were deposited in the bog as ritual sacrifices, the Bog Queen was buried after a natural death. Additionally, in contrast to the continental locations of the other bodies, this body was found on Ulster soil. Discovered in 1781, on the estate of Lord and Lady Moira in County Down, the body has the further distinction of being the first bog body to be properly recorded.[46] The Irish location of the discovery helps to validate Heaney's construction of the Iron Age Jutland-Modern Ulster bridge, though the foreign axis is credited even in this example, as the woman is believed to have been a wealthy Danish Viking. The details of her ornate grave, the body dressed in rich fabrics with three woolen rugs and other adornments, make it possible for Heaney to crown her as his 'bog queen.'

Heaney uses Glob's description of the body's "very bad state of preservation" as a way to transform the historical body into a myth of the feminine and nativizing spirit of the soil. Unlike the other bog bodies, the Bog Queen speaks for herself. Her monologue begins with an acknowledgement of the patient characteristic of history, as she "lay waiting" for the right moment to tell her story, keeping her past relevant while becoming more Irish with the passing of years. The "dreams of Baltic amber" allude to her Danish heritage, but Heaney describes her bodily changes as a process of assimilation: she explains that "My body was braille / for the creeping influences" (*N*, 25), until she becomes one with the Irish landscape. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews

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[46] Glob, *The Bog People*, 103.

explains that, in "The Grauballe Man," the man's body "becomes an element of the bog,"[47] and similarly the Bog Queen's body resembles a topographical map of Ireland: her "sash was a black glacier" and her breasts were "soft moraines."[48] While "Come to the Bower" expresses the poet's urge to engulf himself in the mysteries of the ground, a desire fulfilled through the poetic experiments of Part I, "Bog Queen" articulates the continuity of nature as she becomes an earth goddess by time's slow hand.

Further, the sexuality and violence that merge in Heaney's invocation to the "dark-bowered queen" in "Come to the Bower" give way to the Bog Queen's first person account of her centuries-long decomposition.[49] Morrison, speaking generally on Heaney's engagement with bog women and goddess symbols asserts, "[Heaney's] pure fascination with them is impure, sexual, necrophiliac. The bog becomes a love-bower, its female corpses 'insatiable' brides who lie in waiting for an awakening kiss."[50] "Bog Queen" adds an important element to the goddess myth conjured throughout *North* (as accepting bridegrooms into her womb, swallowing "our love and terror" ["Kinship," *N*, 39]),[51] by coming from the perspective of a surrogate goddess. The "impure" fascination that Morrison detects is encapsulated by the poet's notion of the feminized spirit of the ground and is also quilted into Heaney's gendering of the different traditions in Irish history.[52] Like Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus," the Bog Queen rises from the grave after centuries of silence to tell her own story:

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[47] Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: All the Realms of Whisper* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 85.

[48] See also: "Bone Dreams" (*N*, 19-23) and "Ocean's Love to Ireland" (*N*, 40-41). Michael Longley also depicts the female body as a landscape in poems such as "On Mweelrea" and "Metamorphoses" from *The Echo Gate* (1979), discussed in Chapter 3.

[49] It is interesting to note that in his choice of title as "Come to the Bower," Heaney alludes to a popular Nationalist song of the same name which celbrates the glories of Irish history and topography.

[50] Morrison, *Seamus Heaney*, 62. Heaney has elsewhere described his relation to the bog in distinctly sexual terms. Remembering his childhood experience of swimming in a bog with another boy he describes the experience as a "betrothal," which left him "somehow initiated" through his close contact with the "liver-thick mud." Heaney, "Mossbawn: Omphalos" (1978), in *Preoccupations,* 19.

[51] Heaney's goddess myth as both a protectoress and masochistic lover is most evident in such poems as "Bone Dreams," with its linking of "love-den, blood-holt, / dream-bower" (*N*, 21), and "Come to the Bower," where the poet conjures up his earthen muse and "reach[es] past / The riverbed's washed / Dream of gold to the bullion / Of her Venus bone" (*N*, 24).

[52] For a discussion of Ireland as female see: Cullingford, "'Thinking of Her…as…Ireland:'" 1-21; Clair Wills, "The Politics of Poetic Form" and "Women Poets the Privatization of Myth," in *Improprieties, politics and sexuality in Northern Irish Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 13-77; and Richard Kearney, "Myth and Motherland," in *Ireland's Field Day*, ed. Seamus Deane (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 61-80.

and I rose from the dark,
hacked bone, skull-ware,
frayed stitches, tufts,
small gleams on the bank.
(*N*, 27)

The Bog Queen is therefore part of the lineage Heaney qualified as "Mother Ireland, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the poor old woman, the Shan Van Vocht," but it is not clear what her resurrection will accomplish. The "frayed stitches" may offer a commentary on the tattered condition of the nationalist symbol of Mother Ireland. Perhaps more interestingly, the Bog Queen's transformation from foreigner to native through a long association with the land could also represent the Protestant community in Northern Ireland. Especially in this poem, the pan-northern scope of *North* deconstructs the exclusiveness of the Catholic and Protestant traditions in Northern Ireland. However, while refusing to assign a definite significance to what the Bog Queen's rising means for contemporary Ireland, the poem powerfully maintains the lure of her voice, celebrating with her the features of Ireland's landscape as a place of consequence.

The feminine spirit of the bog, as articulated by the Bog Queen's narrative, takes on a violent edge in "Punishment." In this, the most controversial of the bog poems, a female subject is the victim of a violent ritual. The subject is the Windeby Girl, discussed in Glob's book, who also figures as the subject of "Strange Fruit." Rather than looking at the violence in Northern Ireland from a cross-sectarian point of view, "Punishment" offers a perspective on intra-tribal Catholic violence. In "Strange Fruit," the speaker, recognizing his desire to revere and beatify, forces himself to recite the brutal reality of the dead girl's situation, "Murdered, forgotten, nameless, terrible / Beheaded girl" (*N*, 32). Again, in "Punishment," Heaney renders the tendency to aestheticize through a meticulous recording of the young girl's physical features. Through the poetic window, the reader becomes, along with the speaker, audience to her murder:

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.

It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging

of her ribs.

(*N*, 30)

The alliteration of the harsh *n* in the first stanza captures the spine-tingling and frozen moment of solitude right before death, as does the repetition of sounds in "rigging" and "ribs." The use of short quatrains, as in most of *North*'s Part I, produces a rhythmic pattern that lingers over each word. The speaker openly acknowledges the sexual energy generated towards his subject as he turns from recording the scene to address the girl directly, "you were flaxen-haired, / undernourished, and your / tar-black face was beautiful. / My poor scapegoat, / I almost love you." Through his erotic connection, the poet also expresses empathy for the Iron Age girl's plight. However, despite the established closeness between speaker and victim, the poem ends in controversial ambiguity.

Heaney's labeling of the Windeby Girl with the ominous endearment "Little adulteress" draws upon Glob's conclusions that her death matched the punishment for infidelity in northern Europe during the Iron Age. Using this understanding, Heaney boldly connects the bog girl to Catholic girls who the IRA tarred in the 1970s for fraternizing with British officers.[53] Moving away from erotic descriptions, the poem finishes with a confession, as the poet analyzes the conflict between his feelings of pity and allegiance to the victims of such violence, and his obligation as part of the 'tribe' of northern Catholics. As in "Strange Fruit," where the speaker strips his own aesthetic creation, in "Punishment" Heaney labels himself an "artful voyeur." The title is an admission of his role in creating art out of violence, and also an acknowledgement of the sexualized charge in his attraction to the lonely beauty of the girl as she faced her death. In spite of his bond with the murdered girl, the speaker admits that he stood passive during contemporary rites of violence, which enforce tribal conformity by carrying out public punishments:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact

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[53] See: Bew and Gillespie, *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles*, 41. For example, on 11 November 1971, "In the third incident of its kind during the week, a seventeen-year-old Derry girl has her hair shorn and ink poured over her for 'fraternising' with British soldiers."

and tribal, intimate revenge.
(*N*, 31)

On this ending, Morrison writes, "it would be going too far to suggest that 'Punishment' in particular and the Bog poems generally offer a defense of Republicanism; but they are a form of 'explanation.'"[54] I agree that the poet's understanding of internal tribal violence has important ramifications for the overall mythology of *North*. However, the poem purports to bring to light peripheral acts of violence such as punishment beatings, which are often not publicly discussed, rather than to explain them. The poem does not attempt to examine violence across the religious divide in Northern Ireland, instead concentrating solely on ritual violence within the Catholic community that is less in the public eye. As a result, Heaney bravely invites the reader to question his own position within the tribe in *North*'s other poems.[55]

Reflecting on the political significance of "Punishment," Conor Cruise O'Brien remarked that "it is the word 'exact' that hurts most: Seamus Heaney has so greatly earned the right to use this word that to see him use it as he does here opens up a sort of chasm."[56] For O'Brien, the word "exact," placed beside the speaker's understanding of the "tribal, intimate revenge," implies that the crime in some way justified the form of punishment, which underlies for him the dismal state of affairs in Northern Ireland - locked in a destructive cycle. He regretfully concludes, "the word 'exact' fits the situation as it is felt to be...because it fits and because other situations, among the rival population, turn on similarly oiled pivots, that hope succumbs." O'Brien reads *North* as a painful account of "the actual substance of historical agony and dissolution, the tragedy of a people in a place: the Catholics," because "there is no equivalent Protestant voice."[57] Similarly, in her oft-cited article "'Inner Émigré' or 'Artful Voyeur?,'" Edna Longley condemns *North* for being "full of martyrs rather than of tragic protagonists."[58] Indeed, Heaney himself has

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[54] Morrison, "Speech and Reticence," 109-10.
[55] Heaney is more explicit in a recent interview about the 'tribal' expression in the poem, explaining: "the cross-currents in that poem had to do with an awareness that people were being interrogated, humiliated and violated in interrogation centers like Castlereagh." Thus, Heaney connects the British Government and the RUC to the "uncivilized" behavior of the IRA. Heaney, "Interview with Seamus Heaney," by Mike Murphy, 86.
[56] O'Brien, "A Slow North-east Wind," 26.
[57] Ibid.
[58] E. Longley, "'Inner Émigré,'" 46.

explained the energy of his poetry as "a kind of slow, obstinate, papish burn, emanating from the ground I was brought up on." [59]

However, rather than limiting its poetic efficacy, this willingness to evaluate his own 'tribal' affiliation makes his poetry multi-layered and compelling. The political message of the poem hinges on how one interprets the poet's use of the word "understand" when he admits that he "...understand[s] the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge." There is a significant difference between saying that this means the speaker condones IRA practices, as Ciaran Carson feels it does, and seeing it as recognition of the irrationality of violent communal rituals. In my reading, the poem deliberately allows both interpretations to stand uncomfortably together. Like the narrator who recognizes his contrary affiliations, the poem pressures the reader to enter into the complicated cave of tribal understanding or rejection. The title itself contains several possible avenues of interpretation. It could allude to the historical intra-tribal punishment of the Iron Age girl, with her "betraying sisters" acting as contemporary stand-ins. At the same time, it could represent an indictment against the poet and his community who, in their silence, allow Northern Ireland's rituals of violence to continue.

Ciaran Carson challenges the metaphorical bridge between the IRA's punishment of Catholic girls and Iron Age punishments of adulterous women, arguing:

> [Heaney] seems to be offering his 'understanding' of the situation almost as a consolation...It is as if he is saying, suffering like this is natural; these things have always happened; they happened then, they happen now, and that is sufficient ground for understanding and absolution. It is as if there never was and never will be any political consequence of such acts; they have been removed to the realm of sex, death and inevitability.[60]

However, Carson fails to recognize that, like many poems in *North*, the meaning does not come from an 'either/or' interpretation. Paul Scott Stanfield, in contrast, urges the reader not to privilege the conclusion of "Punishment" over the preceding stanzas. He perceptively argues that "each movement of feeling in the poem is equally real, equally intense, equally genuine. They contend, but none finally dominates."[61] The poem succeeds because it stands as a testament to the often

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[59] Heaney, "Unhappy and at Home: Interview with Seamus Heaney by Seamus Deane," 67.
[60] Carson, "Escaped from the Massacre?": 184-185.
[61] Paul Scott Stanfield, "Facing 'North' Again: Polyphone, Contention," in *Critical Essays on Seamus Heaney*, ed. Garratt, 101.

uncomfortable collision between poetic empathy, outrage and understanding. In Stanfield's interpretation, the poem allows the reader to see "all at once, as in a cross-section, the historical and emotional strands that become entangled in the knot of the present."[62] Similarly, the poems of *North* should be read together, as Michael Molino urges, "as a series of dialogues on related subjects."[63] The power of the ambiguous and self-questioning end of "Punishment" does not indicate that Heaney resigns himself to such violent acts always happening, but that in his association of the Iron Age girl with twentieth-century Northern Irish Catholic girls he has found a symbolic way to bring the intimate atmosphere of stigma to light. The act of writing already breaks any full 'tribal' complicity, as the poem reveals how damaging such rituals are on the victims as well as on the larger community. In a recent interview where he discussed the controversy over the poem's conclusion, Heaney reflected that "maybe it's the word 'tribal' that is wrong. 'Tribal' buys into the outsider's view of the conflict...But this intersection between correctness and crisis is where poetry has to locate itself."[64] In *North*, Heaney continually explores his uneasiness about his kinship to his community, and his insecurities about the ability of art to articulate the issues dividing Northern Irish society. His willingness to look at himself and his position in the Catholic community more generally in "Punishment" is an effort to be truthful by starting with an analysis of his own complicated identity, allegiances and biases. The strategy of starting with a personal position to investigate larger ramifications ultimately emphasizes the impossibility of assigning total blame to any of the competing traditions and communities in Northern Ireland.

IV. "A DREAM OF LOSS AND ORIGINS": CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY AND COLONIAL ALLEGORY

Heaney's inclusion of a pair of poems concerning the myth of Hercules and Antaeus, strategically positioned to open and close the section, calls attention to the

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[62] Ibid., 102.
[63] Michael R. Molino, *Questioning Tradition, Language, and Myth: The Poetry of Seamus Heaney* (New York: The Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1993), 93.
[64] Heaney, *In Conversation with Karl Miller*, 23.

general purpose of Part I. These poems heighten our awareness of the mythic function of the other sandwiched poems, and foreground the dualisms that wedge themselves into the rest of *North*'s Part I. "Antaeus" includes the date of its composition as 1966 - the year *Death of a Naturalist* was published. As the first poem in Part I, "Antaeus" espouses an atmosphere of innocence. However, as Alan Shapiro comments, "the tone here is as innocently confident as the tone of 'Digging,' but it's qualified, as the tone of 'Digging' isn't by what we know will happen to the giant."[65] The reader, aware of the giant's eventual defeat by Hercules, as the giant-as-speaker is not, generates a background current that runs parallel to the declared tone; a heavy sense of inevitability that echoes the fear of historical repetition that runs throughout the volume.[66] However, as the Troubles had not yet started when Heaney wrote the poem, the poet's choice of subject could reveal his own state of innocence, soon to be broken by the eruption of violence in Northern Ireland. Thus, the poems that follow show what the poet and the larger community have lost in the renewal of sectarian fighting. In the years before the outbreak of violence the romanticization of Antaeus, the mythological underdog, had far fewer implications.

Following the original myth, Heaney's poem closely associates Antaeus with the earth. His mother, Gaea (the earth goddess in classical Greek mythology), mated with her son Uranus to produce the Titans.[67] This mother-wife parallel provides a mythological basis for the diverse roles Heaney assigns to the earth goddess throughout Part I. Antaeus derives his strength from his close connection to the land, and replenishes his energy by making direct contact with the earth. The giant boastfully declares, "I cannot be weaned off the earth's long contour...I am cradled in the dark that wombed me" (*N*, 3).[68] Thus, Antaeus brings about his own doom through overconfidence. Though taking place outside the window of "Antaeus," in his challenge to "each new hero" the giant foresees his defeat at the hands of the

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[65] Alan Shapiro, "Crossed Pieties {On the Early Poetry}," in *Critical Essays on Seamus Heaney*, ed. Garratt, 18.

[66] See also: "Singing School: A Constable Calls," where a police officer leaves the Heaney farm on a bicycle that "ticked, ticked, ticked" (*N*, II.62), thus giving the impression of 1940s and 50s Northern Ireland as a time bomb. Blake Morrison noted that "*North* is in many ways a bleak book" because of the poet's lingering fear "that even if we do understand the past we may still be condemned to repeat it." Morrison, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Routledge, 1982), 68.

[67] See Chapter 5 for an analysis of Heaney's use of the classics more generally.

[68] Antaeus' close association to the earth is markedly similar to terms that Heaney has used to describe his own fascination and closeness to the land, notably in the already quoted discussion of his initiation in the bog, as he acknowledges that "to this day, green, wet corners, flooded wastes, soft rushy bottoms, any place with the invitation of watery ground...possess an immediate and deeply peaceful attraction." Heaney, "Mossbawn: Omphalos," 19-20.

"sky-born and royal" Hercules. Ultimately Antaeus' belief in the rejuvenating qualities of the soil, with his description of himself as "Girded with root and rock" and "nurtured in every artery / Like a small hillock," is turned upside down not only in "Hercules and Antaeus" but in most of Part I's poems. The ground of Part I is marked by the footsteps of conquerors and the blood of the vanquished, and associated with destructive and repetitive rituals where only emblems of violence such as the Grauballe Man are symbolically reborn.

As the last poem of Part I, "Hercules and Antaeus" again takes up the myth of "Antaeus," but from a markedly different perspective. The giant, who had previously spoken for himself, is silenced by the entry of Hercules, and the events are narrated in the third person. Heaney doesn't include a date, but the poem is clearly written years after "Antaeus," during the Troubles. "Hercules and Antaeus" reworks several lines and images from the earlier poem, claiming, for instance that "Antaeus, the mould-hugger, / is weaned at last" (*N*, 46). This gives the impression, not felt in Antaeus' earlier monologue, that there was something unnatural about the giant's relationship to the maternal earth. Heaney represents the fight between Antaeus and Hercules as a colonial allegory whereby Antaeus represents Ireland and Hercules signifies England.[69] Yet, Heaney complicates the poem's portrayal of the power struggle between colonizers and colonized by including other dualisms, as the poem introduces a series of binary oppositions: victor/loser, sky/ground, future/past, light/dark, masculine/feminine, foreign/native, rational/instinctive, as well as colonist/colonized. These overlapping oppositions both illuminate and reveal the strain of *North*'s larger binary structure.

Politically, "Hercules and Antaeus" repudiates the utopian notion of looking to mythology in order to find hope for the future, with implied significance for Irish nationalist myths. Heaney sarcastically describes "Hercules lift[ing] his arms / in a remorseless V," his "mind big with golden apples" (*N*, 46-47), which clearly associate him with the figures of colonial violation in poems such as "Ocean's Love to Ireland" and "Act of Union." Like Raleigh, who "has backed the maid to a tree / As Ireland is backed to England" (*N*, 40), Hercules' defeat of the "mould-hugger" giant has the repressive aura of imperial conquest. However, Heaney refuses to

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[69] See: Brian Arkins and Patrick F. Sheeran, "Coloniser and Colonised: The Myth of Hercules and Antaeus in Seamus Heaney's *North*," *Classical and Modern Literature: A Quarterly* 10.2 (Winter 1990): 127-34.

position the story of Antaeus as a hopeful utopian myth. With grim realism, the poet assumes an authoritative tone, declaring that "Balor will die / and Byrthnorth and Sitting Bull," and dismisses Ireland's "sleeping giant" in the same sweep.[70] As Brian Arkins and Patrick Sheeran point out, the "disparity in time and place between these cryptic references points to the global, universal nature of the encounter between colonist and colonized."[71] Vendler notes that "to adopt the defeated Antaeus as an alter ego as Heaney had done in 1966 - is to condemn oneself to a lifetime of nostalgia for a vanished heroic past, living in 'a dream of loss and origins.'"[72] However, Vendler does not take into account Heaney's awareness, even at the time of writing "Antaeus," that Hercules would loom in the giant's future, a recognition which adds to the overall feeling of inevitability in the volume, as "Hercules and Antaeus" forces the reader to reconsider all of the poems of Part I.

Though he doesn't withdraw the significance of the poem's colonial allegory, Heaney has also explained that "to me Hercules represents another voice, another possibility," leading "into the poetry of the second half of *North*, which was an attempt at some kind of declarative voice."[73] For Heaney, the differences between Antaeus and Hercules also represent the different competing traditions and inspirations that shape his poetry. Antaeus is feminine, Gaelic, and instinctive, whereas Hercules is masculine, privileges craft over technique, and is influenced by the English literary tradition. Heaney has explained further:

> In the masculine mode, the language functions as a form of address, of assertion and command, and the poetic effort has to do with conscious quelling and control of the materials, a labour of shaping...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 recognised as architectonic.[74]

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[70] Heaney is possibly also alluding to the tenth-century Welsh myth that someday the Celtic peoples of Scotland, Ireland, Cornwall and Wales will unite against England. See: *Armes Prydein o Lyfr Taliesin*, ed. and trans. Ifor Williams (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 1964).
[71] Arkins and Sheeran, "Coloniser and Colonised": 128.
[72] Vendler, *Seamus Heaney*, 90.
[73] Heaney, *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation*, interview by John Haffenden (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 69-70.
[74] Heaney, "The Fire I' the Flint: Reflections on the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins" (1974), in *Preoccupations*, 88.

Part I leans towards the feminine mode, an Antaean voice in its effort to submit to the goddess and rituals, while the more journalistic and direct technique of Part II resembles the masculine mode narrated from a mostly autobiographical position.

"Hercules and Antaeus" naturally follows the colonial allegory poems, and yet, as the above discussion shows, the struggle between Hercules and Antaeus also reflects a battle between different parts of the poet's own personality, "swung at one moment by the long tail of race and resentment, at another by the more acceptable feelings of pity and terror" concerning the situation in Northern Ireland.[75] Heaney's choice to write a second poem on the Hercules and Antaeus myth indicates a change in climate, and the poem's levying of criticism towards the Antaeus type of nationalist mythology as just a "pap for the dispossessed" throws retrospective light over the entire mythological project of *North*'s Part I. The poem, like the section as a whole, pulls in contrary directions: between art and politics; England and Ireland; and masculine and feminine. "Hercules and Antaeus" must not be read as a straightforward struggle between any one binary set, as the symbolism and positions intermingle and overlap with images from earlier poems. Heaney intentionally creates a complicated allegorical web in an apparent bid to mirror the historical jaggedness of Northern Ireland's recent history, as the poem showcases, and in doing so challenges the ambitiousness of the poetic project in *North*.

Heaney further engages the history of Ireland's colonization in the pair of poems "Ocean's Love to Ireland" and "Act of Union," which follow the bog poems in Part I. Building on the sexualized ground established in the bog series, Heaney uses sexual metaphors in the colonial poems to explore the relationship between England and Ireland. Like "Hercules and Antaeus," where the speaker explores the myth's "dream of loss / and origins," the colonial sequence tries to uncover the origins of the imperial relationship in an effort to better understand its linguistic and historical legacy.[76] Walter Raleigh's reputation for sexual conquests while stationed in Ireland becomes a memory-place to meditate on the power struggle and process of cultural exchange. Recalling Raleigh's poem to Queen Elizabeth I, "Ocean's Love to Cynthia," Heaney's "Ocean's Love to Ireland" employs a series of phallic and topographical descriptions that link sexual and imperial conquest. In Heaney's poem, Raleigh's "superb crest inclines to Cynthia" (and implicitly therefore to

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[75] Heaney, "Mossbawn: Christmas, 1971," 30.
[76] See also: "Aisling" (*N*, 42) and "The Betrothal of Cavehill" (*N*, 45).

London) even while he "drives inland," raping the Irish maid, and thus scattering "her dreams of fleets" (*N*, 40-41). By deconstructing the maid's idealized dream of the imperial hero, the poem exposes the brutal realities of both sexual and colonial conquest. The Irish maid, representing the violated condition of Ireland, is also abandoned by her countrymen. The colonial project effeminizes the native Irish, as the Irish poets "Sink like Onan" - overwhelmed by the "Iambic drums" of the English literary tradition - thus dooming their native literary tradition to a fate like Onan, put to death without offspring.[77]

"Act of Union" makes the sexual-colonial metaphor even clearer, as England and Ireland come together to produce the "obstinate fifth column" which Heaney describes as a "wardrum / Mustering force" (*N*, 43). The term "fifth column" usually refers to surreptitious rebel groups, but it is not clear whether Heaney directs the term towards the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), Unionists more generally, or possibly the IRA. Heaney portrays the 1801 Act of Union, which united the parliaments of England and Ireland by abolishing the Irish Parliament, as a sexual and procreative act that forever linked the history of the neighboring islands. The poem is voiced from the English 'father's' perspective, who acknowledges that he is "still imperially / Male, leaving [Ireland] with the pain" of colonization. Significantly, however, the narrator also admits that "Conquest is a lie," as both the colonizer and colonized are changed in the process. Whereas the Irish poets of "Ocean's Love to Ireland" did not reproduce their native tongue for subsequent generations, the Act of Union between Ireland and England negatively spawned the situation in Northern Ireland, creating a region 'parented' by divergent cultural and religious traditions. Heaney furthers the feminization of the Irish landscape by asserting, through the voice of England, that the "big pain" caused by colonization will not be fixed through a treaty. This message rings with meaning for the decisions of 1801 and 1921, but also for 1970s Northern Ireland, as the poem insists that the wound of colonization remain "raw, like opened ground, again."[78] Patricia Coughlan argues that "in the structure of *North* the death-bringing goddess's claiming helpless victims (female force) in the bog poems is matched with the rape-narratives in the pendent colonisation series (male force). The symmetry of this deepens the sense of inevitability generated by the whole project of the mythicisation of history." Coughlan, like Vendler,

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[77] Gen. 38: 1-10.
[78] Coughlan, "'Bog Queens,'" 198.

effectively reveals *North*'s binary impulse, but the convoluted web of Heaney's gendering poetics reveals the multiple meanings of the volume's mythological territory, as any perceived "symmetry" is deconstructed by other explanatory impulses.

V. "WE PINE FOR CEREMONY": THE "CUSTOMARY RHYTHMS" OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

The poem "Kinship" occupies an intersection between the poems of "hieroglyphic / peat" and the poems of colonial allegory. Elizabeth Butler Cullingford notes that Heaney "rediscovered the Romans as a metaphor for the British...Tacitus the Roman ethnographer of the British and the Germans, is called to witness what seems to be an internal religious conflict."[79] In "Kinship," Heaney invokes Tacitus as a pseudo Englishman, poised to analyze the violence of Northern Ireland from the perspective both of an outside observer and as a potential invader. While Heaney has admitted that the employment of the word "tribal" in "Punishment" may have too readily adopted the outsider's perspective of Northern Ireland, in "Kinship" Heaney actively pursues such a viewpoint. As "The Other Side," from *Wintering Out*, saw Heaney looking at his family's rituals through the eyes of a Protestant neighbor, "Kinship" attempts to look objectively at the history and rituals of his homeland. Heaney calls on Tacitus to:

> report us fairly,
> how we slaughter
> for the common good
>
> and shave the heads
> of the notorious,
> how the goddess swallows
> our love and terror.
>
> (*N*, 38-39)[80]

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[79] Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, "British Romans and Irish Carthaginians: Anticolonial Metaphor in Heaney, Friel, and McGuinness," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 111.2 (March 1996): 228.

[80] Crucially, in addition to Tacitus and the various bog bodies, Heaney also asks for and receives advice from Viking warriors. In "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces" Heaney derisively asks the Vikings ("killers, haggers / and hagglers, gombeen-men") as the "Old fathers" to "be with us," in their

The poem's title declares, with an acerbic edge, Heaney's kinship to his fellow Ulstermen as he steps "through origins" (*N*, 33) to assume his position "at the edge of centuries / facing a goddess" (*N*, 36). However, as Cullingford argues, "Heaney's defense of his 'barbarian' nationalist community in the face of Tacitus's 'civilised tut-tut' is not an unequivocal endorsement of sacrificial violence."[81] For example, the critical phrase "slaughter / for the common good" resembles the biting cliché in "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," from Part II, that "the 'voice of sanity' is getting hoarse" (*N*, 52). Of course, it is ironic that Heaney uses Tacitus and the Romans as examples of objectivity and rationality, since the Roman imperial regime and 'civilizing' thrust to conquer distant lands embraced rather than avoided violence. And, like so many of the poems of *North*, the speaker is self-critical, worrying about his tendency to deify common men, and his attraction to the bog's "cooped secrets."[82] However, most importantly, "Kinship" reveals the strains of the poet's allegiance to his countrymen as it confirms his feelings of displacement from the landscape and people, without providing the unifying and hopeful conclusion of a poem such as "Funeral Rites."

Broken into three parts, "Funeral Rites" addresses the relation between memory and commemoration, beginning by exploring the notion of kinship from a more personal perspective. The poem offers a powerful exploration of the ritualistic nature of funerals and the commonality of suffering shared by both Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. Heaney begins by acknowledging the importance of the wake in his Catholic childhood before spanning out to a much larger message for Northern Ireland. Explaining how he "shouldered a kind of manhood / stepping in to lift the coffins of dead relations," Heaney paints a scene of familial mourning; "as the wax melted down / and veined the candles," and the "coffin lid / its nail-heads dressed" dominating the room (*N*, 6-7). The second part shifts from the poet's dead relations to the larger societal news "of each neighbourly murder" (*N*, 7). The courteous boy of the first section gives way to a matured voice that speaks for a larger community who "pine for ceremony, / customary rhythms."

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capacity as "cunning assessors / of feuds and of sites" (*N*, 15). Further, in "North" the poet's position on the "hammered shod of a bay" enables him to hear the "ocean-deafened voices" of the "fabulous raiders" (*N*, 10-11). Heaney imagines that the "longship's swimming tongue" of the Vikings is "buoyant with hindsight" and tells him to "Lie down / in the word-hoard," and trust his senses in order to articulate his understanding of his (and Ireland's) situation.

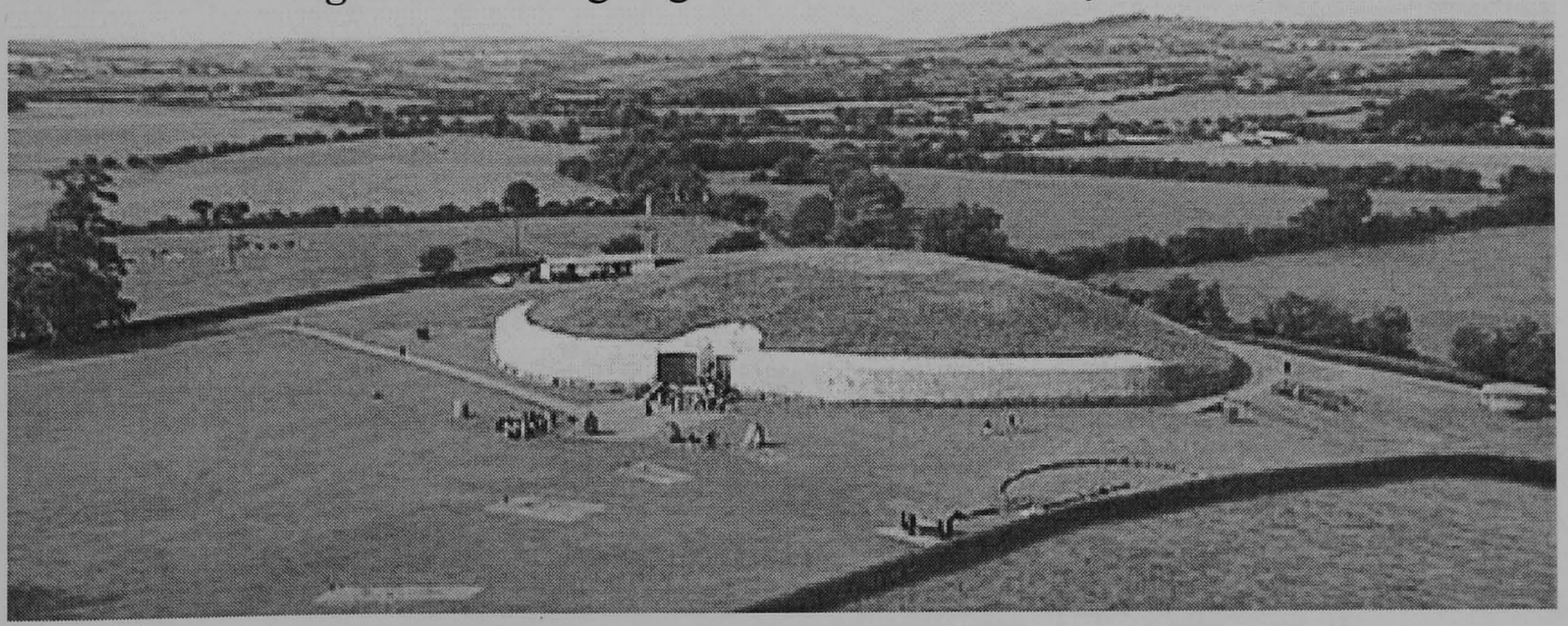
[81] Cullingford, "British Romans and Irish Carthaginians": 229.

[82] Similarly, in "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces," Heaney becomes "Hamlet the Dane, / skull-handler, parablist, / smell of rot" (*N*, 14).

Even in the first section, Heaney emphasizes the universality of the funeral ritual whereby the dead are remembered by their uniformly "obediently sloped" wrists. As the "black glacier / of each funeral / pushed away," the poet acknowledges that the 'cold kiss' of the ritual was not adequate to the situation, but "had to suffice" (*N*, 7). Andrew Murphy reflects that the repetitive motions of the familial funeral ritual, in the later sections, serve as "recognition here that the deep-running fissures of the conflict could never be healed by means of such easy, familiar pieties."[83] As a result of this understanding, the poet grandly calls for a national funeral at "the great chambers of Boyne" (*N*, 7) where everyone can join to consecrate a symbol of shared suffering and collectively decide to put an end to sectarian fighting.

Heaney intentionally chooses the Boyne for its pre-Christian significance, visually represented by the impressive burial chamber at Newgrange, in order to locate a symbol before the history of Catholic and Protestant differences. Thus, he suggests the possibility of finding a symbol that all contemporary Ulstermen can identify with. Pointedly, the choice of the Boyne also acts as the poet's reclamation of the most divisive place of memory for the people of Northern Ireland. The victory of William of Orange over James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 solidified the Protestant domination of the throne of England over Ireland, and led to an increased number of plantations in Ulster. More than merely the battle itself, however, Heaney also reclaims the location from its contemporary role as a representation of Ulster's

Figure 1.3 Newgrange Burial Chamber, Boyne Valley



divided population, as the Protestant's annual Orange parades in commemoration of victory at the Boyne routinely spark violence and intense antagonism between Catholics and Protestants. Thus, by emphasizing a pre-Christian symbol at the

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[83] Murphy, *Seamus Heaney*, 42.

Boyne, Heaney attempts to reduce the divisiveness of this particular memory place, while also extending an equal share in the 'Irishness' of an early Irish earthwork to the Protestant community. As Corcoran notes, "the divisions of the present...are to be healed in a rite which insists on the common ground shared."[84] A rite, according to Heaney, that will include the "whole country." The poet's vision of a communal procession leaves behind the loud drums of the Orange parade for the "muffled drumming / of ten thousand engines," which slowly cross the modern landscape of Northern Ireland. The procession of cars marks a "slow triumph" against division by making shared mourning the basis for a new relationship.[85] Powerfully, through his vision of a massive burial mound, Heaney articulates a different type of memory landscape. If the bog preserves memory by layering history in its protective soil, then Heaney wants the mound at the Boyne to serve as a geographic monument, a visual reminder and therapeutic memory-place for the people of Northern Ireland.[86]

Whereas the first section dealt with familial rituals, and the second with fashioning a new memory-place out of a resonant landscape, the potent last section of "Funeral Rites" stirs the ghost of Gunnar from the bloody Icelandic epic *Njal's Saga* (written in the thirteenth century about events set between 930 and 1020). The third section celebrates the communal rite against violence by locating the hope for peace in a literary tradition where "the cud of memory" is "allayed for once" (*N*, 8). Gunnar functions as a wiseman, counseling Northern Ireland with his historical insight and retrospective knowledge, much as the Vikings counsel Heaney in "North" and "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces." "Funeral Rites" invokes the blood-feud world of *Njal's Saga* as an allegory of the revenge-motivated violence in Northern Ireland, but crucially Heaney finds in the *Saga* a precedent for the end of cyclical revenge killings. Since Gunnar's death went unavenged, Heaney views him as lying "beautiful / inside his burial mound, / though dead by violence." Gunnar encourages hope for a peaceful future when his spirit appears to his kinsman "chanting / verses about honour," reversing the definition of honor as a mandate to avenge the memory of family members. Ultimately, the slain hero "turned / with a joyful face / to look at

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[84] Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 66.

[85] See my analysis of *The Cure at Troy* (1990) in Chapter 5.

[86] Interestingly, while in other poems from *North* the female goddess of the ground is described as actively "swallow[ing] / our love and terror" ("Kinship," *N*, 39), in "Funeral Rites" women are placed outside the problem and the eventual solution, as they are "Somnambulant" (*N*, 8) and "left behind" (*N*, 6) to imagine "our slow triumph" in making a pact for peace. The women are figured as witnesses to the communities' rituals (as in the first section of the poem where they are seen "hovering") but not active forgers of new traditions.

the moon," thus validating his kinsmen's choice to put a stop to the rituals of violence. "Funeral Rites" is one of the few poems from *North* to embrace a sense of hope for the future. By following a path from the particular to the universal, Heaney generates an atmosphere of commonality, utilizing his pan-northern reach to ground the end of bloody feuds in a cultural tradition.[87]

Significantly, *North* does not only describe rituals of violence. The dedicatory sequence to Mary Heaney, the poet's aunt, highlights that which is not included in the tight two-part division of *North*, and demonstrates a healthy kinship that stands in great contrast to the mixed feelings of allegiance expressed in poems such as "Kinship" and "North." By placing "Sunlight" and "The Seed Cutters" before the bipartite division of the volume, Heaney offers a glimpse into the peaceful landscape of familial rituals, intentionally located in a time before the outbreak of the Troubles. On their function, Goodby writes, the pair "link family, love and rural community in an idealised vision of childhood and communal, seasonal 'calendar customs.'" Thus, their quiet assertion of natural ties reveals "what has been violated by the Troubles."[88] In "Sunlight," Heaney expresses love through the woman's rhythmic preparations in the kitchen. The tender portrait of Mary Heaney, "in a floury apron by the window," hark to an idyllic image of childhood frozen in time, which like the laborers in "The Seed Cutters" seem "hundreds of years away" (*N*, xi). The calming ritual of his aunt's baking contrasts with the adult speaker's realization of loss, as a "sunlit absence" settles on his memories of childhood, the scoop "sunk past its gleam / in the meal-bin." The companion piece further describes the rural landscape, with the speaker acknowledging his intention to accurately record the scene by evoking the Flemish Renaissance painter Breughel, who is renowned for his realistic depictions of pastoral life.[89] The statement "You'll know them if I can get them true" reminds the reader of the poet's role, claimed with such force in *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*, as a chronicler and celebrant of rural practices.

The seed cutters "kneel under the hedge in a half-circle," and thus occupy a space that Michael Parker notes conveys "innocence and indolence, yet their activity

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[87] See also my analysis of "Belderg" in Chapter 4. Heaney also starts with the personal, analyzing the etymological roots of Mossbawn, and ultimately sees in his home the overlapping traditions of Northern Ireland and process of cultural exchange, which leads him into the "eye of the quern" (*N*, 5).
[88] Goodby, *Irish Poetry Since 1950*, 158.
[89] Patricia Boyle Haberstroh notes that Breughel is a fitting reference as his work often captured the sixteenth-century conflict between Catholics and Protestants. Haberstroh, "Poet, Poetry, Painting, and Artist in Seamus Heaney's *North*," *Eire-Ireland* 23.4 (Winter 1988): 125-29.

perpetuates the creative cycle, connects them to the earth, and in their deaths they are blessed by the 'broom / Yellowing over them.'"[90] As in "Sunlight," where the adult feels a sense of absence, Parker draws a line between the rural scene and "the world which the poet inhabits...the tainted world of experience...the adult in him *knows* that anonymity and collective security are presently things of the past."[91] The familiarity of the "calendar customs" freezes the memory of a time and place when having "time to kill" did not have bloody significance.[92] This brief window of normality and love gives way to Part I where a nightmarish ground opens up, and discussions of ritual become associated, not with remembered fondness, but tinged with the life-loss and sadness of recent and remote history. *North* does not suggest a return to the familiar innocence of "Sunlight" and "The Seed Cutters." However, the acknowledgement of a simpler time does nonetheless offer a different model of return than the brutal historical violence uncovered in the poems of Part I. If other poems in *North* show the frustrating and negative aspect of rituals, the warmth and predictability portrayed in "Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication" quietly asserts the assuring and hopeful aspect of cyclical actions. These poems also qualify the sense of timelessness that the poems of Part I also embody. In many ways, the seed cutters appear more distant than the Iron Age bog bodies or Viking ghosts. Thus, Heaney reveals that in the pressurized moment of 1970s Northern Ireland, the timeline is curved, and the relationship between remote and more immediate memory altered.

VI. "ESCAPED FROM THE MASSACRE": THE CONCLUSIONS OF "EXPOSURE"

Part II of *North* mostly abandons the mythological method of the first part, dealing instead with autobiographical memory, but "Exposure," the final poem included in "Singing School," briefly returns to a mythological region whereby the poet imagines himself as David, using his poetic gift "like a slingstone / Whirled for

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[90] Michael Parker, *Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), 128.
[91] Ibid.
[92] The mention of the "dark watermark," as it recalls the potato famine, offers a glimpse of the dark and destructive side of history that becomes a primary focus in the poems that follow.

the desperate" (*N*, VI.66). As the title suggests, the poem forcefully comes back to a style of self-examination prevalent in much of *North*, and clearly articulates the poet's struggle between feelings of attachment to and displacement from Northern Ireland. Heaney, as a Sweeney-esque exile is "weighing and weighing" his "responsible *tristia*" from a location removed from Northern Ireland. The poem is a confessional reflection on his absence from his homeground, addressing his decision to move his family to the Republic in 1972. The first line announces his physical distance from the North, "It is December in Wicklow." Tony Curtis views "Exposure" as Heaney's declaration that he must address politics in his art: "He like the Yeats of 'Easter 1916,' acknowledges the fact that he must now be a politically-committed poet; no mere observer of the Troubles."[93] However, I believe that the poem is much less sure about political engagement, as the poet defends himself as "neither internee nor informer," and chooses to identify himself as "An inner émigré, grown long-haired / And thoughtful; a wood-kerne," harking back to Spenser's view of the native Irish captured in "Bog Oak" of "geniuses who creep / 'out of every corner / of the woodes and glennes'" (*WO*, 15). The speaker defends his distanced position from his homeland, claiming that he "Escaped from the massacre." However, he also worries that in his 'escape' he might have missed "the once-in-a-lifetime portent." The fear that he may have overlooked the "comet's pulsing rose" reflects an apprehension expressed throughout the volume that, paradoxically, the violence in Northern Ireland *is* what gives the poetry its peculiar intensity - an emotionally charged atmosphere not accessible from outside its stressful borders.

The confessional atmosphere of "Exposure" appropriately concludes a volume that consistently questions the function and characteristics of mythology, ritual, politics, art and identity.[94] The "strangeness" that Heaney attributes to *North*, in an interview with Karl Miller, has much to do with the great plethora of perspectives and multiple intersections that the book merges.[95] The smaller

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[93] Tony Curtis, "A More Social Voice: 'Field Work,'" in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. Tony Curtis, (Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan: Poetry Wales, 1982), 101.

[94] Anne Stevenson, for instance, argues that in the self-questioning of *North*, and of "Exposure" in particular, Heaney's most powerful contribution is his willingness to demystify: "What he shares with his readers is not the Irish question, nor is it his personal grief (although that is there). No. What he shares, or manifests, is precisely failure itself- that 'failure' which in our time has become a hall-mark of honesty, that 'confession' which, in the work of Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, Robert Lowell, and Geoffrey Hill, has cleared the air of false ideals, 'Visions,' 'Presences' and mysticism itself." Stevenson, "Seamus Heaney and the Sacred Sense of the Sensitive Self," in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. Curtis, 49.

[95] Heaney, *In Conversation with Karl Miller*, 21.

'exposures' explored in the poems of the second part lead to his decision to 'escape' the confining nature of Northern Ireland by repeatedly offering glimpses, from various points in the poet's early life, into his feelings of pressure, frustration and fear. In Part II, Heaney explores his connection to his place of origin by grounding his observations in particular and personal memories. Part I also symbolically asserted the "tight gag of place / And times" (*N*, 54), but in Part II Heaney explores pivotal moments in his own life, from his initiation into the world of St Columb's College in Derry, to his mixed feelings about being in Madrid when the sectarian fighting escalated in Northern Ireland in the summer of 1969. Though he evokes Patrick Kavanagh's "Epic" with a cutting edge, "Well, as Kavanagh said, we have lived / In important places," the poems of Part II do attempt to add detail to Heaney's 'places' of personal significance in order to examine how, as he asks in "Exposure," "did I end up like this?" (*N*, 67).

This quest for personal understanding also lies at the heart of *Stations*, published the same year as *North*, and thus occupying the same intense and precarious historic moment. In the preface, Heaney explains that "I think of the pieces now as points on a psychic turas, stations that I have often made unthinkingly in my head. I wrote each of them down with the excitement of coming for the first time to a place I had always known completely" (*S*, 2). Here again, Heaney describes significant memories as locations - places that he needs to revisit in order to make sense of his current position. Significantly, he notes that he could only finish the poems once settled in Wicklow, because the "sectarian dimension" became clearer when seen "at one remove." Similarly, in "Exposure," his location outside of the North enables him to better analyze the strengths and weaknesses of his artistic position. *North* is a volume that, as Roy Foster states, is "one of those books indelibly marked by the where and the when of discovery," which articulates an "Ireland without intellectual boundaries."[96] *North* deliberately allows the Wordworthian autobiographical memory of Part II to be set beside the investigations of 'tribal' memory in poems such as "Punishment" and "Kinship," and the Irish political historiography of "Act of Union." The volume does not provide an over-riding unifying national myth, but a series of often uncomfortable investigations into personal and cultural memory. Heaney purposefully shaped the volume from the

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[96] R. F. Foster, "The Normal and the National: Yeats and the Boundaries of Irish Writing," in *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), 109.

unique pressures of the historic moment, and in its magnification of fundamental and contentious questions about art and politics, personal and cultural identity, *North* continues to be a crucial point of reference for discussions of place and memory in Irish poetry.

CHAPTER 2

LONGLEY'S OVERLAPPING BATTLEFIELDS: THE GREAT WAR AND THE TROUBLES

I. THE GREAT WAR AS A PLACE OF MEMORY

Every book of poetry by Michael Longley, from his early pamphlet *Ten Poems* (1965) to his latest volume *Snow Water* (2004), engages with the Great War.[1] This chapter analyzes key poems such as "In Memoriam" and "Wounds," and considers how the War functions as a complex place of memory in his poetry. Longley's poetry often depicts the First World War as a subject in its own right, but he also uses the symbols, events and places of the Great War to reflect on other places, concerns and times. As Fran Brearton perceptively notes, the Great War "has become to some extent, at least in the western world, a paradigm for all war in the twentieth century, an imaginative ground which is reinvented time and time again."[2] Longley's poetic meditations on the Great War often merge with his attempt to artistically address the violence occurring in his native Northern Ireland since 1968.[3] His overlapping of war-zones, as the trenches of the Great War give way to the streets of Belfast, is compelling because of Longley's characteristic insistence on the small details of personal memory and domestic life. Much like Heaney's creation of an imaginative bridge from the bogs of Iron Age Jutland to contemporary Northern Ireland, Longley's merging of landscapes in different locations and times demonstrates his creative effort to relate to the historical situation in Northern Ireland, and situate the role of the artist in times of turmoil.

Significantly, just as Heaney demonstrated an interest in excavation before the human unearthings of *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975), so Longley's

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[1] I consider *Snow Water* (2004) in the Conclusion.

[2] Fran Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry: W. B. Yeats to Michael Longley* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), vi.

[3] See: Brearton, "Michael Longley: Poet in No Man's Land," in *The Great War in Irish Poetry*, 251-86; Terence Brown, "Who Dares to Speak? Ireland and the Great War," in *English Studies in Transition: Papers from the ESSE Inaugural Conference*, eds. Robert Clark and Pieto Boitani (London: Routledge, 1993), 226-37; and Peter McDonald, "Michael Longley's Homes," in *Mistaken Identities: Poetry and Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 110-44.

interest in the Great War is evident from his earliest work. The function of the War as a place of memory in Longley's poetry has understandably changed over the course of a career spanning forty years, but he admitted recently that his interest only gets stronger over time: "As I grow older the nightmare that [my father] lived through looms even larger in my imagination...."[4] As I argued in the Introduction, Longley's investment in the symbolic ground of World War I offers a powerful example of Heaney's argument in "Place and Displacement." The established nature of Longley's preoccupation with the literature, events, figures and places of the First World War, and its representative quality as *the* War, offered Longley a foundation to ground discussions of the violence and loss taking place during his own space and time in contemporary Northern Ireland.

In describing the soldier-poets of World War I, Jay Winter notes the "backward gaze of so many writers" who expressed their grief by relying upon themes of the past to come to grips with the horrible reality of the present.[5] According to Winter, their "sites of memory...faced the past, not the future," and they often located their themes and techniques in pre-war romantic and religious forms.[6] Over half a century later, Longley compellingly makes a "site of memory" out of the Great War itself, focusing a "backward gaze" on the soldier-poets.[7] At first, the Great War served as a "site of memory" that could reflect Longley's personal grief over the death of his father, a survivor of the trenches of World War I. Thus, in his early poems, the War functions more or less, as a traditional memory-place as discussed by Frances Yates; a symbolic place in his imaginative landscape to locate memories of his father. As Thomas Aquinas wrote in the thirteenth century, "it is necessary for reminiscence to take some starting-point whence one begins to proceed to reminisce."[8] Longley's poetry routinely takes the Great War as its starting point. However, in the decade following the outbreak of sectarian fighting in Northern

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[4] Longley, "The Twelfth of July" (9-6-1997?), Box 37, Folder 5, Emory.
[5] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 223.
[6] In emphasizing continuity, Winter breaks from Paul Fussell's argument in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975; repr., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000) that the war produced a major change in literature.
[7] I argue in Chapter 4 that Heaney's investment in the pastoral mode can be seen in his criticism of John Barrell and John Bull's *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*. Similarly, Longley reveals the depth of his preoccupation with war poetry, and specifically the Great War, in his harsh criticism of *The Faber Book of War Poetry*, edited by Kenneth Baker. See: Longley, "review of *The Faber Book of War Poetry*, ed. Kenneth Baker," Box 36, Folder 25, Emory.
[8] Quoted in Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge, 1966), 72.

Ireland, the subject of "reminiscence" and his use of the War as a place of memory broadened from Yates' conception of the term into something closer to Pierre Nora's definition of a *lieu de mémoire*. His poetry of the 1970s widened to include not only those who actually fought in the Great War such as his father, but also victims of sectarian violence from 1970s Northern Ireland. For, while Longley derived his interest from a personal source, his preoccupation with the Great War intersects with larger questions of collective memory. Specifically, the Ulster Division's part in the Battle of the Somme, 1916, is a key *lieu de mémoire* for the Northern Irish Protestant community. Further, the extended and persistent nature of Longley's poetic concern with the memory of World War I also serves to reveal the War's precarious and comparably overlooked position in the national memory of the Republic of Ireland.[9]

The comparison of Longley's poetry to Nora's project, while at once showing how Longley's themes intersect with 'national' *lieux de mémoire*, also suggests why Longley's Great War could never function in the way that Nora understands the term. Whereas Nora's project to chart France's national places of memory throughout its history was ultimately to "exhume specific sites, to identify the most obvious and crucial centers of national memory, and then to reveal the existence of invisible bonds tying them all together," Longley does not construct his places of memory in this way.[10] In Northern Ireland, as I indicated in the Introduction, it is difficult to speak of shared "sites of memory." In his poetry, Longley both extends and subverts the traditional commemoration of the Great War in Irish collective memory, north and south, by using it to show how violence disturbs the rituals of everyday life in all communities.[11] With his sensitive eye for detail, and subtle

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[9] See: R. F. Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it Up in Ireland* (2001; repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002), 58-59; and Edna Longley, "Northern Ireland: commemoration, elegy, forgetting," in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 235-39.

[10] Pierre Nora, "From Lieux de Mémoire to Realms of Memory," in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, ed. Nora and trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996), xvii.

[11] Longley has consistently elevated examples of people who complicate the traditional sectarian conception of both world wars. For instance, in *The Weather in Japan* (2000) he includes a poem ("Ocean," *WJ*, 31) in "Homage to James 'Mick' Magennis VC" - a Catholic from West Belfast and "Northern Ireland's only VC." Longley credits him as "Unimaginably brave," but "because he was a Catholic, the smug Unionist establishment didn't want to know about him, while his own West Belfast community disowned him because he had fought for King and Country." Longley, "Cenotaph of Snow, Explanation of Poems for a Reading," Box 35, Folder 7, Emory. Similarly, Longley has held up the positive example of the Mayor of Dublin in 1941 in terms that have implications for the contemporary situation, noting that "On the evening of 15 April 1941 nearly 200 German bombers approached…dropping flares over Belfast and then incendiaries, high-explosive bombs and parachute mines…Belfast lay almost defenceless. I would like one day to write in celebration of Alfie Byrne, the

merging of landscapes, Longley's war poetry consistently maintains Wilfred Owen's claim that the "poetry is in the pity."

In the next section I will examine his early "In Memoriam" (*NCC*, 1969), and focus on the narrower definition of reminiscence when, before the outbreak of the Troubles, Longley wrote of World War I primarily from his memories of his father's experiences and those recorded by the soldier poets. Though the Troubles had not yet started, already by the early 1960s, in early poems such as "In Memoriam" and "Remembrance Day," Longley shows his awareness of the Great War not only as a "site of memory" but also a site of conflicting memories. Section III, the main focus of this chapter, discusses Longley's compelling extension of the symbols of the Great War in the 1970s to incorporate the Troubles, and concentrates on the pivotal poem "Wounds" (*EV*, 1973). Finally, Section IV examines Longley's adoption of a poetic "middle ground," which dissolves notions of set identity. For, as he says of the soldier-poet Edward Thomas, Longley has consistently kept his "eye on what remained" (*MLW*, in *SP*, 54), and has in doing so revealed the universal fragility of plant, animal, and human life.

II. "SINK ROOTS INTO MY MIND": "IN MEMORIAM" AND POETIC BEGINNINGS

Longley's poetic involvement with the Great War began with "In Memoriam," from his first pamphlet *Ten Poems* (1965), which he later included in *No Continuing City* (1969). Critics consider "In Memoriam" the pivotal poem of *No Continuing City*, and have used it to demonstrate connections between his early and later work.[12] Indeed, "In Memoriam" occupies a similar position in Longley's poetic career as "Digging," from *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), does for Seamus Heaney. Written at the start of their careers, both poems address artistic birth through the context of an inheritance passed from father to son, respectively anticipating how

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Lord Mayor of Dublin who rode in one of his city's fire engines all the way to Belfast. He wanted to help put out the flames. He wanted to end the black-outs which persist to this day in both cities." Longley, "Thought for the Day" (Radio Script, October 1986), Box 40, Folder 9, Emory.

[12] See: Brian John, "The Achievement of Michael Longley's *The Ghost Orchid*," *Irish University Review* 27.1 (Spring/Summer 1997): 145; and Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry*, 255.

these inheritances would later be used to address the violence in Northern Ireland.[13] Both poems were discussed during sessions of Philip Hobsbaum's Belfast Group, so the two poets must have recognized the similarities and differences in their poetic outlook at this early stage in their development. "In Memoriam" is quite obviously the principal poem of *No Continuing City*, but unlike Heaney's "Digging," Longley does not alert the reader to its centrality by placing it at the beginning of his first book.[14] Rather, the powerful images and the personal emotion in the poem push its significance to the forefront of Longley's early poetry. While both Heaney and Longley's poems center around their fathers, Longley calls up very specific details of his father's memories, while Heaney remains general about his family, using their farming tradition to validate his poetic technique.

"In Memoriam" is an elegy for Longley's father who served in both world wars. Originally from Clapham Common, Richard Longley enlisted in 1914 at the age of seventeen, accidentally joining the London-Scottish Regiment. As, Michael Longley mused in his autobiography *Tuppenny Stung* (1994), his father "went into battle wearing an unwarranted kilt."[15] After surviving the trenches, Richard married and moved with his new bride to Belfast in 1927, where Michael, his sister Wendy, and his twin Peter were all born. Richard Longley worked in Belfast as a commercial traveler after the War, and Longley proudly remembers his father as "that rare thing, an Englishman accepted and trusted by Ulstermen."[16] However, lingering battle wounds caused poor health, and Longley recalls in "In Memoriam":

> In my twentieth year your old wounds woke
> As cancer. Lodging under the same roof
> Death was a visitor who hung about,
> Strewing the house with pills and bandages,
> Till he chose to put your spirit out.
>
> (*NCC*, 42)

The loss of his father at the beginning of his poetic career left a crucial mark on the poet, which he addressed by adopting his father's stories about the Great War as a

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[13] See my discussion of "Digging" in Chapter 4.
[14] Heaney not only places "Digging" as the first poem in *Death of a Naturalist*, but also as the first poem in three subsequent selections of poems: *Selected Poems 1965-1975* (1980); *New Selected Poems 1966-1987* (1990); and *Opened Ground* (1998).
[15] Longley, "Tuppenny Stung: Growing up in Belfast," in *Tuppenny Stung: Autobiographical Chapters* (Belfast: Lagan, 1994), 18.
[16] Ibid., 17.

crucial source for his poetic inspiration.[17] His father, remembered in "Wounds" as a "belated casualty" of the Great War who followed the "landscape of dead buttocks" (*EV*, 40) of his London-Scottish Regiment companions for fifty years, died just before the outbreak of violence in his adopted home of Belfast, as his children's generation came of age.

In addition to commemorating Longley's father, "In Memoriam" is also shadowed by literary fathers - poets of the Great War, such as Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, and Edward Thomas, whose works helped to shape the contours of Longley's imaginative landscape.[18] Therefore, in this early poem, the Great War becomes a place for Longley to locate memories of his father as well as tap into an established tradition of war poetry. The poem brings attention to its literary dimension in the opening phrase, which commands his father to "let no similes eclipse / Where crosses like some forest simplified 'Sink roots into my mind'" (*NNC*, 41).[19] Thus, Longley credits the roots planted in his brain by his father's stories as the imaginative force that propels him to write verse. Yet, at the same time, the poem notes the inescapable gap between artistic depiction and original experience, as Longley's lines include a simile despite his aspiration to the contrary. The "slow sands" of his father's history swirl around in his mind, and compel him to capture their vibrancy and authenticity. In this regard, Longley's creative 'roots' compare interestingly with the roots Heaney evokes in "Digging," a poem also concerned with

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[17] See also: "Last Requests" (*EG*, 14) where Longley juxtaposes two events. The poem recalls how in the war "Your batman thought you were buried alive," yet his father "Surfaced to take a long remembered drag," and contrasts that memory with Longley's visit to his father on his deathbed. Longley realized that his father was asking for a "Woodbine, the last request / Of many soldiers in your company," but since he had only brought "peppermints and grapes" he couldn't reach his father "through the oxygen tent." In a draft of the poem, Longley reveals the depth of his interest in his father's war experiences, evident in two additional stanzas not included in the published version. Longley admits that "In all the newsreels of the First World War / I look for your face looking out at me," and notes how towards the end of his life his father turned back into "another raw recruit / Or a skeleton dressed up in Khaki." Longley, "Draft of 'Last Requests,'" Box 20, Folder 29, Emory.

[18] This technique can also be seen in later poems. For example, in "The Moustache" (*WJ*, 24) Longley moves from Edward Thomas to his own father, and in doing so asserts their different yet equally influential roles in inspiring his poetry and developing his imaginative landscape. Further, his concern in "The War Graves" with the resting places of the soldier-poets, as well as soldiers he doesn't know anything about such as "Rifleman Parfitt, Corporal Vance, / Private Costello of the Duke of Wellingtons…," also showcases his interest in both his father's experiences (as "representative of a generation") and the literary talents of the war (*WJ*, 22-23). Finally, Longley's technique of pairing family members with the war poets can be seen in "No Man's Land," where Longley directs his "Jewish granny" towards "Isaac Rosenberg" as both of their bodily remains are missing (*P*, 199).

[19] The poem's function as a literary introduction is also furthered by the shadow of Tennyson's imposing elegy of the same name.

linking poetic enterprise and technique to a familial inheritance.[20] In "In Memoriam," Longley moves beyond the recollections of his father's past captured within the lines of the poem, even as those memories take shape, to a larger context of poetic inspiration, as he asks that "yours / And other heartbreaks play into my hands" (*NCC*, 41).[21]

As well as demonstrating the creative strength Longley gains from his father's stories, "In Memoriam" emphasizes the luck involved in such an artistic life, as the foundations of his birth as a poet link explicitly to the conditions of his physical birth. Anticipating his later merging of his father's war with the conflict in Northern Ireland, Longley places himself in No Man's Land, as witness to the scene where his father's procreativity almost slipped away. Longley imagines watching his father being hit by "shrapnel shards" which sliced his testicle, and contemplates the demise of his own future, as in "that instant I, your most unlikely son, / In No Man's Land was surely left for dead" (*NCC*, 41). Instead of such a 'death,' stranded on the battlefield, Longley himself is rewarded by patience, "held secure, waiting my turn," symbolically waiting to be born, but also waiting to give birth through poetry to his father's memories.[22] Paul Fussell notes that, as a result of the crisis of the First World War, twentieth-century memory relies heavily on the ironies of experience.[23] Accordingly, Longley's poem ponders the luck of his own life, which is countered by the irony of his father's death, as survival of the War didn't translate into escape from its emotional or physical pains.[24] During the last days of Major Longley's life, succumbing to cancer caused by war injuries, he mentally returned to the battlefields, "Re-enlisting with all the broken soldiers," and emotionally dying among them as a delayed victim of a war he survived.

"In Memoriam" shows the early way that Longley crafted the genre of elegy, as the son attempts to relieve his father's agony, as well as the painful memory of watching him die, by summoning "lost wives" from his father's experimental post-

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[20] Compare, for instance, the similarity of Longley's command in "In Memoriam" to his father's memories to "Sink roots into my mind" (*NCC*, 41) with Heaney's understanding in "Digging" that the technique and symbols of his family's farming have cut "Through living roots" in his mind (*DN*, 4).
[21] In a more recent poem, "January 12, 1996," Longley commemorates his father's birthday by imagining that his father is able to read his accounts of the war, lifting "with tongs from the brazier an ember / And in its glow reads my words and sets them aside" (*WJ*, 25).
[22] The celebration of the luck in his very existence in "In Memoriam" connects to Longley's persistent focus on the fragility and beauty of life, as in the title poem for *The Ghost Orchid* where he recalls the beauty of a flower that "Just touching the petals bruises them into darkness" (*GO*, 52).
[23] Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 35.
[24] Longley, "Tuppenny Stung," 19.

war years. In the poem, these re-found lovers pack-up and go underground as if going into a trench made benign through the hands of poetry and time. In the final line of the poem, Longley envisions the women lifting their "skirts like blinds across your eyes" (*NCC*, 42). The line reveals his literary debt to the soldier-poets, as it alludes to the last stanza of Wilfred Owen's iconic "Anthem for Doomed Youth" (1917):

> What candles may be held to speed them all?
> Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes
> Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
> The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall:
> Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
> And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.[25]

"In Memoriam" demonstrates what Kennedy-Andrews terms the "characteristic thrust of Longley's war poetry - the effort to redeem loss and suffering through invoking the power of memory, love and poetry."[26] In Longley's poem his father's pain exists not only in the physical sense of feeling, but also in seeing and remembering. Therefore, the final calming vision picks up the "tenderness" of Owen's poem, and offers a conclusion to his father's continual revisiting of war memories. The ultimate peace is found in providing the ability to let go, as Longley artistically removes his father from the painful scenes of the War and his last days, and takes him to the "verge of light and happy legend."

The early poem "Remembrance Day," included in another pamphlet of pre-Troubles poetry, *Secret Marriages* (1968), more directly explores the place of the First World War in Irish collective memory, and thus provides an important link to Longley's poetry of the 1970s. In his introduction to the pamphlet, Longley prefaces the poem by explaining that: "In 'Remembrance Day' I imagine the possibility of swallows breeding near a battlefield and using blood as well as mud to build their nests. On second thoughts this does not seem likely."[27] Despite Longley's acknowledgement of the implausible nature of the poem's premise, he leaves the

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[25] Wilfred Owen, "Anthem for Doomed Youth," in *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. John Stallworthy (London: Hogarth, 1985), 76.
[26] Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, "Conflict, Violence and 'The Fundamental Interrelatedness of all things' in the Poetry of Michael Longley," in *The Poetry of Michael Longley*, eds. Alan J. Peacock and Kathleen Devine (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2000), 85.
[27] Longley, *Secret Marriages* (Manchester: Phoenix Pamphlet Poets Press, 1968).

reader to decipher its symbolism.[28] At first, Longley's command for the reader to imagine swallows building their nests "among these meadows / Where the soldiers sink to dust" offers a form of remembrance of the battlefield, and renewal in the sense of cyclical natural patterns. However, the final stanza does not assuage the original vision of the "Outlandish dead beneath whose / Medals memory lies bruised," as a hawk circles "like a dark cross" over the landscape (a possible allusion to the divide in Ireland between Protestant and Catholic commemoration of the War). Despite the swallows' attempt to bring new life to the fallen soldiers, procreating and raising their young in the blood-mingled mud, the presence of the hawk (and by implication the ominous history of the ground) cannot be forgotten. The title, "Remembrance Day" obviously refers to the annual public commemoration of the official end of World War I. Anticipating Longley's much later poem "The Cenotaph" where "They couldn't wait to remember and improvised / A cenotaph of snow and a snowman soldier, / Inscribing 'Lest We Forget' with handfuls of stones" (*WJ*, 26), "Remembrance Day" begins Longley's earnest dialogue concerning Ireland's war memory, as the poem points to the gap between public and private memory. As Fran Brearton and Paul Simpson explain, the poem "awakens what remains a central preoccupation with memory," positing a critical distinction between "the official objects, the medals, onto which remembrance is projected, and the unofficial memory which lies beneath."[29]

III. "BEFORE I CAN BURY MY FATHER ONCE AGAIN": THE GREAT WAR AND THE TROUBLES

Like "In Memoriam," where Longley places himself in No Man's Land, subsequent elegies for his father such as "Wounds" (1973) and "Wreaths" (1979) again juggle geography and the timeline of history, this time by using his father's

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[28] Longley partly returns to the symbols of "Remembrance Day" in his recent poem "The Choughs" where the fallen soldiers look irreverently at war, as "Choughs at play are the souls of young soldiers / Lifting their testicles into the sky" (*WJ*, 25).

[29] Fran Brearton and Paul Simpson, "'Deciphering Otter Prints': Language, Form and Memory in Michael Longley's Poetry," *Honest Ulsterman* 110, Special Feature: Michael Longley, A Celebration (Summer 2001): 19.

memories as a lens through which to view contemporary acts of violence in Northern Ireland. Longley poetically buries the dead of the Great War beside the victims of Ulster's late-twentieth-century conflict. In doing so, however, he does not naively equate the millions of dead from the First World War with the thousands killed in the post-1968 Troubles. Rather, he uses the Great War to open up a discourse on the effects of violence. In an interview in 1985, Longley explains, "When I write about my father I write about him because he's representative of a generation, the survivors of the trenches."[30] By this time, Longley's poetry had already made a bridge between the Great War and the Troubles, which established a link between his father's generation and the poet's own generation reaching adulthood in a Northern Ireland filled with the emotional and physical signs of a country torn by violence. Longley argued for the possession of his father's war memories in "In Memoriam," as part of his own imaginative landscape, and after the outbreak of violence he has continued to use his father's experience as "representative of a generation," but also to subtly claim his own position as a war poet.

In "Wounds," for instance, details of those killed by violence in Northern Ireland ("Three teenage soldiers, bellies full of / Bullets and Irish beer" [*EV*, 40]) are placed alongside memories of his father. The juxtaposition offers a personal grounding to the seemingly endless litany of loss that emerges out of Northern Ireland in the 1970s, while also bringing attention to the open 'wounds' of Irish and British conflicts, past and present. Longley's decision to address his father's generation as well as his own therefore strengthens rather than abandons his original interest in the personal and private aspect of his father's experience. Looking back on "In Memoriam," in a 1995 interview with Dermot Healy, Longley emphasizes the necessity of bringing "your personal sorrow to the public utterance" in order to escape the "deadly danger of regarding the agony of others as raw material for your art, and your art as a solace for them in their suffering."[31] The act of personalization can, I believe, be read as an effort to counter the journalistic version of the conflict. It is interesting in this regard to compare Longley's understanding with Helen Vendler's assessment of how the bog bodies of *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975) allowed Heaney an "imaginative scope he would have been unwilling to

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[30] Longley, "The Michael Longley Tapes," *Honest Ulsterman* 78 (Summer 1985): 30.
[31] Longley, "An Interview with Michael Longley," by Dermot Healy, *Southern Review* 31.3 (July 1995): 560.

assume in a literal retelling of local assassinations."[32] Though both poets worry about using, in Longley's words, "the agony of others as raw material" for their art, Longley emphasizes the particular and the domestic in forging his bridge between the Great War and the Northern Irish Troubles in his poetry of the 1970s, a strategy that contrasts sharply with Heaney's large-scale mythic method in *North*.

Fran Brearton argues that, despite the vast differences between the two conflicts, both World War I and the Troubles are characterized by a perception of their irresolvable nature. Observations of the Great War, as "mov[ing] one step forward only to take two steps back," become relevant for the Northern Irish conflict:

> The Great War is the first 'war of attrition,' the war which puts the phrase itself, without the quotation marks first tentatively applied to it, into common use. It is the ultimate manifestation of the cost, in human terms, of zero-sum political thinking, a war whose tale is too often told through its casualty figures rather than its political rationale. It is also the war in which the enemy shares one's own characteristics, suffers in the same situation.[33]

Brearton convincingly argues for the pervading mood of stagnation felt in both World War I and the Troubles. Yet, she often takes for granted the constructed nature of Longley's overlapping of landscapes, and therefore downplays the creative leap taken in his poetry. Longley rarely uses his poetry centered on World War I to directly explore the "political rationale" of the Northern Irish conflict or the Great War. Rather, his poems offer glimpses into the lives of those touched by violence, in an effort to counter the cold statistics that stack faceless victims one on top of the other.

Longley is one of the few Northern Irish poets to have remained in Belfast during the Troubles, a fact that undoubtedly gives his poetry unique markings.[34] Asked in an interview in 1995 to identify the place he considers home Longley answered clearly: "Home is Belfast. Belfast is home. I love the place. The city, the hills around it, County Down, County Antrim. My home from home is in Mayo. But home is Belfast."[35] Longley has not always been as precise in his identification of home (1995 was indeed a hopeful moment in the history of the conflict), but he has always affirmed his connection to Belfast, and to the North more generally. Ten years earlier, in 1985, for example, Longley asserted his preference for the

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[32] Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Harper Collins, 1998), 35.
[33] Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry*, 155.
[34] The younger poets Ciaran Carson and Medbh McGuckian have also remained in Belfast, while Paul Muldoon left in the 1980s.
[35] Longley, "Interview with Michael Longley," by Healy: 559.

intellectual atmosphere of Northern Ireland, as opposed to the Republic or England, claiming that he found "social intercourse outside of Ulster a shade two-dimensional, compared with the way we deport ourselves here. The North of Ireland is culturally exciting. One has to be tuned in all the time. One has to keep one's antennae in good repair."[36] Thus, as Heaney worried in "Exposure," the structures that have combined to create a divided culture also contribute to an artistically stimulating environment, as the need to "keep one's antennae in good repair" means that the poets are constantly challenged to be aware of multiple positions and perceptions.

Yet, alongside Longley's statements of identification, he also admits to strong feelings of displacement. In "To Seamus Heaney," from *An Exploded View* (1973), written in the early years of the Troubles (and around the same time Heaney admitted to being "unhappy and at home" [*WO*, 48]), Longley mockingly claims his identification to Northern Ireland:

> Offering you by way of welcome
> To the sick counties we call home
> The mystical point at which I tire
> Of Calor gas and a turf fire.
>
> (*EV*, 38)

The couplets used throughout the poem hint at the poet's self-mocking tone ("The midden of cracked hurley sticks / Tied to recall the crucifix"), which creates a song-like effect, generating a natural pause after each rhyme.[37] Jonathan Hufstader observes that "Even when speaking...of 'the sick counties we call home,' Longley never imagines that there is any other place he might be living."[38] Yet, though Northern Ireland remains home for the poet, Hufstader ignores the complexity of Longley's persistent imaginings of other places and alternative lives in poems from the same volume such as "Ghost Town," "The West," "Altera Cithera," "Alibis" and "Options."[39] Indeed, Longley's obsession with his father's war experience points to his own lack of a solid identity. By associating with the participants in the War that caused an intellectual crisis in the western world, Longley emphasizes the uncertainty he feels concerning contemporary expressions of fixed affiliation.

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[36] Longley, "The Michael Longley Tapes": 21.
[37] See my longer analysis of "To Seamus Heaney" in context with the other epistolary poems of *An Exploded View* in Chapter 3.
[38] Jonathan Hufstader, *Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones: Northern Irish Poetry and Social Violence* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1999), 90.
[39] These poems are discussed in Chapter 3, with the exception of "Altera Cithera," which I analyze in Chapter 5.

"Wounds," from *An Exploded View*, opens in a confessional mode by revealing "two pictures from my father's head" kept "like secrets until now" (*EV*, 40). Terence Brown, speaking about the status of war memory in the Republic of Ireland, has described World War I as "one of the great unspokens of Irish life, something which rattles skeletons in many a family closet, something which even now cannot find that full expression which would lay to rest forever all its Irish victims."[40] Roy Foster, like Brown, argues that in Ireland, "the importance of structured memory has been recognized by the widespread practice of its obverse: therapeutic voluntary amnesia. Until recently, this was conspicuously the case regarding the First World War. For many years the 'Great' War was seen as a topic of some embarrassment."[41] Longley's poem plays on this skeleton in the closet aspect by opening with sectarian revelations from his father's war memory.

The reason for the "voluntary amnesia" regarding the Great War has complicated origins, which Longley's poetry significantly helps to break down. The fact that so many Irishmen fought for Britain, both in the present Republic and in Northern Ireland, did not easily fit into Irish collective memory after the creation of the Free State and partition. Nationalists have often viewed the War as a symbol of obligation to the English Crown, rather than as a war fought against a common enemy. Though W. B. Yeats cannot be taken as representative, his poem "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death" reveals the uncomfortable association between service and loyalty to England. The poem is one of three elegies Yeats wrote for Major Robert Gregory, the son of his close friend and fellow Celtic Revivalist Lady Augusta Gregory. Though the poem was written earlier, it was revealingly included in *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), published just before the War of Independence. Yeats distances Robert Gregory from his service to England, claiming that it was a "lonely impulse of delight" that prompted him to go to war, rather than a feeling of duty or moral objections to the enemy, declaring, "Those I fight I do not hate, / Those I guard I do not love." Focusing on Ireland, rather than the battlefields of the war, Yeats asserts Gregory's 'true' allegiance: "My country is Kiltartan Cross, / My countrymen Kiltartan's poor, / No likely end could bring them loss / Or leave them

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[40] Brown, "Who Dares to Speak?," 228.
[41] R. F. Foster, *The Irish Story*, 58.

happier than before."[42] The last two lines emphasize that Kiltartan (with implications for Ireland more generally) had nothing to win or lose, a belief with ramifications far beyond the scope of Yeats' poem.

In poems and prose Longley has consistently probed the difference between private and public memory. In "Memory and Acknowledgement" (1995), for instance, Longley writes ostensibly about a visit to the Holocaust museum at Buchenwald, and in the process addresses such weighty issues as the difference between private memories and public remembrance, as well as Ireland's tendency to repress historical events.[43] In poems such as "Buchenwald Museum" and "Poppies," from *The Ghost Orchid* (1995), Longley criticizes the virtual silence surrounding the Irish war contribution, and also the fact that commemorative events have more often been marked by protest and controversy than by respect for the dead. Though Foster and Brown specifically refer to the lack of public memory of the Great War in the Republic, Longley also deconstructs the politicized and divided status of commemorations of the Great War in Northern Ireland. He laments the political atmosphere that surrounds remembrance of the world wars, where poppies are seen as "pro-British badges," and asserts "When I wear a poppy I do so in remembrance of millions of lost lives, and not as a political gesture. I hate it when the wearing (or the not wearing) of a poppy is politically construed."[44]

In the same vein, Longley has expressed his distaste for the politicized memorial in France to the Orangemen who died at the Battle of the Somme. Longley claims that the main monument designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens "miraculously makes room for the heartbreak of millions of homes. Every detail is simple and clear-cut, without a hint of jingoism or triumphalism…the rows of war graves amount[ing] to a huge, silent lamentation." In sharp contrast, Longley contends that the "shiny black obelisk" that commemorates the Orangemen who died "contradicts the tenderness and nostalgia" of the main memorial: "whereas desolation on an unprecedented scale produced the cemeteries, assertion thrust the obelisk onto the scene."[45] In this commemoration, Longley finds evidence of the type of single-mindedness that also fuels the Troubles, arguing that in the obelisk (erected in 1993) "our present Troubles

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[42] W. B. Yeats, "An Irish Airman foresees his Death" (1919), in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner Paperback Poetry, 1996), 135.
[43] Longley, "Memory and Acknowledgement," in *Irish Review* 17-18 (Winter 1995): 153-59.
[44] Ibid., 154.
[45] Longley, "The Twelfth of July" (9-6-1997?), Box 37, Folder 5, Emory.

lurk behind its inadequate cover…veneration for the dead of the Somme has degenerated into a necrophilia," and the memorial "symbolizes much that has gone wrong with Orange and Unionist culture."[46] As a result of the divided collective memories of Ireland, and especially Northern Ireland, Longley asserts that for him "dual or even multiple allegiance [is] the only way to proceed. Sometimes I consider myself British, sometimes Irish. Occasionally I lay claim to being an Ulsterman. Most of the time I feel none of these things."[47]

The memory of the First World War in Northern Ireland has had a very different shape from that in the Republic. A higher percentage of the population of eligible men enlisted from Ulster, and the Ulster Division encountered particularly fierce fighting due to their fateful position on the front line on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, which resulted in a dramatic depletion of the division, a moment captured in Longley's "Wounds." Coincidentally, the first day of the Somme corresponded with the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne (1 July 1690), and both events have since been annually commemorated on the Twelfth of July, the most significant day in the Orangemen's marching calendar. The Great War's association with the Twelfth has meant that nationalists have often protested against war commemoration as a way to object to Northern Ireland's continued attachment to the United Kingdom. Indeed, a divide exists between commemorations of the Easter Rising of 1916 and the Battle of the Somme, events that took place only months apart. After the creation of the Free State they came to symbolize the divergent commemorative emphasis of Northern Ireland and the Republic.[48] Ireland's role in the Great War, and its subsequent place in public remembrance has in recent years been more readily addressed.[49] Along with Longley's poetic explorations, other Irish writers have opened up discussion of Irish memory of the Great War, including the novelist Jennifer Johnston's novels, *The Gates* (1973) and *How Many Miles to Babylon* (1974), as well as, in a cross-confessional effort, Frank

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Longley, "Writing for the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland, 'For God and Ulster'" (September 1996), Box 8, Folder 6, Emory.
[48] As David Officer notes, the sacrifice of the nationalist rebels in the Easter Rising has often been explicitly contrasted with the blood sacrifice of Ulster Unionists on the Somme, signifying the fulfillment of their "contractual obligations" with the English Crown. Officer, "'For God and for Ulster': the Ulsterman on the Somme," in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. McBride, 182
[49] See: McBride, "Memory and national identity in modern Ireland," in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. McBride, 4; E. Longley, "Northern Ireland: commemoration, elegy, forgetting," 235-44; and Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry*, 3-4.

McGuinness' play about the Ulster Division in *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985).[50]

"Wounds" is a double-elegy, which contains two seventeen-line stanzas that mirror each other. The first stanza commemorates Longley's father, and the second stanza elegizes four victims of the Troubles. Longley purposely pushes the limits of contemporary discourse on the Great War by using an overtly confessional tone to ridicule the lack of public memory. In the process, by carefully linking his father's experience to victims of Ulster's sectarian killings, the poem calls attention to the participants in Northern Ireland's bloody conflict, however apparently incomprehensible. In a draft of the poem, "Wounds" appears to further explore the familial territory of "In Memoriam," rather than the Troubles, as the earlier version does not include his father's observation on the Ulster Division.[51] Revealingly, Longley adds an additional "picture" from his "father's head" in order to have a more obvious resonance with the victims of the Troubles recalled in the second stanza. In the first stanza of the published poem, Longley shares the last thoughts of a doomed soldier at the Somme, whose partisan religious affiliation in Northern Ireland provided him with motivation to face the horrible dangers of going over the top of the trench. In doing so, Longley dramatizes the religious division in Ulster, with implications for both the past and present. Longley's father, like the poet himself, maintains a strange position in the middle, as an Englishmen serving in the London-Scottish Regiment, and watching the fate of young Ulstermen ordered to attack. The poem's image of the Ulster soldiers charging into battle with screams of "'Fuck the Pope!'" (*EV*, 40) is crucially recorded by an outsider; Longley's father couldn't entirely relate to him but felt "admiration and bewilderment" as he watched the young boy "about to die, Screaming 'Give 'em one for the Shankill.'"[52]
Longley's poem paints a battlefield where local resentments and loyalties matter more than the foreign enemy, as the soldier mentally returned to an 'other' he could

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[50] Indeed, Longley has directly supported cross-confessional explorations of war memory, affirming the positive qualities of McGuinness' attempt to get into the mind of the Unionist psyche. In a letter to the *Irish Times*, Longley disagreed with David Nowlan's reading of the play as "'one of the most comprehensive attacks every made on Ulster Protestantism,'" and argued instead that McGuinness' play is an "abundant, profound and humane study of cultural confusion and military heroism. This play moved me to tears." Longley, "Letter from Michael Longley to Editor of the *Irish Times*" (26 February 1985), Box 3, Folder 1, Emory.
[51] Longley, "Draft of 'Wounds,'" Box 18, Folder 24, Emory.
[52] For an exploration of the myth surrounding the Ulster Division's role in the Somme as linked to a Loyalist self-consciousness, see: Officer, "'For God and Ulster,'" 160-83.

relate to, having lived side by side with Catholics in Northern Ireland.[53] The fact that the doomed boy invoked Belfast's Shankill, a legendarily Protestant area of the city, as he rushed to his death in France, provides a context for the exploration of sectarian violence in 1970s Northern Ireland in the second stanza.[54]

Longley's poem reminds us that, like his father who ironically admitted he was "'dying for King and Country, slowly,'" many Northern Irish citizens felt a strong allegiance to "King and Country." Numerous Ulstermen, predominately Protestants but also Catholics, took up the call to fight in the Great War.[55] Therefore, in "Wounds," Longley's father, a "belated casualty" of the First World War, has something in common with the "three teenage soldiers" murdered in Northern Ireland for their own perceived loyalty to "King and Country." The type of antagonism and expression of difference articulated by the young solider as he went over the top at the Somme, fighting for the Shankill even as he fought against a German enemy, continued to fester after the War, and finally reached a boiling point on Northern Irish soil. As Seamus Heaney reasoned in 1966, prior to the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, "A kind of double-think operates, something is rotten, but maybe if we wait it will fester itself to death."[56]

The dutiful son of "Wounds" in the first stanza, who listens to his father's deathbed stories and reaches out with tenderness to his outstretched "hand, his thin head I touched," foreshadows another act of duty in the second stanza, where Longley lays to rest victims of sectarian violence beside his father. He creates a communal grave, adding "a bus-conductor's uniform" worn by another victim of violence, killed in front of his wife and children, and the bodies of "Three teenage soldiers." The poem's power comes from the deliberateness of its contrasts. The longevity of Longley's father, who lived for fifty years after the War before

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[53] As Paul Fussell points out about trench warfare in the Great War, most soldiers did not often see the enemy, the "German line and the space behind are so remote and mysterious…that actually to see any of its occupants is a shock." Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 76.

[54] Longley has later asserted, "It occurred to me when I was young that God and Ulster might not be too good for each other. The combination seemed to cut out much that I considered normal and acceptable, including myself." He argues that "sectarianism takes many subtle as well as crude forms," and the fact that Catholic and Protestant children are not educated together in Northern Ireland "has little to do with God and everything to do with Ulster…." Longley, "Writing for the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland, 'For God and Ulster.'"

[55] Brearton notes that in Ireland (including present-day Republic and Northern Ireland), "around 150,000-200,000 Irishmen volunteered for the British Army between 1914 and 1918…at least 35,000 were killed in the war, almost 3 per cent of the eligible male population in Ireland." Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry*, 4.

[56] Quoted in R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Allen Lane, 1988), 585-86.

succumbing to his wounds, contrasts with the youth of the murdered soldiers. The son of the first stanza, knowing that death is near, comforts his father and listens to his last stories while tenderly touching his hand and head. In the second stanza, the "bewilderment" that Longley's father felt towards the Ulster Division, "'Wilder than Gurkhas,'" gives way to the complete bewilderment of the wife and children who watch as a "shivering boy" walks into their home and murders their husband and father. In this case, there is no time for deathbed confessions, as the bus conductor dies abruptly, falling "beside his carpet-slippers" in the midst of his domestic existence.

"When the Troubles enter Longley's poetry," Peter McDonald writes, "the dominant perspectives are domestic ones."[57] The absurdity of being shot dead while watching television with dirty dishes still on the table reveals the depth of the crack caused by violence, as private and public spheres become confusingly merged. Alluding to Heaney's "Funeral Rites," as well as to Wilfred Owen, Alan J. Peacock observes that in this poem the "chilling domestic intimacy of 'neighbourly' murder is unblinkingly registered but, as the First World War perspective helps to assert, 'the poetry is in the pity.'"[58] The domestic details that frame the burial scene carry a shock value, and also register the everyman nature of the victims. A "packet of Woodbines," the favorite cigarettes of his father and the three teenage soldiers, are included alongside a glimpse of the bus-conductor's family and place of death. The wounds, both physical and psychological, accumulated like the details of everyday life, connect the characters together and command the reader's attention and compassion.

Remarking on the power of Longley's juxtaposition of the Troubles and the Somme, Fussell observes that, "As if there weren't enough irony there, the irony always associated with the Somme attack remains to shade that conclusion. But at least the Somme attack had some swank and style: one could almost admire, if afterward one had to deplore."[59] The pathetic scene of a living room murder, executed by a nervous boy, contrasts with the extravagantly orchestrated disaster of the British attempt to break the German line at the Somme. In the poem, the youth of the Ulster Division, fighting against the Central Powers, sits beside the lone gunman

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[57] McDonald, *Mistaken Identities*, 133.
[58] Peacock, "Introduction," in *The Poetry of Michael Longley*, eds. Peacock and Devine, xvi.
[59] Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 325.

sent to carry out a solitary murder. The passion of the Ulster Division as they went over the top contrasts in the second stanza with the fear felt by both murderer and victim in the intimacy of the domestic setting. Finally, the complete failure to surprise the Germans on the opening day of the Somme, resulting in horrific casualties, ironically connects to the conflict in Northern Ireland, where attacks, though often solitary, seek to catch the target off guard.

The key to understanding the feelings of pity elicited by the poem lies in the fact that Longley refuses to come from a set perspective.[60] On the one hand, the poem explores the deeply felt Protestant identification of the Ulster Division at the Somme, yelling anti-Catholic slogans, before proceeding to reveal the bodies of three teenage soldiers, the probable victims of a Catholic paramilitary group. Yet, rather than only looking at the violence from a Protestant point of view, Longley also describes the murderer as "a shivering boy who wandered in / Before they could turn the television down / Or tidy away the supper dishes." The boy-murderer's feeble "Sorry Missus" to the watching "children, to a bewildered wife" adds complexity to the elegy by refusing to make the murderer into a monster. As Longley has asserted in an interview, we must "imagine how one can be so brain washed or so angry or in a sense perhaps even so innocent that one can drive in a car and go into somebody's house and shoot that person stone dead."[61] The boy, it appears, has not acted from a specific grievance against the bus-conductor, but has followed sectarian commands. The compassion generated by the poem focuses on the watching family, but it does not exclude the boy who commits the murder. To imagine how someone can be "so brain washed or so angry or in a sense perhaps even so innocent," the poem asserts, is a necessary exercise if the violence is going to stop. Longley shows that the prejudiced passion of the Ulsterman at the Somme, fighting imaginary Catholics while charging against the Germans, must be analyzed in tandem with the shivering boy carrying out an order to murder – both products of comparable 'tribal' formations. The multiple perspectives Longley engages in "Wounds" led the Irish poet Brendan Kennelly to praise the poem over others written about the Troubles: "The problem with most of the poetry written about your city is that, to put it bluntly,

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[60] For example, the mention of the "night-light in a nursery" being "put out" refers to a Catholic child killed in his home by the RUC, while the "bus-conductor" refers to a Protestant killed by the IRA. See: E. Longley, "Northern Ireland: commemoration, elegy, forgetting," 247.

[61] Longley, "Q & A with Michael Longley," by Dillon Johnston, *Irish Literary Supplement* 5.2 (Fall 1986): 20.

the poems are sectarian and therefore crippled. 'Wounds' knows no frontiers and its pity is unconfined."[62]

"Wreaths," from *The Echo Gate* (1979), does not specifically engage with the Great War, but it elaborates many of the mnemonic symbols and techniques developed in "In Memoriam" and "Wounds." As in "Wounds," Longley reveals the damage caused by violence by offering windows into ruptured domestic scenes. A triptych, Longley uses generalized titles such as "The Civil Servant" along with domestic settings, to focus on the shared links between the particular victims and the public. And, in the third poem "The Linen Workers," Longley again connects the memory of his father to the act of remembering victims of the Troubles.[63] In the first poem "The Civil Servant," Longley immediately places the reader in a home, watching the simple task of "preparing an Ulster fry for breakfast" (*EG*, 12). Powerfully, Longley's introduction of the poem through the daily task of making breakfast gives the domestic space a universal quality, as one can picture other kitchens in Northern Ireland where the same activity is being performed on any given day. However, the second line destroys the privacy of the kitchen, and ritualistic nature of the morning routine when "someone walked into the kitchen and shot him," recalling the invasion of the domestic space in "Wounds." "The Civil Servant" dramatizes the efficiency and lack of emotion that has become standard in dealing with the Troubles. For, by describing the professionalism used at the murder scene, Longley effectively captures how the continuous nature of the conflict has infiltrated the fabric of society, making abnormal actions seem routine. Though the man lay dead in his "dressing gown and pyjamas" (the attire of his private life rather than his public persona), the clean-up effort and investigation are conducted as an efficient business. They dusted "the dresser for fingerprints," and then "shuffled backwards across the garden / With notebooks, cameras and measuring tapes." Most powerfully, in the final stanza, Longley eloquently exposes the painful discrepancy between the visual and emotional damage left by acts of violence. Once the body has been rolled up "like a red carpet" there remains little physical evidence of the murder, but the horrible impact of the act of violence can be sensed in the gap between the minute visual reminder (a "bullet hole in the cutlery drawer"), and the

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[62] Brendan Kennelly to Longley (23 November 1973), Box 1, Folder 9, Emory.
[63] Cf. Heaney. Published in the same year, Heaney's *Field Work* (1979), a book full of elegies, includes several to specific victims of the Troubles. While Longley's generic titles show how society in general has been changed by the violence, Heaney concentrates on personally known victims.

immense and overwhelming emotional damage. The victim's wife's use of a "hammer and chisel" to remove the "black keys from the piano" represents an effort, even if unconscious, to bridge the gap between the physical and emotional evidence by providing a record of the irreparable nature of her loss. As Brearton argues, "Longley's elegies reveal not only the short term tangible damage caused but also the long-term effects not immediately, or possibly ever, readily apparent."[64]

In "The Greengrocer," the second poem in "Wreaths," Longley again reflects on the Troubles by detailing a rupture to daily routines, and returns to a meditation on the Shankill and Falls neighborhood identifications that figured in "Wounds." An elegy for a murdered shopkeeper, Jim Gibson, Longley depicts the greengrocer carrying out his daily tasks despite the ongoing violence in Northern Ireland. Therefore, when the "death-dealers" enter his shop they find him "busy as usual / Behind the counter, organized / With holly wreaths for Christmas, / Fir trees on the pavement outside" (*EG*, 12). The poem does not describe the "death-dealers" as Protestants or Catholics. Instead, it emphasizes the shopkeeper's efforts to run a "good shop" that does not restrict its business to one religious community.[65] The diligent and inclusive practices of the shopkeeper, as well as the seasonal tokens of Christmas placed in front of his shop, contrast sharply with the brutality and senselessness of the murder. Longley imagines "Astrologers or three wise men / Who may shortly be setting out / For a small house up the Shankill / Or the Falls," and quietly asserts that it would do both religious communities well to meditate on the positive example set by Gibson.

Kennedy-Andrews argues that the poems of "Wreaths" present "three progressively more meaningful and comprehensive responses to violence." Accordingly, Longley "affirms the *lares*, spirits of hearth and home, reasserting the binding force of community and the unquenchable life-force itself."[66] In the third poem, "The Linen Workers," Longley returns to the deathbed of his father from "In Memoriam" and "Wounds" in order to connect personally to the horrific deaths of ten Protestants killed in 1976 by the IRA as they returned from Kingsmill Factory in

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[64] Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry*, 258.
[65] Despite the lack of clear information in the poem, Edna Longley notes that the subject was a Catholic killed by a loyalist paramilitary group, and observes that the civil servant of the first poem was a Protestant killed by the IRA. E. Longley, "Northern Ireland: commemoration, elegy, forgetting," 247.
[66] Kennedy-Andrews, "Conflict, Violence and 'The Fundamental Interrelatedness of All Things,'" 86.

County Armagh.[67] As John Goodby writes, "The reported journalistic detail of the false teeth fallen on the road is seen as the trigger of the poem and its oblique mediation on the roots of the Northern crisis."[68] The journalistic particulars provide a bridge to a familial memory, as Longley meditates on the "roots of the Northern crisis" by returning to the false teeth that he has known most intimately. The metaphysical vision in the first stanza as "Christ's teeth ascended... / Through a cavity in one of his molars" becomes particular in the second stanza when Christ's "smile" contrasts with the deadly "grin" of his father's false teeth when "outside of his body" (*EG*, 13). Unlike Christ's teeth, which keep him fastened even in Heaven "to a wintry sky," Longley's father's dentures could be easily taken in and out of his mouth, a fact that allows Longley in the final stanza to symbolically return the teeth to his father. The poet's care for his own loved one heightens our awareness of the senseless and brutal murder of the linen workers.

Longley records the murder of the ten Protestant workers as still frames taken at the moment right after the slaughter, and forces the reader to examine the evidence: "spectacles / Wallets, small change, and a set of dentures" that "fell on the road beside them." The final line of the stanza, "Blood, food particles, the bread, the wine," clearly alludes to the elements of the Eucharist. In this analogy, the Catholic militants have essentially shot the elements of the communion out of the bodies of the Protestants, which reveals a particularly grisly version of the ritual and how religion can be used as a divisive force between communities. Still, the poem seems to qualify this type of religious terrorism as a radical and small faction, for though the elements of the Eucharist lay together, the ritual is not completed. Similar to the way that Longley used Jim Gibson's list of Christmas items available in his shop (in "The Greengrocer") to contrast with the un-Christian exclusionary rhetoric of certain Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland, "The Linen Workers" presents the unconsumed elements of the Eucharist as reminders of the distance

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[67] On 5 January 1976 "Ten Protestant workers are murdered at Kingsmills, Co. Armagh, by the 'Republican Action Force' (a cover name for the local IRA) as they return from work in a works minibus. The bus is stopped and the driver (a Catholic) is separated from the passengers, who are then machine-gunned." Paul Bew and Gordon Gillespie, *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles, 1968-1999* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1999), 110. Heaney also makes reference, calling the killing of the workers "one of the most harrowing moments in the whole history of the harrowing of the heart in Northern Ireland...," and uses it as a positive example of how the Protestant and Catholic workers were protective of each other, only to be annihilated by the vicious violence of the paramilitaries. Heaney, "Crediting Poetry, The Nobel Lecture, 1995" (*OG*, 45-56).

[68] John Goodby, *Irish Poetry Since 1950: From Stillness into History* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2000), 174.

between the supposedly 'communal' nature of the Eucharist and the vicious and hateful actions of the murderers.

The climax of "The Linen Workers" is Longley's vow to "bury my father once again," which recalls how in "Wounds" the poet also made room in his father's grave for symbols of those killed in the post-1968 Troubles. Without a personal connection to the killed workers, and not wanting to trivialize their deaths through generalization, Longley attempts to feel their loss more personally by reencountering the pain of losing his father. As the son lovingly polishes his father's spectacles, refills his pockets with money, and gives his hollow mouth back their false teeth, the poem attempts to symbolically also give back these items to the slain workers.[69] Jonathan Hufstader argues that, at this point, "Longley's chance...for a fresh perspective is partially lost in his return to the domestic, to the sentimental."[70] However, I believe that Longley's return to the domestic marks a powerful effort to make the workers' deaths resonate personally by bringing them into a private mourning ritual.[71] The danger, according to Longley in the poems of "Wreaths," is to allow oneself to become so desensitized that it is possible to mentally roll the bodies up like "red carpet[s]." Ultimately, the poem offers an elegiac commemoration of the linen workers, without evident underpinning from either religious or poetic traditions. Like "Wounds," Longley here boldly brings the Troubles into his own home, an immediate place of memory that merges the intimacy of remembering his father with a commemoration of the slain workers.

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[69] Longley's emphasis on the personal items left on the road anticipates his haunting later poems about the Holocaust in *Gorse Fires* and *The Weather in Japan*. For instance in the two-line "Terezín," he observes that "No room has ever been as silent as the room / Where hundreds of violins are hung in unison" (*GF*, 39). Further, in "The Exhibit," Longley imagines that the "grandparents turn back and take an eternity / Rummaging in the tangled pile for their spectacles" (*WJ*, 18), which had been taken from them as they entered the concentration camps.

[70] Hufstader, *Tongue of Water*, 97.

[71] Similar to the praise Kennelly offered to "Wounds," a friend credited "Wreaths" with entering into public discussions in a non-partisan way, writing of "The Linen Workers" that Longley "effectively avoided politics and yet indirectly made a subtle political comment in a metaphysical way that packs a powerful meaning." David Krause to Longley (19 May 1986), Box 3, Folder 7, Emory.

IV. AN "EYE ON WHAT REMAINED": FRAGILITY AND BEAUTY

Longley has subtly connected his own generation of Northern Irish poets to the soldier poets of the First World War, and in doing so has entered into discussions about the responsibilities of artists during times of violence. In "The War Poets," from *The Echo Gate* (1979), Longley makes an understated case for his own credentials as a war poet through an allusion to Louis MacNeice's "Carrickfergus" ("I thought the war would last for ever"):[72]

> It was rushes of air that took the breath away
> As though curtains were drawn suddenly aside
> And darkness streamed into the dormitory
> Where everybody talked about the war ending
> And always it would be the last week of the war.
> (*EG*, 34)

Likewise "Peace," also from *The Echo Gate*, reinforces Longley's own war-time lyrics. In "Peace," a poem written after Tibullus, Terence Brown notes that "Longley himself seems a poet in the wars, exploiting his own version of a hardy perennial in English-language verse, the lyric mode, to bear a personal testimony from a new front in an ongoing twentieth-century assault upon the human."[73] The poem, written in the first person adopts a tone of reminiscence and lament:

> I would like to have been alive in the good old days
> Before the horrors of modern warfare and warcries
> Stepping up my pulse rate. Alas, as things turn out
> I've been press-ganged into service, and for all I know
> Someone's polishing a spear with my number on it.
> God of my Fathers, look after me like a child!
> And don't be embarrassed by this handmade statue
> Carved out of bog oak by my great-great-grandfather
> Before the mass-production of religious art
> When a wooden god stood simply in a narrow shrine.
> (*EG*, 35)

Tibullus, a Roman elegiac poet who lived from c. 55 BCE to 19 BCE, is considered one of the most accomplished Latin love elegists of the Augustan period. By reworking a poem by Tibullus, Longley shows the universality of his generation's problems, while also subtly implying the particular traumas of his own day and place. He deliberately inserts words that resound with contemporary meaning; a

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[72] Louis MacNeice, "Carrickfergus," in *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. Paul Muldoon (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 97.
[73] Brown, "Who Dares to Speak?," 234.

technique that I argue in Chapters 3 and 5 is characteristic of Longley's poetry. Commenting on "Peace," Alan J. Peacock notes that "The infiltration of modern terminology ('arms deal,' 'affluent society') into the version of Tibullus 1, 10 jolts ancient topoi into contemporary immediacy...and provides a context in which reference to the Troubles ('barricades,' 'ghettos') is unmistakable but not exclusive."[74] Longley makes a connection to the specificities of Northern Ireland, beset by social unrest, through a use of contemporary diction, but insists on leaving room for other interpretations as he has done more recently in his classical 'translations' since *Gorse Fires* (1991).

"Peace" extrapolates from the cliché that things were always better in "the good old days," a phrase that emphasizes a brand of nostalgia for the past that comes with middle age. However, Longley also makes a case for the validity of his claim. He demonstrates that "the horrors of modern warfare" and the frequent "warcries" voiced in Northern Ireland are symptoms of a deeply embedded division. Whereas in "Wounds" much of the poem's strength comes from the parallels between the two stanzas, the effectiveness of "Peace" lies in the contrasts between Longley's word choices. However, unlike the technique of paralleling stanzas in "Wounds," the modern vocabulary of "Peace" is "unmistakable but not exclusive." For example, Longley's admission that he had been "press-ganged into service," is followed by a prayer, "God of my Fathers, look after me like a child," to avert the "spear" intended for him. Further, many of the words that offer distinctly Irish associations, such as the hand carved statue out of "bog oak," resonate with the "ancient tree stumps" of the original poem and help to bridge the universal and the local visions of war.[75] The poem ends with a final pastoral plea for a woman "to come and fondle my ears of wheat and let apples / Overflow between her breasts. I shall call her Peace" (*EG*, 37), reasserting the context of Tibullus' poem with its call for an end to violence and sense of natural abundance.[76] Man's desire to grow old surrounded by family, basking in the luxury of a peaceful existence, is felt as strongly in Tibullus' Rome as Longley's Northern Ireland.

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[74] Peacock, "Introduction," xvii.

[75] Tibullus, *Poems (With the Tibullan Collection)*, trans. Philip Dunlop (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 9.

[76] In the Irish context, Longley may intend his readers to think back to Kavanagh's poem of the same name, where Kavanagh admits that "sometimes I am sorry" that "I am not the voice of country fellows / Who now are standing by some headland talking / Of turnips and potatoes or young corn…," but though the countryside is peaceful he imagines "fools climb[ing] / To fight with tyrants Love and Life and Time…." Kavanagh, "Peace," in *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, 24-25.

"Second Sight," also from *The Echo Gate*, extends the sense in "Wounds" of being caught between different places and creates a flexible and uncertain landscape that enables Longley to complicate and conflate his memories of both the Troubles and the Great War. Edna Longley comments that "bereft of a steady-state perceptual and cultural universe," the poem presents an "uneasy palimpsest of the Great War, London, Ireland, terra firma, sea, 'cloud and sky.'"[77] The poet asks:

> Where is my father's house, where my father?
> If I could walk in on my grandmother
> She'd see right through me and the hallway
> And the miles of cloud and sky to Ireland.
> 'You have crossed the water to visit me.'
>
> (*EG*, 15)

Recalling his grandmother who "had the second sight," Longley explains that "Flanders began at the kitchen window." War and memory are offered as states of mind, as geography and time become flexible units. His grandmother could sense the horrors of World War I from her location in London so strongly that gas turned the "antimacassars yellow / When it blew the wrong way from the salient." Thus, the symbolic visual evidence of the coverings turning colors from the chemicals of the battlefields, confirms the depth of his grandmother's intuition as well as the far-reaching consequences of war. Longley uses his grandmother's intuitive knowledge to reflect upon his own relationship to the Great War. For, just as she could sense her son's actions in France from her location in London, Longley can imaginatively inhabit the trenches with his father, though born twenty years after the armistice, on the eve of the Second World War. Additionally, the question posed in "Second Sight," "Where is my father's house, where my father?," asks in part if his father's 'real' home was in the London of his childhood or the Belfast of his family life, and thus implicitly questions the notion of fixed identity. The vibrancy the poet feels in his father's memories, and (more worryingly) the stench of extended war, has wafted to Longley's Northern Ireland, thus coloring how he looks at both the Great War and the Troubles.[78]

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[77] Edna Longley, "Northern Irish Poetry: Literature of Region(s) or Nation(s)?," in *Writing Region and Nation (A Special Number of the Swansea Review)*, ed. James A. Davies (Swansea: Univ. of Swansea Press, 1994), 65.

[78] Longley does occasionally worry about his preoccupation with the Great War, questioning in a draft of "The Third Light" whether he must "be the looter, souvenir hunter, / pick pocket of death out in No Man's Land / Who spots among Lugers and brass buttons / His identity disc face down in mud?" Longley, "Draft of 'The Third Light,'" Box 22, Folder 5, Emory. See also the published version (*P*, 200).

As I mentioned in the Introduction, some critics consider Longley the most English of the Northern Irish poets of his generation, which derives both from his parents' nationality as well as a perception of his embrace of the English poetic tradition, specifically the war poets.[79] However, in "Second Sight," by blurring the boundaries of identity and time, Longley deliberately destabilizes the poem's foundation.[80] Kennedy-Andrews argues that Longley's desire to show the area between fixed categories highlights the redemptive vision of his poetry concerning Northern Ireland's violent conflict. As in poems such as "Wounds" and "Wreaths," rather than coming from the perspective of Protestant or Catholic, Longley addresses memories of personal and communal identity from many angles. Thus, Kennedy-Andrews credits Longley as purposely occupying a poetic "middle ground" arguing that "Longley refuses to take sides, but that is because he believes the 'middle ground,' is the only ground where accommodation can take place and mutual respect and understanding develop."[81]

Longley's stance in the middle, as a "Man Lying on a Wall," also relates to his artistic adoption of the No Man's Land between the trenches of World War I as a space of horror but also of creative possibility. For Longley, No Man's Land operates as a crucial middle ground, which Fran Brearton explains as:

> …a landscape which does not simply inform Longley's own poetic locale, rather it becomes that poetic locale: It is adapted and adopted as a kind of schizophrenic hinterland which, in acknowledging the contradictory nature of its origins, challenges as it enables the poetry. It offers a 'solid' ground whose solidity depends, paradoxically, on its fluidity, on its 'betwixt-and-between' quality.[82]

An example can be found in an unpublished poem entitled "Armistice," where Longley adopts the vocabulary of the Great War to describe his mental state, taking the reader "Into the rats and trenches of my head," "A paradigm of armies," in order

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[79] See: Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (London: Hutchinson, 1996), 243; and Goodby, *Irish Poetry Since 1950*, 118.

[80] Longley consistently grounds discussions of family members in a Great War context, as in "Master of Ceremonies" where Longley remembers his grandfather as a "natural master of ceremonies" who didn't talk about his son Lionel who ("good for nothing except sleepwalking to the Great War") got his head "blown off in No Man's Land" and was later "demoted" to the rank of "nephew" (*MLW*, in *SP*, 53)

[81] Kennedy-Andrews, "Conflict, Violence and 'The Fundamental Interrelatedness of All Things,'" 73-74.

[82] Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry*, 255.

to explain the "head wound" he lives with.[83] As a poet, placing himself "betwixt-and-between" affords him a remarkably wide perspective, but does not stop him from making direct statements in his poetry. As Kennedy-Andrews observes, Longley's middle ground stance is one of profound activism, for "to map that ground, far from being an evasion or withdrawal, may yet be the most socially and politically beneficial act the poet can perform."[84]

Not all critics agree that Longley's "middle ground" is politically productive.[85] Jonathan Hufstader, noting the difference between Longley and his contemporaries, criticizes Longley for what he regards as a detached perspective towards the Troubles: "Longley's apparent refusal – one which finally proves deceptive – to admit or accept any personal involvement in the Troubles...separates him from his colleagues. He shows no interest either in Heaney's pursuit of understanding such involvement or Mahon's flight from its consequences."[86] Hufstader introduces his criticism of Longley's poetic distance by citing Longley's poem "Fleance" from *Man Lying on a Wall* (1976) as proof of the poet's detachment:

> It took me a lifetime to explore
> The dusty warren beneath the stage
> With its trapdoor opening on to
> All that had happened above my head
> Like noises-off or distant weather.
> In the empty auditorium I bowed
> To one preoccupied caretaker
> And, without removing my make-up,
> Hurried back to the digs where Banquo
> Sat up late with a hole in his head.
>
> (*MLW*, in *SP*, 55)

"Like Fleance fleeing from the senseless carnage which is soon to include him," Hufstader claims that Longley "accepts a position of irrelevance, hiding under the stage and coming out again only when the crowd has gone home."[87]

Yet, I believe that the lines of "Fleance," where the poet imagines the real action going on "above my head / Like noises-off or distant weather," have much in common with Heaney's self-examination during the same historic moment in the last

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[83] Longley, "Uncollected Poem, 'Armistice,'" Box 29, Folder 13, Emory. See also: "Desert Warfare" (*MLW*, in *P*, 117) where Longley assesses the "hazards" of relationships between men and women in terms of battle strategies.
[84] Kennedy-Andrews, "Conflict, Violence and 'The Fundamental Interrelatedness of All Things,'" 73-74.
[85] One might compare Heaney's notion of a "middle voice," which I discuss in Chapter 4.
[86] Hufstader, *Tongue of Water*, 87-88.
[87] Ibid.

poem from "Singing School" in *North*: "Exposure." Heaney wonders if by moving with his family to Wicklow in 1974 he had "escaped from the massacre" only to miss "The once-in-a-lifetime portent, / The comet's pulsing rose" (*N*, 68). Like Heaney's "Exposure," Longley's poem reflects the insecurities attached to the perceived pressure to comment on the political situation, cornered by what Heaney calls the "tight gag of place" (*N*, 54). Hufstader uses a few poems to make over-generalized comments about Longley's poetry and politics, yet the concerns he raises remind the reader of the heightened level of self-consciousness felt by the poets in the 1970s as violence escalated. Longley was keenly aware of his uncomfortable stance in the middle during this particular period, as is evident in his choice of title for the volume as *Man Lying on a Wall*. In a letter written to his editor he observes that "The man lying on a wall rests midway between life and death, sleeping and waking, drunkenness and sobriety, responsibility and freedom, fact and fantasy. And in his own peculiar way, he is sitting on the fence."[88]

In 1992, responding to critics such as Hufstader, Longley discussed the pressure placed on artists. He explained, "I find offensive the notion that what we inadequately call 'the Troubles' might provide inspiration for artists; and that in some weird *quid pro quo* the arts might provide solace for grief and anguish."[89] In 1971 Longley made a similar statement of defense of artists' rights to creative space in times of conflict. Though speaking specifically about Northern Ireland, Longley returns to Wilfred Owen's observations about poetry in the context of World War I:

> Too many critics seem to expect a harvest of paintings, poems, plays and novels to drop from the twisted branches of civil discord. They fail to realise that the artist needs time in which to allow the raw material of experience to settle to an imaginative depth where he can transform it...He is not some sort of super-journalist commenting with unfaltering spontaneity on events immediately after they have happened. Rather, as Wilfred Owen stated fifty years ago, it is the artist's duty to warn, to be tuned in before anyone else to the implications of a situation.[90]

In the title poem, "Man Lying on a Wall," Longley admits that along with the pressure comes a desire to escape: "he is trying to forget, his briefcase / With everybody's initials on it." The perceived responsibility to speak for an entire group or country is both overwhelming and unrealistic. Longley has consistently asserted

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[88] Longley to Kevin Crossley-Holland (27 June 1975), Box, 1, Folder 11, Emory.
[89] Longley, "Blackthorn and Bonsai: or, A Little Brief Authority," in *Tuppenny Stung*, 73.
[90] Longley, "Introduction," in *Causeway: The Arts in Ulster*, ed. Longley (Belfast: Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1971), 8.

that poets have an obligation to the times they live in, but he maintains that to "publish a bad poem about the Troubles is a dangerous impertinence."[91]

The direct juxtaposition in "Wounds" between the Great War and the post-1968 Troubles is only one of many comparable techniques that Longley has utilized to poetically address the continuing violence in Northern Ireland. The poems included in *An Exploded View*, of which "Wounds" is perhaps the best known, were written between 1968 and 1972, years which witnessed the start and severe escalation of violence, climaxing with "Bloody Sunday" on 30 January 1972.[92] As the conflict continued during the 1970s, many of Longley's poems addressed an increasingly fragile landscape. For instance, *The Echo Gate* (1979) opens with a short dedicatory poem to Michael Allen and Paul Muldoon:

> I have heard of an island
> With only one house on it.
> The gulls are at home there.
> Our perpetual absence
> Is a way of leaving
> All the eggs unbroken
> That litter the ground
> Right up to its doorstep.
>
> (*EG*, 5)

The absence of a human presence celebrates the messiness and beauty of the natural world, and the lone house exists as a reminder of the harmony possible when we respect the need for distance. This poem does not pledge common objectives, as in the earlier dedication of *An Exploded View* to "Derek, Seamus and Jimmy," who collectively are "trying to make ourselves heard…" (*EV*, 5). In fact, the dedication to Allen and Muldoon offers an insight into Longley's changing poetic approach. Celebrating distance as much as directness, Longley finds beauty in the fragile. He acknowledges that in order to find respite or asylum, he must continue to maneuver his poetry across brokenness.

"Edward Thomas's War Diary," from *Man Lying on a Wall*, quietly insists on the importance of noticing the natural beauty of birds and flowers in the midst of horror and destruction.[93] The soldier-poet Isaac Rosenberg's "Break of Day in the Trenches," written during the First World War, asserts a similar sentiment, claiming

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[91] Longley, "American Ireland Literary Fund Award Speech" (19 June 1996), Box 35, Folder 1, Emory.
[92] Bew and Gillespie, *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles*, 44-6.
[93] At the time that Longley composed the poems of *MLW* Edna Longley was editing an edition of Edward Thomas' poems, *Poems and Last Poems* (Collins: London and Glasgow, 1973).

that the "Poppies whose roots are in man's veins / Drop, and are ever dropping; / But mine in my ear is safe, / Just a little white with the dust."[94] In Rosenberg's poem, the picking of a poppy growing on the side of the trenches reinforces the beauty and fragility of both flowers and men. Of the poem, Fussell notes, "[Rosenberg] is aware that the poppies grow because nourished on the blood of the dead...if it is now just a little bit white, it is already destined to be very white as its blood runs out of it."[95] The deliberate irony of the choice of the word "safe" in Rosenberg's poem brings us back to the uncomfortable knowledge that the red vein of life will eventually run out. In "Edward Thomas's War Diary," Longley imagines Thomas sleeping in a trench "where shell holes / Filled with bloodstained water" (*MLW*, in *SP*, 54). Thomas was also a naturalist and a writer of nature books, and in his poem Longley celebrates the soldier-poet for making time to "draw panoramas," as Thomas ventured just far enough away from the battlefield to hear larks singing "Like a letter from home / Posted in No Man's Land."

Like Thomas, Longley has a deep investment in pastoral and lyric poetry that is strengthened rather than diminished by the Troubles.[96] Longley's poetry insists that painting panoramas and writing poetry, like listening to birds, is even more important when battles are raging. Recording the small details of natural life, and enjoying these simple activities, attests to the things that cannot be taken away - the details that give everyday life a sense of wonder. Longley, as much as Thomas, receives the gift of the birds' song. Longley credits Thomas for keeping his "eye on what remained – / Light spangling through a hole / In the cathedral wall" (*MLW*, in *SP*, 54). Similarly, Longley has consistently maintained the lyric as a form that can capture natural beauty, but that can also show the fragility of the natural and human world. In his war poetry, whether concerning the Great War, World War II, the Troubles, or a combination, Longley keeps his "eye on what remained." Longley, like Thomas, finds great worth in the effort of skirting "the danger zone / To draw panoramas," asserting that to do so does not ignore the horror going on all around, but captures the fragility and celebrates the fleeting beauty of the world. The earth as the subject of nature poetry is perhaps Longley's ultimate mnemonic reference and *lieu de mémoire*. The natural world offers him, like Thomas, a sense of continuous

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[94] Quoted in Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 251.
[95] Ibid., 252-53.
[96] I make a more extended argument concerning Longley's defense of his poetry of the natural world in times of conflict in Chapter 3.

belonging that transcends the horrors of conflict. Recently, in "The War Graves," Longley asserts that though "There will be no end to clearing up after the war," items of beauty still shine through: "Violets thrive, as though strewn by each cataclysm / To sweeten the atmosphere and conceal death's smell / With a perfume that vanishes as soon as it is found" (*WJ*, 22). Likewise, just as in another recent poem Longley recalls how Edward Thomas left his copy of Keats "in a ruined house in Arras" to be found by the poet Edmund Blunden, poetry (whether Thomas', Longley's, Blunden's or Keats') is a "gift" that will survive war (*WJ*, 21).

CHAPTER 3

"THAT SMALL SUBCONSCIOUS COTTAGE WHERE / THE IRISH POET SLAMS HIS DOOR": THE WEST AS PRIMARY LANDSCAPE IN MICHAEL LONGLEY'S POETRY

The West of Ireland is the homeground of Michael Longley's poetry - the most developed place in his imaginative landscape where he has consistently grounded discussions of community, identity, love and violence. An elective homeground, his Mayo retreat has been depicted in every collection since *An Exploded View* (1973), and, as Heaney looks back to Mossbawn, Longley has positioned his western landscape as both a physical and mental place of prime importance. However, keeping in mind Heaney's argument in "Place and Displacement," Longley's engagement with his elective homeground is dominated by his awareness of other places and affiliations. Before turning to the construction of the West by previous generations of artists, I want to offer a window into the complexities of Longley's relationship with his primal landscape. In "The West" from *An Exploded View* (1973), Longley balances the peacefulness of Mayo with the violent news coming out of Belfast, using his "home from home" in the West to offer a clearer vantage point to assess Northern Ireland:

> Beneath a gas-mantle that the moths bombard,
> Light that powders at a touch, dusty wings,
> I listen for news through the atmospherics,
> A crackle of sea-wrack, spinning driftwood,
> Waves like distant traffic, news from home,
>
> Or watch myself, as through a sandy lens,
> Materialising out of the heat-shimmers
> And finding my way for ever along
> The path to this cottage, its windows,
> Walls, sun and moon dials, home from home.
>
> (*EV*, 49)

The opening stanza contains words that ironically register the differences between his two 'homes.' In Mayo, he sits beneath a "gas-mantle that the moths bombard," far removed from the world of gas-bombs and other more sinister types of

bombardment frequent in Belfast during the height of the Troubles. The diction expresses the distance he feels from his Belfast home, the "crackle of sea-wrack" and "spinning driftwood" suggest a poet lost at sea, shipwrecked in the surreal calm of Mayo. The simile "Waves like distant traffic" evokes both his seaside location at Carrigskeewaun and the Belfast news, and represents his anxiety at the physical and emotional distance from Northern Ireland that he experiences while in the West. The final phrase, "home from home," contemplates the ramifications of a permanent re-location to Mayo, "finding my way for ever along / The path to this cottage," and ultimately concedes that any fixed sense of identification (whether in Mayo or Belfast) would always cause a feeling of dislocation. Robert Welch, in a helpful introductory article "Michael Longley and the West," credits this dislocation to Longley's characteristic "double vision," which Welch ascribes to his inheritance from the English Protestant poetic tradition.[1] Longley may yearn for the calm of the West, but realizes that he could not completely relinquish his "home" in the North. His investment in the West as the homeground of his art is based around the awareness that he will always experience the pull of his identity in multiple places.

I. THE MYTH OF THE WEST

A tourist map of the West of Ireland displays a multitude of museums, cultural and interpretative centers, historical houses, and whole counties dedicated to literary luminaries. For example, most maps of the region designate Sligo as "Yeats Country," and Connemara as "Joyce Country." The list of museums is long and therefore revealing: the Douglas Hyde Interpretative Centre in Roscommon; the Kiltartan Gregory Museum commemorating Lady Gregory near Coole Park, Galway; Padraic Pearse's Cottage in Rosmuc, Connemara; the Yeats Memorial Museum in Sligo; another Yeats Museum at the poet's tower home of Thoor Ballylee in Galway; and, in a Joyce connection, the Nora Barnacle House Museum in Galway. Maps of the West also remember political figures with literary links: for example, the Eamon

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[1] Robert Welch, "Michael Longley and the West," in *The Poetry of Michael Longley*, eds. Alan J. Peacock and Kathleen Devine (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2000), 58 and 54.

De Valera Library and Museum near Ennis in Clare; Lissadell House, home of the Gore-Booth family in Sligo;[2] and the Michael Davitt Museum near Castlebar in Mayo.[3] As evidenced by such a long list, the West of Ireland has been a particularly well-trodden ground for nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists. Michael Longley's poetry recognizes this formidable literary legacy even when it is not overtly referenced. Before turning to Longley's large contribution and alteration to western tradition, it is useful to consider the foundations of artistic depictions of the region, what Longley referred to as "the visual, historical, archaeological and scientific treasure-trove which is the West," so important in the iconography of Irish identity.[4]

Many of the literary figures honored with museums and historical houses are, unsurprisingly, responsible for focusing attention on the West of Ireland. Though travel writers had long noted the unique qualities of the region, in the late nineteenth century the Celtic Revival, led by W. B. Yeats, made the West of Ireland an overt reference point for Irish poets and painters, as well as politicians.[5] Yeats, Lady Gregory, J. M. Synge, as well as Douglas Hyde and others, used the western landscape to argue for the greater cultural authenticity of rural over urban areas, stressing the particularly *Irish* nature of the West. Their writings, however different in style, collectively emphasized the wit and cultural distinctiveness of the western inhabitants, whose stories epitomized the West's mystical qualities. They portrayed the West as a spiritual and rugged landscape, which was more authentically Irish than other regions because it had been less influenced by English rule. Catherine Nash underlines the significance attached to the West in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century, writing:

> The West came to stand for Ireland in general, to be representative of true Irishness. It could be seen as a way of access into the Irish past through its

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[2] The house and its inhabitants are commemorated in: W. B. Yeats, "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz," in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner Paperback Poetry, 1996), 134. Originally published in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933).

[3] Michael Davitt (1846-1906) was a political organizer and Fenian. He started the influential Land League with Charles Stewart Parnell. See: Robert Welch, ed., *Oxford Concise Companion to Irish Literature,* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 82-83.

[4] Longley, "Interview with Andrew Morrison" (08/01/00), Box 43, Folder 6, Emory. At times the influence is direct, for instance Longley made a personal note that his poem "Ropemakers" (*EV*) was "about domesticity and half-liking it, an image borrowed from Synge's *The Aran Islands*." Longley, "Table of Contents notes, *An Exploded View*," Box 18, Folder 25, Emory.

[5] For instance, Synge's *Aran Islands* (1911) and *Playboy of the Western World* (1907), as well as Joyce's "The Dead" (1907, published in *Dubliners* [1914]) are potent icons of the West.

> language, folklore, antiquities, and way of life, yet also be conceived of as outside time, separated from normal temporal development....[6]

The West was therefore paradoxically figured as both distinct from other parts of Ireland, while also being the primary example and representation of true Irishness. As a landscape that allowed "access into the Irish past" (through its Gaelic speaking population and maintenance of traditional dress, farming and fishing practices, as well as its connections to ancient Irish mythology), the West acquired pivotal significance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as Ireland (and Irish writers) sought to redefine itself. Artists as well as politicians, especially during the early years of the Irish Free State and Republic, used the landscape and its traditions to claim cultural difference from England, and to give a strong cultural identity to the new nation.

The West was an equally fertile ground for visual artists, such as Jack B. Yeats (1871-1957), Seán Keating (1889-1977), and Paul Henry (1876-1958). They explored, through widely different techniques, romantic notions of the western landscape and the simple life of its people, depicting the West as the edge of Irish experience, as well as (especially in the case of Keating) linking the importance of the West to the nationalist cause and subsequently to the success of the new nation.[7] More recently, the West has been an important inspiration not only for Michael Longley, but also for fellow Northern Irish poets Louis MacNeice, Seamus Heaney and Derek Mahon.[8] Their western explorations reveal the continuing appeal of both the myth and the reality of the West of Ireland, and put Longley's emphasis on the landscape into sharper focus. In this section, I begin by looking at the foundations of the western outlook as laid by the Celtic Revivalists, before turning to the landscape's representation by visual artists Keating, Henry and J. B. Yeats. Finally, I turn briefly to the representations of the West of Ireland in the poetry of MacNeice, Heaney and Mahon. Turning to Longley's poetry, in the second section, I analyze

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[6] Catherine Nash, "'Embodying the Nation' - The West of Ireland Landscape and Irish Identity," in *Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Analysis*, eds. B. O'Connor and M. Cronin (London: UK Monographs, 1993), 86-87.

[7] See: Figure 3.3.

[8] The Co. Galway born poet Richard Murphy (born 1927), who also lived on Inishbofin Island near Longley's western retreat, set many of his poems in the West. See: *Sailing to an Island* (1963). See also the work of Limerick born Michael Hartnett (born 1941), who in Patrick Crotty's assessment "seeks continuity with the eighteenth-century poets of his native Munster – mouthpieces of a dying Gaelic culture...." Crotty, ed., *Modern Irish Poetry: An Anthology* (1995; repr., Belfast: Blackstaff, 2001), 235.

his use of the West to frame his understanding of issues of community and identity, and demonstrate that Longley characteristically uses his elective homeland to reflect on other places. Then, in the third section, I dwell specifically on Longley's plethora of love poems set in the West of Ireland, as he compellingly merges love and landscape poetry. In the fourth section, using three examples ("The Ice-Cream Man," "Burren Prayer," and "At Poll Salach"), I argue that the West is also the setting of some of Longley's most political poems, though he typically enters into matters of public concern from oblique angles. Finally, the fifth section looks specifically at how, through a focus on his artistic homeground in the West, Longley approaches matters of poetic legacy.

THE WEST OF THE REVIVALISTS: J. M. SYNGE, W. B. YEATS AND LADY GREGORY

J. M. Synge and W. B. Yeats had the most powerful impact in turning international attention towards the West of Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[9] Yeats famously advised Synge to go to the Aran Islands for literary inspiration, and thus ignited Synge's deep creative association with the West, counseling him to "find a life that had never been expressed in literature instead of a life where all had been expressed."[10] Yeats here purposely constructs a dialectical opposition of French and Irish literature. French literature only facilitates "morbid and melancholy verse," because its traditions have all "been expressed," in contrast to the wonderful possibilities for creative material available in Ireland. Yeats' argument for the trio of isolated western islands was true more generally for his depiction of the entire western part of Ireland as an archetypal Irish landscape. It was a cultural goldmine not only because it had been less influenced by Anglicization but also because "its physical landscape provided the greatest contrast to the landscape of Englishness."[11]

Yeats (like Lady Gregory, Synge and others) wanted to create a distinctly Irish poetic voice by writing about specifically Irish subjects inspired by the western

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[9] Although Synge died in 1909, his works, especially *The Playboy of the Western World*, continued to spark discussion. Further, Synge's depictions of the West were a major influence on poets such as Longley, MacNeice and Mahon, as well as the painter Paul Henry.
[10] Yeats, "First Meeting with Synge," in *J. M. Synge: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. E. H. Mikhail (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977), 15.
[11] Nash, "'Embodying the Nation,'" 91.

landscape. Synge followed Yeats' advice, visiting the Aran Islands as well as many other western locations, which collectively made such a strong impression that most of his mature work has a clear western source of inspiration. In a letter to Lady Gregory, dated 11 August 1905, Synge writes about a planned trip to the Blasket Islands off the coast of Kerry, noting that the islands are:

> ...probably even more primitive than Aran and I am wild with joy at the prospect. If all goes well I may stay there for some time...I am to go out in a curragh on Sunday when the people are going back from Mass on the mainland, and am to lodge with the King.[12]

Synge's assumption of a shared fascination on the part of the Revivalists in searching for primitive and untouched places, stemmed from both anthropological and literary interests. In his next letter to Lady Gregory, dated 20 August 1905, he confirms the hopes of his previous letter: "in some ways I find [the Blasket Islands] the most interesting place I have ever been in...In the evening there are often 20 or 30 people in the house dancing and getting on. The old King himself is the only person who speaks to me in English."[13] For Synge, inhabiting a world still dominated by Gaelic intensified both the untouched nature of the western areas and the uniqueness of the tales relayed to him.[14] These tales and local anecdotes figured heavily in his books of travel recollections, as well as in the plays that attracted international attention and controversy: *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903); *Riders to the Sea* (1904); and *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907).[15]

Synge hints at the cultural material at stake in his preface to *The Playboy of the Western World*:

> I have used one or two words only that I have not heard among the country people of Ireland, or spoken in my own nursery before I could read the newspapers. A certain number of the phrases I employ I have heard also from herds and fishermen along the coast from Kerry to Mayo, or from beggar-women and ballad-singers nearer Dublin; and I am glad to acknowledge how much I owe to the folk-imagination of these fine people. Anyone who has lived in real intimacy with the Irish peasantry will know that the wildest sayings and ideas in this play are tame indeed, compared with the

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[12] J. M. Synge, *Some Letters of John M. Synge to Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Dublin: Cuala, 1971), 14.
[13] Ibid.
[14] See: Luke Gibbons, "Synge, Country and Western: The Myth of the West in Irish and American Culture," in *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Critical Conditions: Field Day Essays, 1996), 23-35.
[15] Synge also expressed a desire to find the most "primitive" part of the Aran Islands, writing, "In spite of the charm of my teacher...I have decided to move on to Inishmaan, where Gaelic is more generally used, and the life is perhaps the most primitive that is left in Europe." Synge, *The Aran Islands* (Dublin: Maunsel & Company, 1911), 10.

> fancies one may hear in any little hillside cabin in Geesala, or Carraroe, or Dingle Bay.[16]

His comments reinforce the privileged place of native western Irish culture as the source of the language of the play, and assert the realistic and authentically Irish origin of his controversial plot. It is significant, in terms of the Celtic Revival's stated aspiration to write for exactly this group in their effort to create a national literature, that Synge claims that he *is* someone "who has lived in real intimacy with the Irish peasantry."[17] Yeats, too, uses Synge's work to make a larger claim about the grand originality of the culture in the West by drawing a connection between the "real life of Ireland" and the "fantastic."[18] The West is a most real landscape, in both a rugged sense (life as "salt in the mouth" in Yeats' appraisal of Synge's tastes) as well as in a creative sense, through an oral culture that reveals both mysterious and mythic foundations.[19] Synge, perhaps more than his peers, framed his depictions of the West in terms of this dual understanding, writing both geographical accounts of the severity of the weather and lifestyle, such as *The Aran Islands*, and theatrical and fictionalized explorations of his experiences.

While Synge always maintained a frequent visitor's appreciation of the West, Lady Gregory saw portraying the West and recording its stories and myths as a cultural duty. For Gregory, access to western themes, especially in her native Galway, was a natural literary inheritance and a primary responsibility. In the introduction to the "Sea Stories" chapter in *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (1920), Lady Gregory (like Synge) acknowledges Yeats as the force behind her original interest in the folklore of the West. "'The Celtic Twilight' was the first book of Mr Yeats' that I read" she recorded, "and even before I met him, a little time later, I had begun looking for news of the invisible world; for his stories were of Sligo and I was jealous for Galway."[20] Gregory put the West of Ireland at the heart of the Celtic Revival movement and her creative work. Access to the "invisible world" of western folklore was found through a rigorous collection of material from the (visible) storytelling gatekeepers of the locality. She felt that the West offered a real

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[16] Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*, ed. Malcolm Kensall (1907; repr., London: A & C Black, 1994), 1.
[17] See: Patrick J. Duffy, "Writing Ireland: Literature and art in the representation of Irish place," in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography,* ed. Brian Graham (London: Routledge, 1997), 67.
[18] Yeats, "J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time," in *J. M. Synge: Interviews and Recollections*, 59.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Lady Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland Collected and Arranged by Lady Gregory: With Two Essays and Notes By W. B. Yeats* (1920; repr., Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1970), 15.

entry point into a type of Irish life and folk tradition not found elsewhere, and provided access to an (assumed) communal past.

Further, Gregory's Galway home of Coole Park served as the effective headquarters of the Celtic Revivalists. She was both a primary creative member, and a benefactor to the movement and its other artists. Her *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (1920) contains many tales about the *Sidhe*, the shape-changing fairies, which give the folklore of the West much of its mystical appeal. Yeats underscores the cultural significance of Gregory's project by recalling a conversation between himself and Lady Gregory:

> As that ancient system of belief unfolded before us, with unforeseen probabilities and plausibilities, it was as though we had begun to live in a dream, and one day Lady Gregory said to me when we had passed an old man in the wood: "That old man may know the secret of the ages."[21]

In addition to her many studies and dictations of local stories and myths, Gregory also created a dialect language (Kiltartan) that attempted to render the colloquial speech of the Irish peasantry near her Galway home into English. Her development of Kiltartan, utilized in plays by her and others in the period, was mocked even in her lifetime but it nonetheless contributed significantly to the Celtic Revival's vision of the cultural uniqueness of Ireland.

W. B. Yeats lived most of his life in the metropolitan cities of London and Dublin, yet throughout his long and prolific career he found inspiration in the West of Ireland. As Duffy contends, Yeats "is the supreme example of an artist setting out to construct a deliberate, symbolic landscape allegory of identity, impressing himself on a landscape like a 'phase of history.'"[22] Yeats first sought to immortalize the mythic substance of the area around his childhood home of Sligo, the Yeats Country of the tourist guides. He later concentrated on the Galway landscape around Lady Gregory's home of Coole Park (near the Burren, an important location in Michael Longley's poetry) and his home of Thoor Ballylee, near Coole Park, combining geography with the region's mythology and folklore in his constructions. If Coole Park was the symbolic capital of Yeats' Irish Revival, the loss of Lady Gregory's son Robert Gregory in World War I offered a moment of paradoxical consolidation for Yeats as it enabled him to take greater poetic ownership over the landscape. In "In

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[21] Yeats, "A General Introduction to my Work," in *Essays and Introductions* (1937; repr., Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1961), 517.
[22] Duffy, "Writing Ireland," 66.

Memory of Major Robert Gregory," from *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), Yeats' description of the land also implies positive personality characteristics about Gregory as well as the inhabitants of the West more generally: "We dreamed that a great painter had been born / To cold Clare rock and Galway rock and thorn, / To that stern colour and that delicate line...."[23] The occasion of Robert Gregory's premature death provided Yeats with a new door into discussions of allegiance and nationality whereby the West, embodied in the Gregory estate at Coole, came to represent the ideal community. For example, as noted in Chapter 2, in "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death," Yeats has Gregory voice his true allegiance:

> My country is Kiltartan Cross
> My countrymen Kiltartan's poor
> No likely end could bring them loss
> Nor leave them happier than before.[24]

Yeats casts Gregory as a true individual spirit, and the knowing heroism of his "lonely impulse of delight" (as with "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory") reflects on both his character and the Galway landscape that nourished him. Yeats' Irish Airman defines the local Galway area as a "country," an entity all its own, and suggests that the authentically Irish characteristics of the West have been forgotten by a "modern Ireland, spiritually barren."[25]

For Yeats, according to one critic, "to go West was to seek visionary self-realization."[26] The early poem "The Lake Isle Of Innisfree," discussed in Chapter 1, shows how Yeats invested the West with a magical atmosphere, set apart from "the pavements grey" of the city.[27] As Duffy remarks, "it was principally Yeats's literary movement which glorified the rural aesthetic as the authentic source of Irishness," and without Yeats "Inishfree would be a nameless place."[28] The very small island, in the middle of Lough Gill in Sligo, symbolized Yeats' larger vision of the West as the heart of spiritual Ireland. His poem overtly privileges rural over urban, and positions the West as a remnant of an older and more mysterious culture. It does not merely

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[23] Yeats, "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," in *Collected Poems*, 134. Originally published in *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919).
[24] Yeats, "An Irish Airman foresees his Death," in *Collected Poems*, 135. Originally published in *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919).
[25] Daniel A. Harris, *Yeats, Coole Park and Ballylee* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974), 114.
[26] Ibid., 11.
[27] Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," in *Collected Poems*, 39. Originally published in *The Rose* (1893).
[28] Duffy, "Writing Ireland," 66 and 69.

describe a physical landscape, but symbolically defines an ideal location for the Irish artist. Though living in London at the time, the poet claims his ability to mentally reside in an artist's paradise, with his "small cabin" and self-sufficient life: "bean-rows" and honey, natural songs and inner peace.[29] The West of his childhood holidays in Sligo was a symbolic place that Yeats sought to recreate in his imagination even while remaining bodily in the "roadway" or on the "pavements grey."

If "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" embodies the West as an ideal artistic refuge for the early Yeats, "The Fisherman" dramatizes his problematic ideal of an Irish audience far from the madding crowd in Dublin. The "wise and simple man" in the poem, dressed in distinctive "grey Connemara clothes," encapsulates both a vision of the artist and of Yeats' artistic project. The fisherman signifies Yeats' poetic hopes and aims, as "All day I'd looked in the face / What I had hoped 'twould be / To write for my own race / And the reality…."[30] By writing to the figure of the palpably fictional Connemara fisherman, Yeats tries to redeem his artistic project and forget both his critics and other types of audiences:

> Maybe a twelvemonth since
> Suddenly I began,
> In scorn of this audience,
> Imagining a man,
> And his sun-freckled face,
> And grey Connemara cloth,
> Climbing up to a place
> Where stone is dark under froth,
> And the down-turn of his wrist
> When the flies drop in the stream;
> A man who does not exist,
> A man who is but a dream;
> And cried, 'Before I am old
> I shall have written him one
> Poem maybe as cold
> And passionate as the dawn.'[31]

Yeats admits that the subject of the poem "does not exist, /...is but a dream," but still allows the imaginary fisherman to encapsulate his ideal audience. The symbolic

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[29] Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," 39.
[30] Yeats, "The Fisherman," in *Collected Poems*, 148. Originally Published in *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919).
[31] Ibid.

force of the West of Ireland outweighs any possible reality, and his fisherman, though non-existent, remains his most authentic audience.

Towards the end of his life, in poems such as "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931," Yeats revisited the cultural ambitions of the Revivalists, re-evaluating their quasi-feudal nationalist dream of the West. Realizing that the completeness of their project had been upset by the forces of historical change and instability in Ireland during the climatic years of his life, the poet finds the "high horse" now "riderless":

> We were the last romantics - chose for theme
> Traditional sanctity and loveliness;
> Whatever's written in what poets name
> The book of the people; whatever most can bless
> The mind of man or elevate a rhyme;
> But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
> Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
> Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.[32]

John Wilson Foster refers to the Celtic Revivalists' West as "the vestige and symbolic entirety of an undivided nation."[33] However, as shown in such poems as "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" and "Coole Park, 1929," Yeats recognized the break-down of his cultural project, which casts a shadow on the West of his creation. In "Coole and Ballylee, 1931" Yeats attempts to control the landscape and the cultural traditions that he helped to create, but finally yields to the unstoppable forces of historical change, as he figures himself and Lady Gregory as "the last romantics." Michael Longley, a later romantic, does not share Yeats' ascendancy vision of the West, but it can be argued that Longley's positioning of the West as the geographic site of poetic exploration owes much to Yeats' drive to "construct a deliberate, symbolic landscape allegory of identity…."[34] Longley, too, looks to the West to frame his identity, and over the course of his long engagement (despite his unobtrusive naturalist's perspective) Longley has, like Yeats earlier, artistically impressed himself on his elective homeground.

Finally, Sean O'Faolain's *An Irish Journey* (1941), a travel book, succinctly captures the multiple components of the myth of the West. Though written in the aftermath of the Celtic Revival, its romantic description owes much to the earlier

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[32] Yeats, "Coole and Ballylee," in *Collected Poems*, 245. Originally published in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933).
[33] John Wilson Foster, "Certain Set Apart," in *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival*, quoted in Edna Longley, *Louis MacNeice: A Critical Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 29.
[34] Duffy, "Writing Ireland," 66.

movement.[35] He imagines the West as outside of real time, a place locked in an earlier authentically Irish time, a lost world that could still magically be found on a bicycle:

> As always in the west, I lost all count of time once I entered the hinterland. Picking up my bicycle again…on a godly morning of hot sun which filled Galway Bay with a million sparkles; and within an hour I was lost to all the world but this world of furze that smelt like buttermilk, and bog-myrtle that came and went in gushes on the imperceptible breathing of the sweet air. As the land became wilder and wilder…'Lost' was the word that kept recurring to my mind - lost islands, lost land, lost consciousness, lost time...You feel when you meet a side road that if you follow it you will end up as a fable; and yet, I defy anybody to halt at the cross-road at Costelloe, and not turn west out to the islands, and having come to Lettermore, not to persist to Gorumna...and having come to the end of the ultimate boreen, not to sigh because he cannot easily cross over to the little islands that lie still farther on and out.[36]

O'Faolain presents himself as a cultural tourist, and his perception of the West's timelessness adds to his general covering of the land in a surreal veil, where the whole region becomes "lost islands, lost land, lost consciousness, lost time," a historical understanding that clearly has implications for the whole of Ireland as well as the western counties he explicitly includes. The ability to enter into a realm of "lost consciousness, lost time" bears important implications for the present, especially in terms of national identity. The West, according to O'Faolain, exists as a living myth or a fable; a relic of an otherwise "lost" way of life. Significantly, O'Faolain's perception of the West as "lost time" continues in more recent discussions of the West of Ireland. The *Irish Times* (1 November 1994) observes, "There's something about the Shannon - when you cross that river you leave Europe. There's a softness, a gentleness, a civilisation here."[37] Further, an article on County Mayo in the *National Geographic Traveller* (March 2003) celebrates the region as "The Real Ireland," "a land apart…preserv[ing] a pure, raw spirit."[38] The article goes on to note that the local "culture has endured with an immediacy unusual even

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[35] O'Faolain (1900-1991) held complicated political views that changed significantly during his life. He fought as a Republican in the Civil War, and was influenced by the nationalist historian Daniel Corkery early in his career. Later, through the literary journal he started and edited, *The Bell*, he openly criticized the conservatism of both the Catholic Church and the government's Gaelic-centric formation of identity. However, despite his later frustration, *An Irish Journey* does reinforce romantic and traditional representations of the West and its cultural significance. See: Welch, ed., *Companion to Irish Literature*, 279-80.

[36] Sean O'Faolain, *An Irish Journey* (London: Readers Union and Longmans Green, 1941), 170.

[37] *Irish Times*, 1 November 1994, quoted in Duffy, "Writing Ireland," 68.

[38] Mel White, "Far Edge of Ireland," *National Geographic Traveler* (March 2003): 96-97.

in tradition-minded Ireland. For the curious traveller, this means a chance to visit not just the friendly pubs and green fields and rocky coast, but 'the landscape of memory'...." The article concludes that the true beauty of the landscape is found in its "people who have faced centuries of hard life in a rugged and lonely land, and come through it all, with a heritage that is stronger for the storms they have survived."[39] Thus, the West represents rural Ireland, the last vestige of a much earlier "civilisation," where its timelessness sets it apart from the rest of Europe, including other regions within Ireland, and makes it (both for the Revivalists and today) a key landscape for discussions of Irish cultural identity.

PAINTERS: JACK B. YEATS, SEÁN KEATING AND PAUL HENRY

James Christen Steward reminds us that painters also actively contributed to the myth of the West, looking "to the West to find landscape and subject matter that would be defined first and foremost as Irish, by contrast with the English and Continental influences of their forebears."[40] As Tricia Cusack points out:

> Painters could not avoid nationalist readings of the west: 'No modern representation of the Irish landscape could avoid the implication that in the ancient hills of Connemara there was a stifled civilization awaiting rebirth.'...The 'rebirth' of the Irish nation was thus associated with a particular landscape- the west- cast as both virginal and maternal vitality....[41]

Given the enormous impact of his elder brother, Jack Butler Yeats naturally assumed the leadership of visual artists who made the West a primary landscape. His early monochrome illustrations of the Aran Islands and western coast, drawn during his travels with Synge in 1905 and 1906, stand out as particularly vibrant when compared to the rest of his early work.[42] Illustrations such as *Porter* and *The Hooker's Owner* capture the specificity and energy of domestic life in the West, and offer a realistic and compelling pictorial accompaniment to Synge's candid prose.

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[39] Ibid., 99 and 102.
[40] James Christen Steward, "The Irishness of Irish Painting," in *When Time Began to Rant and Rage: Figurative Painting from Twentieth-Century Ireland*, ed. James Christen Steward (London: Merrell Hoblerton with Univ. of California Berkeley Art Museum, 1999), 19.
[41] Tricia Cusack, "Migrant Travellers and Touristic Idylls: The paintings of Jack B. Yeats and post-colonial identities," *Art History* 21.2 (June 1998): 203. Cusack quotes from Alan and Mary Hobart, *An Ireland...Imagined: An Exhibition of Irish Paintings and Drawings 1860-1960* (London: Pyms Gallery, 1993), 5.
[42] Jack Yeats' illustrations were included in Synge, *In Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara* (1911); and *The Aran Islands*.

Like his brother, Jack was greatly influenced by his childhood years in Sligo, and after turning to oil painting in 1897 his involvement with the West increased rather than dwindled.[43] Specifically, the impressionist technique of Yeats' late oil paintings corresponds with his identification of the rugged and vibrant existence of the West:

> Human figures merge with the landscape or emerge from within the landscape echoing the constantly changing nature of land, sea and sky. It is Yeats's colour that explodes magnificently into light or fades into darkness. His emotional use of paint was moulded by the physical nature of the West of Ireland where great roaring winds sweep in from the Atlantic to drench the land with spray and weaken the spirit before the drifting clouds threaten further havoc. Yeats experienced this sense of wildness and freedom, the untamed forces of nature and interpreted this through his paint until the paint itself escapes its own material.[44]

As Cusack notes, for J. B. Yeats the West was "natural and uncontaminated" in contrast to the "deadening vitality" of more anglicized Irish landscapes.[45] In *A Place of Islands* (1946), for example, the traveller stands on a promontory and looks out, hat in hand, with awe at the shimmery gold islands that lie all around his small stable patch of ground. The dark outline of the man, dressed in a suit (clothes that reveal him as a non-native), contrasts sharply with the bright colors of the islands and the sea, and indicates a sense of promise for the watcher.[46]

In Yeats' *Men of Destiny* (1946) (Figure 3.1), according to one critic, "the flamelike glowing figures of the fishermen coming ashore are evocations of those involved in the struggle for national independence."[47] The three figures, each slightly offset in their distance on the path towards the forefront of the picture, seem to emanate from the dark blue of the sea (with its outline of a fishing boat, and the moonlit sky in the upper right hand side of the painting) towards a final destination (or destiny) slightly outside the window of the canvas. The men, relaxed with their hands in their pockets, walk with assurance to whatever awaits them on their golden path. The sunset behind them takes up the bright yellows of the providential path rather than the night-drenched sea from whence they came. The painting suggests

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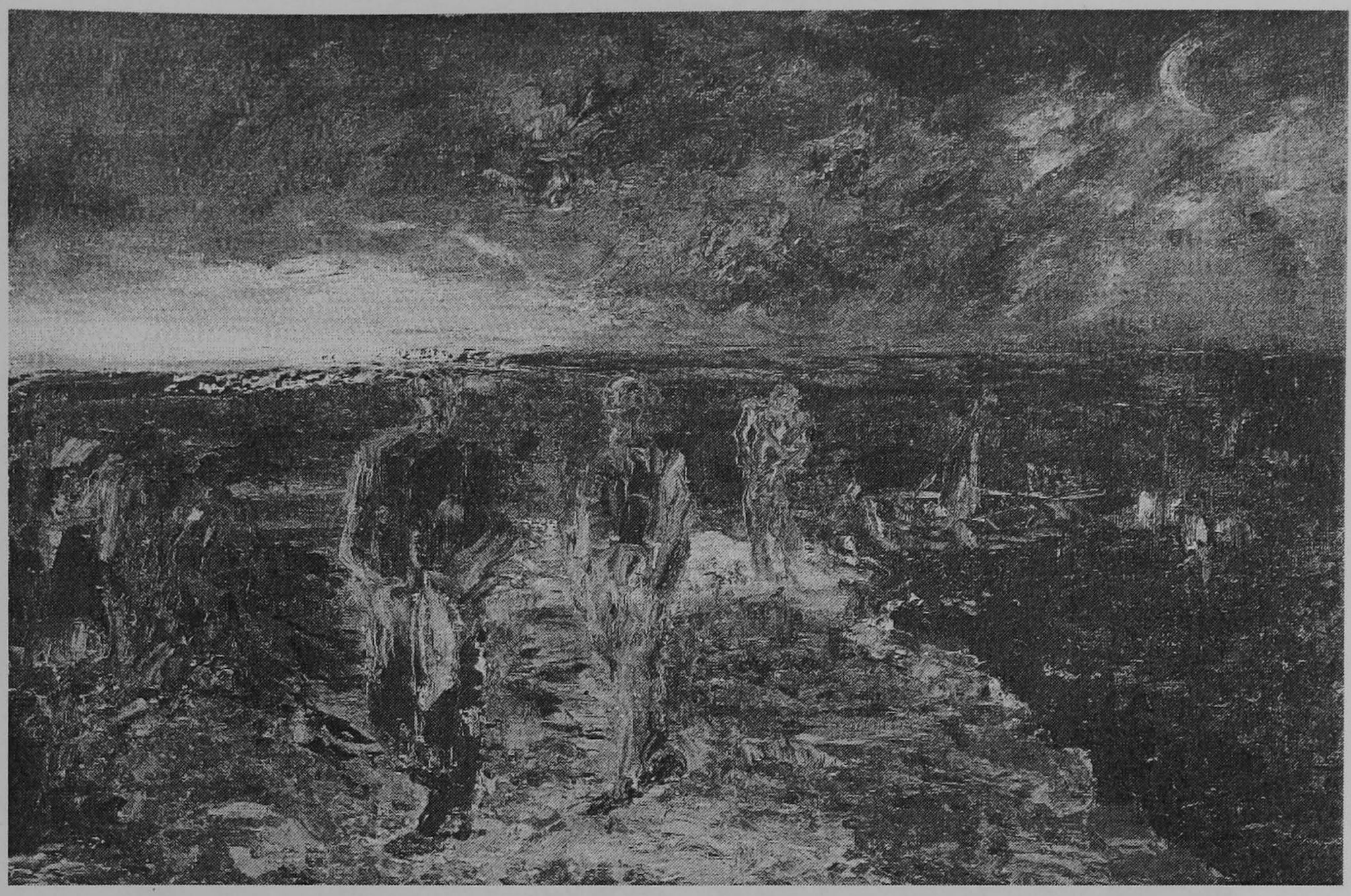
[43] See: T. G. Rosenthal, *The Art of Jack B. Yeats* (London: André Deutsch, 1993), 4.
[44] Stephen Snoddy, "Never have a narrow heart," in *Jack B. Yeats, A Celtic Visionary* (Manchester City Art Galleries with Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast, 1996), 7.
[45] Cusack, "Migrant Travellers and Touristic Idylls": 5.
[46] The painting's title does not explicitly link the image to the islands off the West of Ireland, but knowledge of Jack Yeats' themes makes the West an obvious symbolic context.
[47] Sighle Bhreathnach-Lynch, "Framing Ireland's History: Art, Politics, and Representation 1914-1929," in *When Time Began to Rant and Rage*, ed. Steward, 42-43.

Figure 3.1 Jack B. Yeats, *Men Of Destiny* (1946)[48]



many different interpretations about the destiny of the men, but Yeats' image of the inward bound westerners asserts (here again) that the culture of the West of Ireland is an authentic source for the identity and destiny of Ireland more generally. As the Celtic Revivalists argued for a return to the West to center the Irishness of a national literature, so J. B. Yeats' paintings are full of transient seekers to the landscape.[49] Samuel Beckett praised the "cette étrangeté sans example" of Yeats' art, which evokes "the darkest part of the spirit," and the symbolic rendering of the western landscape in his paintings surely influenced Beckett's assessment of Yeats' particularly modern contribution.[50]

Paul Henry also made an indelible impact on perceptions of the West. Interestingly, Henry's career has many obvious similarities to Michael Longley's. A Protestant from Belfast, Henry, like Longley, spent a large portion of his career in Mayo. Henry's paintings, especially those of Achill Island (Co. Mayo) where he settled with his wife the artist Grace Henry, invest the West with an alluring and isolated beauty.[51] Henry explained that his attraction to the region emanated

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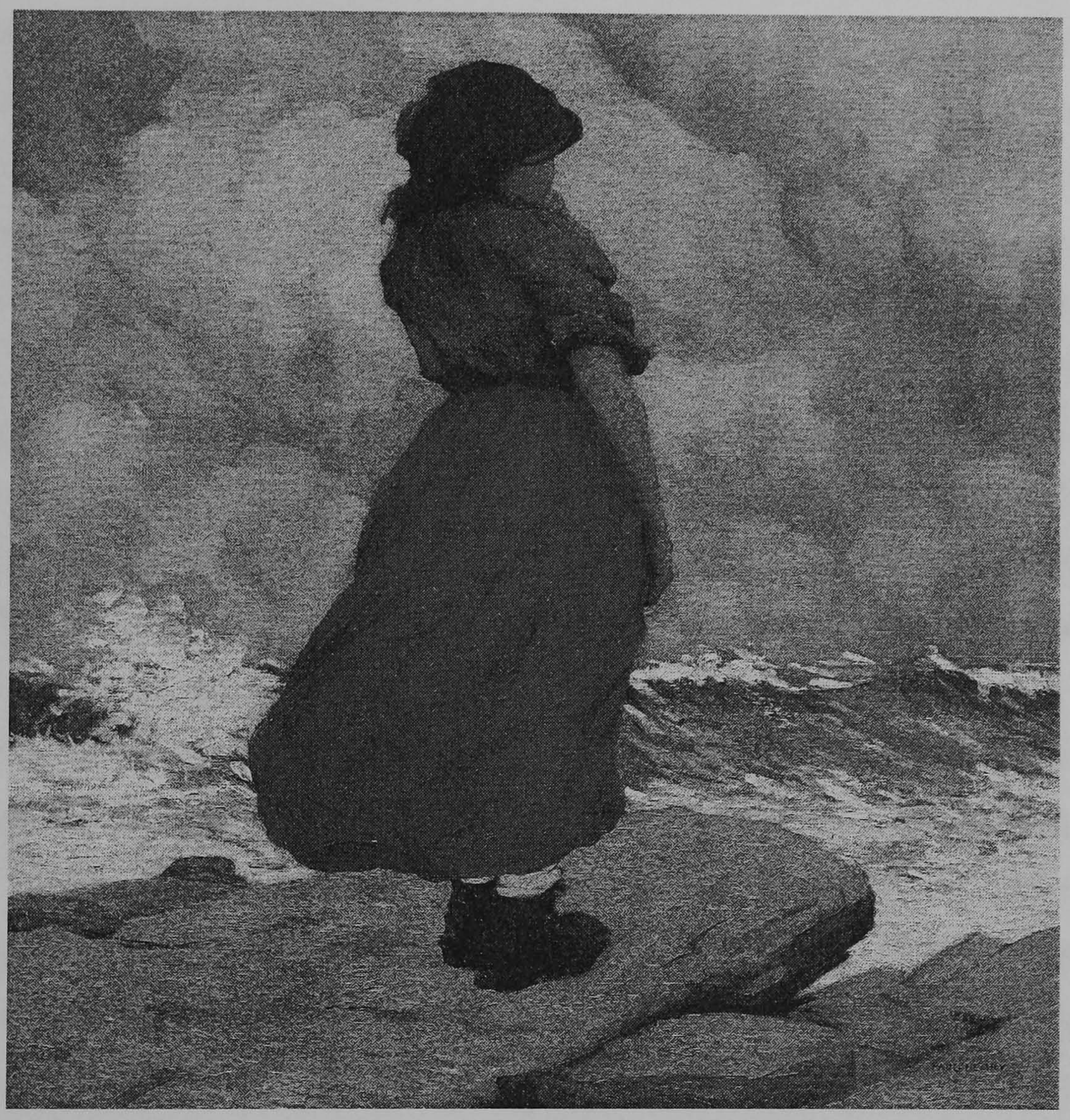
[48] Canvas, 20 X 27 in., National Gallery of Ireland. Rosenthal, *The Art of Jack B. Yeats*, pl. 75.
[49] See also: Jack Yeats, *Two Travellers* (1942); and Cusack, "Migrant Travellers and Touristic Idylls," 204.
[50] Samuel Beckett, "Hommage à Jack B. Yeats," trans. Ruby Cohn, in *The Art of Jack B. Yeats,* by Rosenthal, x.
[51] Longley clearly feels an affinity for Henry, editing an edition of Henry's *Further Reminiscences* (Belfast: Blackstaff with Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1973).

from "the wild beauty of the landscape, of the colour and variety of the cloud formations, one of the especial glories of the West of Ireland."[52] As Jack Yeats illustrated Synge's western studies, so Henry provided paintings to accompany O'Faolain's *An Irish Journey*, with the painting *A Connemara Village* standing out from the rest for its bleak yet romantic portrayal. Henry attributed much of his original decision to paint the West to Synge: "there was something in Synge that appealed to me very deeply. He touched some chord which resounded as no other

Figure 3.2 Paul Henry, *The Watcher* (1914)[53]



music ever had done."[54] Henry's *The Watcher* remains one of the most stirring depictions of the West, with its young girl in the traditional western red skirt facing away out to sea. Whereas the man with his back to the viewer in Yeats' *A Place of Islands* looks out at the islands from the solidity of the mainland, Henry's *The Watcher* depicts a native islander looking out to the severe water and sky from the edge of dry land.

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[52] Paul Henry, *An Irish Portrait* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1951), 51.
[53] Canvas, 23⅞ X 19⅞ in., Pyms Gallery, London. *When Time Began to Rant and Rage*, ed. Steward, pl. 13.
[54] Ibid., 48.

The girl dominates the painting as a solitary figure in the midst of the natural power of the sea and sky. Henry composed the painting during his residence on Achill Island, and the simple elements of his composition (girl, sea, land and sky) echo "the simplicity of life on Achill yet made vital by a reliance on quick brushstrokes and rich coloring."[55] He employs a similar technique in *Launching the Currach* (1910-11), which captures the teamwork of the men en route to the sea, as the browns of the boat and their clothes blend with the shadows, and contrast with the white and blue of the sea stretched out in front of them. In these paintings as in others by Henry, his choice of subject reveals his interest in the daily life of the islanders, and makes a link between the perceived harmony of their lifestyle and Irish culture. Further, Henry was responsible for actively bringing visitors to the region, as his paintings were used in railway posters and travel literature to encourage tourists to discover a "pure and unspoiled" region of Ireland.[56] Michael Longley directly acknowledges the importance of Henry as an "Ulster Protestant who not only discovered the West of Ireland for himself but in a way for the rest of Ireland and for the people in the West," and notes the painter's great impact on perception of the landscape as "to be in Mayo or Connemara and see the sky and the light and the clouds behaving in a certain way" one realizes "that you are noticing it because it has been filtered through your viewing of Henry's paintings."[57]

Henry's contemporary Seán Keating is labeled as the "court painter to the Aran Islanders," which implies that the islanders were royalty in Irish cultural terms.[58] In *Men of the West* (1915) (Figure 3.3), one of Keating's most celebrated paintings, he effectively manipulates the notion of the West as a mythical landscape by painting the men from the West of Ireland with symbols taken from the portrayal of the individualistic and rugged cowboys of the American West. As one critic observes, "Keating may have felt that the conquest of the American West by fearless explorers was an appropriate model for the expansion of traditional ideals from the West of Ireland to the other parts of the country."[59] The painting, with the three men defiantly standing guard next to the tricolor flag, carries added significance by its

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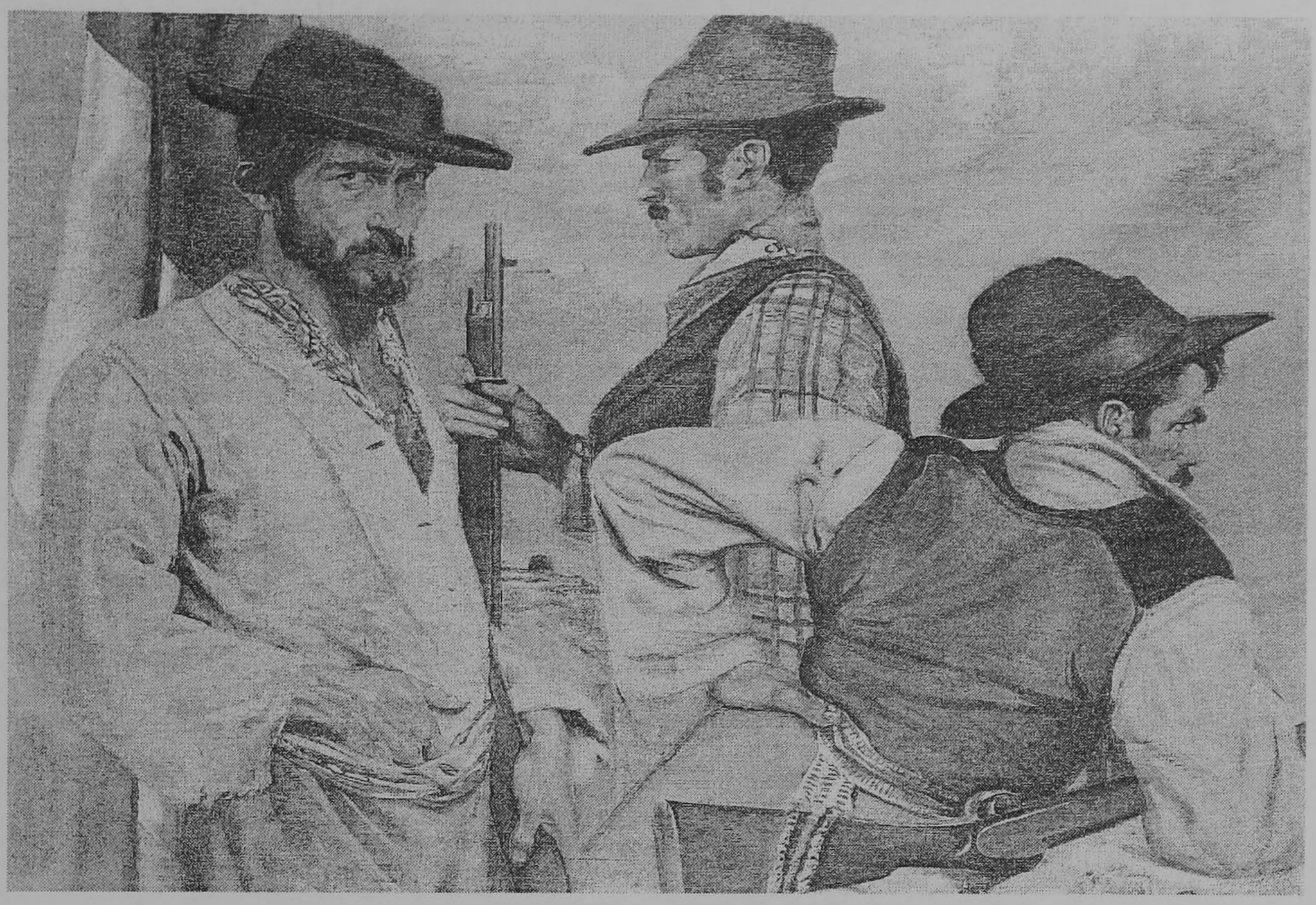
[55] John Losito and James Steward, "Catalogue," in *When Time Began to Rant and Rage*, ed. Steward, 148.
[56] Ibid., 146.
[57] Longley, "Interview with Andrew Morrison" (08/01/99), Box 43, Folder 6, Emory.
[58] Hobart, *An Ireland...Imagined,* 62.
[59] Losito and Steward, "Catalogue," 152.

Figure 3.3 Seán Keating, *Men of the West* (1915)[60]



date of 1915.[61] The Easter Rising took place in the following year, an event that launched Irish nationalism and republicanism into an openly fought battle with England, as well as within their own ranks, over the cultural and political future of Ireland. The men's positions around the flag reveal the West's role as an upholder of true Irish culture, as well as obviously identifying the men as revolutionaries, ready to fight for their ideals. The men in Keatings' painting are united by their common task of resolvedly standing guard, but significantly they do not look at one another. Keating depicts them romantically, similar to the way that cowboys are traditionally depicted in the American West, and as individuals with their own sense of duty and morality. The man in the forefront (a Keating look-alike) stares directly at the viewer, daring the observer to question his commitment, while his fixed and faintly hostile gaze seems to question ours. Keating's paintings, such as "Men of the West,"

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[60] Canvas, 35⅞ X 49¼ in., Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin. *When Time Began to Rant and Rage*, ed. Steward, pl. 15.

[61] There is some disagreement about the painting's date. It is usually dated 1915, but at least one major exhibition dated the painting as 1916, making it possible to read it as a direct reaction to the Easter Rising, rather than an artistic anticipation of the event. See: Bhreathnach-Lynch, "Framing Ireland's History," 43 and 51. Additionally, after independence, the tricolor flag was adopted as Ireland's national flag, but in 1915 it was the revolutionary flag used by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, precursor to the IRA.

[64] See also: *An Beinnsin Luachra* [Two on the Mountain]; and *Slán Leat, a Athair* [Good Bye, Father].

actively argued for the West of Ireland's resonance for Ireland as a whole, and, through his nationalist emphasis, positioned the landscape as a key player in the political issues of his day.[64]

NORTHERN IRISH POETS: LOUIS MACNEICE, SEAMUS HEANEY AND DEREK MAHON

The myth of the West forged during the Irish Literary Renaissance by Yeats and Synge, and by visual artists such as J. B. Yeats and Henry, continues to cast a powerful shadow on contemporary Irish poetry. Of the generation of Northern Irish poets immediately before Longley's own, the work of Louis MacNeice wielded the biggest influence.[65] MacNeice, like painters such as Yeats and Henry, had a deep creative investment in the West of Ireland. As Edna Longley explains, as a result of MacNeice's feelings of early displacement from his northern home of Carrickfergus, the poet transferred his identification to the West:

> Both MacNeice's parents had been brought up near Clifden in Connemara... Louis and his sister Elizabeth liked to consider themselves western exiles in the North. As the 'first of [my] dream worlds' the West not only received its own poetic incarnations, but was the prototype for other Hy Brasils and Utopias in MacNeice's writing.[66]

Though their respective tones often differ greatly, MacNeice, like Longley, found access to the traditional symbols of Irish identity through his association with the West. MacNeice lived for most of his life in England, but the West remained a prominent place in his imaginative landscape as the location of childhood and adult holidays (Auden, for instance, commemorated him as a "lover of women and Donegal"[67]). His poem "Western Landscape" (1945) opens with a declaration to write about the West of Ireland:

> In doggerel and stout let me honour this country
> Though the air is so soft that it smudges the words
> And herds of great clouds find the gaps in the fences
> Of chance preconceptions and foam-quoits on rock-points...
> For the western climate is Lethe,
> The smoky taste of cooking on turf is lotus,
> There are affirmation and abnegation together

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[65] See: Derek Mahon's early poem "In Carrowdore Churchyard," in *Collected Poems* (Oldcastle, Co. Meath: Gallery, 1999), 17; and Longley, "Introduction," in *Louis MacNeice: Poems selected by Michael Longley* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), xi.

[66] E. Longley, *Louis MacNeice,* 2.

[67] Quoted in Longley, "Introduction," in *Louis MacNeice: Poems Selected by Michael Longley*, ix.

> From the broken bog with its veins of amber water,
> From the distant headland, a sphinx's fist, that barely grips the sea...[68]

The tone of the poem is probing, as he tries to sort out the reasons for the West's allure, and decides that the West provides cultural "affirmation and abnegation together." Edna Longley argues that for MacNeice, the "West is a state of yearning rather than of fulfilment: a means of questioning."[69] MacNeice often shared a similar starting point as the Celtic Revivalists, but his work actively questioned the validity of their myths. For example, in "Valediction" (1934), he cynically deconstructs the western tourist machine, writing, "Park your car in Killarney, buy a souvenir / Of green marble or black bog-oak, run up to Clare, / Climb the cliff in the postcard, visit Galway city, / Romanticise on our Spanish blood, leave ten per cent of pity."[70] Yet, the West remained deeply appealing for MacNeice, despite his persistent probing of his own (and others') motives for continuing to go back, both mentally and physically. The well-trodden ground became a symbolic platform for him to pose metaphysical questions.[71] Throughout his career, as in "Western Landscape," the West served to remind MacNeice (often painfully) of his relationship to Ireland and to the Irish literary tradition presided over by Yeats (the subject of his own seminal study of 1941, *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats*).[72]

Longley's immediate Northern Irish contemporaries, Derek Mahon and Seamus Heaney, have also been drawn to the West, each writing a handful of poems that concentrate specifically on the region as a place of memory. Significantly, the Aran Islands feature in the landmark first collections of Longley, Mahon and Heaney. Mahon has written several striking poems about the West, including: "Day Trip to Donegal," "Aran," "Thinking of Inis Oírr in Cambridge, Mass.," "Mayo Tao," and "Achill." Among Heaney's western poems are: "Lovers on Aran," "Storm on the Island," and "Synge on Aran," from *Death of a Naturalist* (1965); "The Peninsula" from *Door into the Dark* (1969); "Stations of the West," from *Stations*

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[68] Louis MacNeice, "Western Landscape," in *The Collected Poems of Louis MacNeice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 255.
[69] E. Longley, *Louis MacNeice*, 31-32.
[70] MacNeice, "Valediction," in *Collected Poems*, 53.
[71] See: E. Longley, *Louis MacNeice*, 32.
[72] Longley's selection of MacNeice's poems reveals how important he considers the elder poet's northern/western identification, including many poems that have Northern Ireland or the West as a focus, such as "Valediction," "Western Landscape," "Belfast," "Neutrality," "Carrick Revisited," as well as several linked poems about the western Isles of Scotland, "Leaving Barra," and "The Hebrides."

(1975); "An Aisling in the Burren" from *Station Island* (1984); and "Postscript" from *The Spirit Level* (1996).[73]

Heaney's "The Stations of the West," from the little circulated pamphlet of prose poems *Stations*, appeared in the same year as *North* in 1975. Like many other Catholic children of his generation, Heaney visited the Gaeltacht to "inhale the absolute weather" and learn the native language. His childhood journey was not successful in fostering his knowledge of Gaelic, as he recalls that "The visionaries breathed on my face a smell of soup-kitchens... / ...Ephete, they / urged. I blushed but only managed a few words." However, despite the failure of the language submersion, Heaney's final stanza elevates his journey to the West to the position of a deep cultural resource:

> Neither did any gift of tongues descend in my days in that
> upper room when all around me seemed to prophesy. But
> still I would recall the stations of the west, white sand,
> hard rock, light ascending like its definition over Rannafast
> and Errigal, Annaghry and Kincasslagh: names portable as altar
> stones, unleavened elements.
>
> (*S*, 22)

Heaney clearly takes note of the Revivalists' conception of the West, for though he doesn't manage to master Irish, he still claims to be touched by his brief contact with the particular landscape. His final description of the West as "unleavened elements" suggests that the area is uncorrupted, and its lifestyle unchanged from many generations before. Heaney fashions the region as a cultural *lieu de mémoire*. The West's cultural significance as "portable as altar stones" can be interpreted as making physical residence in the West unnecessary, but, as altar stones are very heavy, the poem also allows a reading of the West's culture as difficult to fully transmit outside the confines of the region itself. The choice of *Stations* as the title for the 1975 volume implies a specifically Catholic and Irish type of journey of self-examination (connecting to the Stations of the Cross) and to the West's corresponding cultural and linguistic stations.[74]

The atmosphere of "The Peninsula," from *Door into the Dark* (1969), also echoes traditional representations of the West of Ireland as located at the edge of experience. He counsels that "When you have nothing more to say, just drive / For a

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[73] St. Patrick's Purgatory, the subject of Heaney's long poem "Station Island," is located in Donegal.
[74] Heaney may also be making an allusion to the existence of army roadblocks along the border of Northern Ireland.

day all around the peninsula" (*DD*, 9). He describes the landscape as "without marks, so you will not arrive / But pass through," and sets himself the task of recalling the day's perceptions:

> The glazed foreshore and silhouetted log,
> That rock where breakers shredded into rags,
> The leggy birds stilted on their own legs,
> Islands riding themselves out into the fog,
>
> And drive back home, still with nothing to say
> Except that now you will uncode all landscapes
> By this: things founded clean on their own shapes,
> Water and ground in their extremity.
>
> (*DD*, 9)

Similar to the "unleavened elements" of "Stations of the West," "The Peninsula," set in Dingle (Co. Kerry), concludes with the poet's remembrance of the landscape as "Water and ground in their extremity." The final stanza develops this crucial understanding, as Heaney declares that the trip has forever changed him, as he will now "uncode all landscapes" by his memory of the western coast. The description of "Water and ground in their extremity" offers a clear acknowledgement of the ruggedness of the land, as well as an awareness of the West's traditional role as the edge of Irish experience. The poem ultimately comments as much on the power of memory as on the landscape remembered from a "home" that is elsewhere. Helen Vendler notes that "The Peninsula" "is chiefly a meditation on the purifying power, for human beings, of the primary senses and of memory founded in the senses."[75] The poem claims the impetus for the drive to the West as the need to overcome writer's block, and the three stanzas reveal the progress of the journey; from daytime perceptions, to the return in darkness, and finally to the poet's new understanding based on his memory of the trip after reaching home.

Heaney returned to the themes and location of "The Peninsula" in "Postscript," the last poem included in *The Spirit Level* (1996), which also recalls a driving trip along the western coast.[76] Unlike the writer's block that prompted the

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[75] Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Fontana, 1998), 23.

[76] Paul Muldoon has also written a poem about driving in the West: "Good Friday, 1971. Driving Westward," in *Poems 1968-1998* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 19-20. Originally published in *New Weather* (1973), the poem taps into the traditional connotations of the West, as they passed "as new blood" in their crossing into Donegal, but ultimately Muldoon subverts a traditional portrayal of the landscape whereby in the conclusion the couple are torn apart rather than redeemed by their journey into the West (as the "new blood" of the day's possibilities gives way to the claustrophobic scene of blame, "she convinced / Of the death of more than lamb or herring").

earlier journey, this time the poet has consciously made "the time to drive out west / Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore, / In September or October…" (*SL*, 70). Like "The Peninsula," "Postscript" is sixteen lines long, and ends with a new perception gained during the course of the journey through the West and through the poem. Heaney precisely records the images and perceptions of the journey, noting that "the ocean on one side is wild / With foam and glitter…," and observing also the "flock of swans" with "Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads / Tucked in or busy underwater." The final five lines reveal the maturity of a poet who knows the limits of capturing the fullness of the scene:

> Useless to think you'll park and capture it
> More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,
> A hurry through which known and strange things pass
> As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways
> And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.
> (*SL*, 70)

Like O'Faolain and MacNeice, Heaney views the western landscape as a tourist. Life is just a big "hurry through," "neither here nor there," and yet the final image reveals that small images and emotional responses can still "catch the heart off guard." Optimistically, Neil Corcoran notes that the "possibly punning title suggests that something does, after all, come 'after script,' survive textuality; in this case a heart-lifting response to the Irish coastline, specifically that of the much-mythologized Irish West."[77]

Derek Mahon's early poem "Aran" was likely written after his visit to the trio of islands with Michael Longley (which inspired Longley's "To Derek Mahon" [*EV*, 1973] and "Leaving Inishmore" [*NCC*, 1969]). The first stanza of "Aran" recalls his witnessing of a type of western courtship ritual, as the man sings a type of poetry to his "girl," with Mahon imagining in the final two stanzas (which I quote) what it would be like to belong to such a cultural tradition:

> Scorched with a fearful admiration,
> Walking over the nacreous sand,
> I dream myself to that tradition
> Generations off the land -
> One hand to an ear for the vibration,
> The far wires, the reverberation
> Down light-years of the imagination
> And a loved hand in the other hand.

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[77] Neil Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 23.

The long glow springs from the dark soil, however -
No marsh-light holds a candle to this;
Unearthly still in its white weather
A crack-voiced rock-marauder, scavenger, fierce
Friend to no slant fields or the sea either,
Folds back over the forming waters.[78]

In his 1972 volume, *Lives*, Mahon originally titled this poem "In the Aran Islands."

Eamonn Hughes argues that through the singer in the poem, Mahon "comments most directly on this traditional association of the land and language."[79] For Hughes, "the double 'unearthly' flight over water of the gull displaces the 'earthed' quality of the singer, so the singer's audition is displaced by the 'boned fields of…vision.'"[80] The poem meditates on light and ground and the nature of poetry, as the poet's "fearful admiration" addresses both the islander's "singing the darkness into the light" as well as the harshness of the island's geography (with its "nacreous sand," "slant fields". and "foaming waters"). Though appreciative of the long traditions of the island (he imagines being from such a place "Generations off the land"), Mahon also maintains a distance from the *Sean-nós* singer, not unlike Synge's position to the islanders. Mahon's description of the man as "earthed" to his "girl" implies a sense of confinement in their adherence to time-honored practices and forms of expression. In the end, Mahon identifies the roaming cry of the gull as a more representative poet for the islands, "A crack-voiced rock-marauder, scavenger, fierce / Friend to no slant fields or the sea either."

Mahon wrote another early poem about the Aran Islands, the nine-line "Recalling Aran" (later changed to "Thinking of Inis Oírr in Cambridge, Mass."):[81]

A dream of limestone in sea-light
Where gulls have placed their perfect prints.
Reflection in that final sky
Shames vision into simple sight;
Into pure sense, experience.
Atlantic leagues away tonight,
Conceived beyond such innocence,
I clutch the memory still, and I

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[78] Mahon, "Aran," in *Collected Poems* 37.
[79] Eamonn Hughes, "'Weird / Haecceity': Place in Derek Mahon's Poetry," in *The Poetry of Derek Mahon*, ed. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, Ulster Editions and Monographs, 11, 2002), 100.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Edna Longley called the poem a "concentrated hymn to concentration." E. Longley, "Looking back from *The Yellow Book*," in *The Poetry of Derek Mahon*, ed. Kennedy-Andrews, 32.

Have measured everything with it since.[82]

Inis Oírr is the Gaelic name of Inisheer, the smallest in size of the Aran Islands, and the change in title (which implies a concrete spatial distance as the poet claims his location in Massachusetts) suggests that the poet's memory of the visited landscape has become an important and symbolic artistic location. This parallels the sentiment voiced in Heaney's "The Peninsula," which claims that after his drive to the West he "will uncode all landscapes / By this...." It is not clear whether Mahon or Heaney's poem was written first. Yet, the significance of the similarity lies in the fact that both poets hark back to an understanding of the Revivalists' investment in the West as a land of profound experiences. As Edna Longley argues, "Mahon reasserts aesthetic values by renewing their Yeatsian liaison with the visionary western landscape. The dream-Aran thus 'recalled' is not only the Aran that Mahon visited in 1965 but also a perennial resort of the spirit."[83] Rather than using their visits to the West to make large cultural statements or reinvest large cultural projects, the West (in "The Peninsula" and "Recalling Aran") becomes a personal measure for Heaney and Mahon.

Finally, it is important to consider the elusive tone of Mahon's exploration of the specific landscape of Longley's homeground in the later poem "The Mayo Tao." Bruce Stewart reads the poem as a philosophical meditation, arguing that the poem "touches on the idea of Pure Being in a larger metaphysical sense. This might be seen as a mystical revelation but is better taken as the poetical expression of an acute perception of a kind familiar enough to those who are perceptually self-aware."[84] In Mayo, Mahon claims that he has "abandoned the dream kitchens for a low fire / and a prescriptive literature of the spirit" before listing his new talents:

I am an expert on frost crystals
and the silence of crickets, a confidant
of the stinking shore, the stars in the mud -
there is an immanence in these things
which drives me, despite my scepticism,
almost to the point of speech,
like sunlight cleaving the lake mist at morning
or when tepid water
runs cold at last from the tap.

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[82] Mahon, "Thinking of Inis Oírr in Cambridge, Mass.," in *Collected Poems*, 29.
[83] E. Longley, "Looking back from *The Yellow Book*," 32.
[84] Bruce Stewart, "'Solving Ambiguity': The Secular Mysticism of Derek Mahon," in *The Poetry of Derek Mahon*, ed. Kennedy-Andrews, 67.

I have been working for years
on a four-line poem
about the life of a leaf;
I think it might come out right this winter.[85]

I have a hard time taking the speaker of the poem to be as serious in tone as Stewart seems willing to do. It is also possible to read the poem as a terrific sending-up of the canonical stereotypes of the West (with the full rhyme that can be made from a mispronunciation of "Mayo" and "Tao" adding to such an interpretation). Thus, in this alternative reading, the poem parodies the convention of viewing time as slowed down in the West, and also mildly teases the tendency of poets (such as Longley and Mahon himself in "A Disused Shed in County Wexford") to spend a great deal of time monitoring things on a very small scale.

Yet, despite the gentle parody of the traditional attachment of importance to the West, Mahon's poem still registers his respect for the region. "The Mayo Tao" is also a poem about poetry, where Mahon uses notions of the West to make statements about the artistic process. In this sense, the poem also comments (self-depreciatingly) on the reality of the poetic vocation as necessarily insulated, where the artist is usually devoted to a personal world (as the "Tao" in the title alludes to the figure of a sage in eastern tradition, contemplating questions in isolation). "The Mayo Tao" may be a serious metaphysical exploration or a message not to take himself (or poetry) too seriously (similar to Longley's self-depreciating glimpses in poems such as "Ghost Town" and "Alibis"), as in the final four-line stanza where the "four-line poem / about the life of a leaf" that he has been working on "for years" is included as the stanza itself. However we read it, the poem draws on the long tradition of significance attached to the West in Irish culture, making it well-suited for the contemporary poet looking to pose philosophical questions or investigate the art of poetry. As Mahon's attitude towards the landscape in "The Mayo Tao" can be interpreted in very different ways, we will find that his friend Longley's chronic investment in the West has shifted radically over time, making his western opus equally resistant to straightforward classification. The rest of the chapter will pursue Longley's evolving commemoration of this potent, culturally loaded, *lieu de mémoire*.

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[85] Mahon, "The Mayo Tao," in *Collected Poems*, 68.

II. "A SIMPLE QUESTION OF BEING IN TWO PLACES AT THE ONE TIME": COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY

> In my ideal village the houses lie scattered
> Over miles and are called a townland, while in yours
> Neighbours live above and below, and a nightcap
> Means climbing up steps in the direction of the stars.
>
> Michael Longley, "For Ronald Ewart" (*WJ*, v)

The dedicatory poem in *The Weather in Japan* suggests the differences in personality between the poet and his friend Ronald Ewart by describing their "ideal village[s]." Longley's ideal village, "called a townland" in the Irish sense is almost certainly Carrigskeewaun. The Mayo townland has become the prototype more generally for Longley's preferences, with its houses "scattered / Over miles," while Ewart's is the small village of Cardoso in Tuscany mentioned in later poems in the book such as "The Altar Cloth," "Leopardi's Song Thrush," "Pascoli's Portrait" and "The Musical Box."[86] Above all, the dedicatory poem vividly introduces questions about Longley's sense of community and belonging. In his early poetry in particular, Longley's poetic explorations of the region focus upon the mysteries of nature, and are rarely populated. In recent volumes Longley has tried to redress this imbalance, but his point of departure remains the flora and fauna of the West. For example, in "Remembering Carrigskeewaun," the wildlife of the region dominate his recollections, "the animals come back to me / From the townland of Carrigskeewaun, / From a page lit by the Milky Way" (*GF*, 12). While Longley identifies strongly with Mayo and the West, as when in a note to *Gorse Fires* (1991) he speaks of "my part of Mayo," his relationship to the human community of the West (and more generally) is much less secure.[87] Indeed, critics and fellow poets alike have remarked upon the fact that regarding questions of personal identity, Michael Longley is a very hard poet to place.[88]

In his second collection, *An Exploded View* (1973), Longley seems sure of his poetic community, and his dedication of the volume to "Derek, Seamus and Jimmy"

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[86] Alan J. Peacock, "'How do you sew the night?': *The Weather in Japan,*" in *The Poetry of Michael Longley*, 156.
[87] See: Welch, "Michael Longley and the West," 57.
[88] See: Brian John, "The Achievement of Michael Longley's *The Ghost Orchid*," *Irish University Review* 27.1 (Spring/Summer 1997): 139; Mahon, "Careful Footprints" (1985), in *Journalism: Selected Prose 1970*-1995, ed. Terence Brown (Oldcastle, Co. Meath: Gallery, 1996), 99; and Peter McDonald, "Michael Longley's Homes," in *Mistaken Identities: Poetry and Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 115.

(*EV*, 5) implies both familiarity ("We are trying to make ourselves heard...") and shared experience with the premier Northern Irish poets of his generation. Directly after the dedicatory poem, *An Exploded View* formally begins with the poem "To the Poets," and later includes individual epistolary poems to the dedicatees, Derek Mahon, Seamus Heaney and James Simmons, as well as one written to all three ("Letters").[89] Two of the epistolary poems, "To Derek Mahon" and "To Seamus Heaney," use the West of Ireland as a distanced vantage point to observe Northern Ireland and northern identity, suggesting we should give close attention to the fact that Longley's work often revolves on this structural polarity between 'the North' and 'the West.' Longley composed the poems of *An Exploded View* between 1968 and 1972. It is therefore not surprising that, during a period when violence in Northern Ireland dramatically resurfaced, he would look for a greater sense of artistic solidarity with his peers.[90] Like Longley, all three dedicatees had published books of poetry by 1973, which accounts for the mutual feeling of confidence expressed in the dedication, and also an awareness of the irony of establishing their poetic vocations at the same time when violence in Northern Ireland was spiralling out of control.

The four poets had already developed intimate personal and poetic relationships with one another by the time of Longley's dedication, as he recalls in his memoir essay "The Empty Holes of Spring." Longley's friendship with Mahon stretched back as far as their undergraduate years at Trinity College Dublin when the two shared a flat as well as poetic discussions.[91] Longley first met Heaney in Belfast through the meetings of Philip Hobsbaum's 'Belfast Group,' a relationship that

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[89] Longley has consistently downplayed the significance of Philip Hobsbaum's Belfast Group, but seems here to authenticate the grouping of Northern Irish poets. Longley has said of the Belfast Group, which Mahon didn't actually attend, "I can honestly say that I didn't alter one semi-colon as the result of Group discussion. Which sounds smug: perhaps I should add that as undergraduate poets at Trinity College, Derek Mahon and I had been tough on each other - more hurtful than The Group ever was." Longley, "The Empty Holes of Spring: Remembering Trinity and The Group," in *Tuppenny Stung: Autobiographical Chapters* (Belfast: Lagan, 1994), 41.

[90] In roughly the same period, Simmons dedicated a poem each to Mahon and Longley in *The Long Summer Still to Come* (1973). See: *Poems 1956-1986* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1986). And, as discussed in the Introduction, Heaney dedicated *Wintering Out* (1972) to Michael Longley and David Hammond, the folksinger, who, along with Longley and Heaney, went on a 1968 tour of Northern Ireland under the title "Room to Rhyme." As Longley uses the significant "we" in *An Exploded View*, so similarly Heaney's dedicatory poem in *Wintering Out* ends with the line "we hug our little destiny again" (*WO*, 5).

[91] Longley recalls that "We inhaled with our untipped Sweet Afton cigarettes MacNeice, Crane, Dylan Thomas, Yeats, Larkin, Lawrence, Graves, Ted Hughes, Stevens, Cummings, Richard Wilbur, Robert Lowell, as well as Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Brecht, Rilke- higgledepiggledy, in any order...We smoked and drank too much...." Longley, "The Empty Holes of Spring: Remembering Trinity and the Group," in *Tuppenny Stung*, 36-38.

Longley later called a cultural initiation: "Heaney was my first Northern Irish Catholic friend."[92] Of the four poets' initial meetings, Longley remembers that "I introduced Heaney to Mahon and Heaney introduced me to Simmons."[93] James Simmons, poet and folksinger from a Protestant background, had recently returned to Belfast from Africa, and in 1968 founded the infamous Northern Irish literary magazine *The Honest Ulsterman*.[94] The associations displayed in *An Exploded View* to other Northern Irish poets initially seem very confident. However, upon further analysis, they reveal anxiety both in terms of the expressed solidarity between the poets as well as in the historical moment the volume records. Recently reflecting on the forging of their relationships, Longley has emphasized the undercurrent of competitiveness between them. Making a parallel between the atmosphere of Simmons' journal and the relationships between the four poets Longley explains that as *The Honest Ulsterman* was "too rumbustious ever to be considered a house magazine…its lack of cosiness reflected our friendships."[95] The unsteady (if assumed shared) historical and artistic territory in *An Exploded View* is set up immediately with a quote by the World War II poet Keith Douglas which prefaces "To Three Irish Poets," the first poem in the "Letters" series, "returning over the nightmare ground we found the place again" (*EV*, 30). The quotation posits an ominous mood for the explorations of Irishness that follow, and again asserts (like Longley's Great War poems) his own status as a war poet.

The last poem included in "Letters," "To Seamus Heaney," starts with Longley addressing his own location:

> From Carrigskeewaun in Killadoon
> I write, although I'll see you soon,
> Hoping this fortnight detonates
> Your year in the United States,
> Offering you by way of welcome
> To the sick counties we call home
> The mystical point at which I tire
> Of Calor gas and a turf fire.
>
> (*EV*, 38)

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[92] Longley, "Remembering the Sixties" (n.d.), Box 35, Folder 4, Emory.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Longley recalls of the four poets that "We were intensely aware of each other's work, but there were no agendas or manifestos. The only programme was an invigorating rush for recognition and publication…Between 1966 and 1969 we all brought out our first collections." Ibid.
[95] Ibid.

Though the "sick counties" refer to Northern Ireland (playing upon the fact that Northern Ireland contains *six* counties) Longley recognizes the importance of the fact that both he and Heaney are currently elsewhere. At the time of composition Heaney was finishing his year at the University of California Berkeley, while Longley was in his vacation cottage in Mayo. The lines "The mystical point at which I tire / Of Calor gas and a turf fire" appear heavily ironic, with "tire" seeming to read as the 'point at which I get fed up with.' The stereotypical portrait of the Irish countryside, which Longley conjures in the poem, is something that Heaney gave the appearance of having natural artistic rights to through his rural Derry childhood. Yet, Longley desires, and succeeds in attaining, another right of entry to the symbols of Irishness through his association with the West, which he did not inherit from his English parents and middle-class Protestant upbringing in Belfast.

Though Longley's tone mocks the particular baggage of the Irish poet, significantly he had only recently gained a window into such a world, the "small subconscious cottage where / The Irish poet slams his door" (*EV*, 38). Longley directly cites Carrigskeewaun for the first time in *An Exploded View* as an alternative home landscape, and in "To Seamus Heaney" the western location offers him an illuminating perspective on Northern Ireland from outside its borders, clarifying his original home in the North. The poem provides solid evidence for Heaney's argument in "Place and Displacement" that the "historical situation" often pushes the Northern Irish poet to view "the world from a great spatial or temporal distance...."[96] Heaney's case for the use of multiple landscapes in Derek Mahon's poetry also bears on Longley's use of the West in the verse letters of *An Exploded View*: "in order for any place to be credible...it has to be reimagined in the light of other places."[97] Longley's purposely explosive word choice of "detonate" in the third line propels both poets back into the reality of Belfast where they will each soon return, revealing the poem's function as a warning letter about events in their mutual northern home as well as an exploration of their shared and difficult status as Northern Irish poets.

In "To Derek Mahon," placed directly before "To Seamus Heaney," Longley describes his and Mahon's sense of foreignness during their joint visit to the Aran Islands (recorded by Mahon in poems such as "Recalling Aran"). On Inisheer,

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[96] Heaney, "Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry of Northern Ireland" (1984), in *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 119.
[97] Ibid., 123.

Longley recalls that they were "Eavesdroppers on conversations / With a Jesus who spoke Irish-- / We were strangers in that parish" (*EV*, 36-37). "To Three Irish Poets," the first epistolary poem, acknowledges Longley's intention to address each poet in a way befitting to the individuality of their poetic voices, "to get beneath your skins, / To colonise you like a land, / To study each distinctive hand" (*EV*, 31). The metaphor of colonization (in line with John Hewitt's "The Colony"[98]) underscores Longley's awareness of the special complexities involved with being identified (and identifying) as Northern Irish poets. In his letter to Heaney, Longley engages with the symbols of traditional Irishness and the special circumstances of Ulster, as he evokes the "midden of cracked hurley sticks / Tied to recall the crucifix" (*EV*, 39), and leaves "careful footprints round / A wind-encircled burial mound." This presents a loaded representation of Celtic (and implicitly Catholic) Ireland. In contrast, in "To Derek Mahon," Longley appeals to a sense of Protestant identity and shared beliefs, and paints them in a joint stance of thoughtful distance, as both himself and Mahon are depicted as strangers in their own city "of guns and long knives."[99] Longley labels himself and Mahon as "Two poetic conservatives," and in this light recalls their pilgrimage to the Aran Islands, as well as to the notoriously divided Catholic and Protestant communities of the Shankill and Falls Road where the two poets drew an "imaginary Peace Line / Around the burnt-out houses of /The Catholics we'd scarcely loved" (*EV*, 36). Longley appears aware of the long association of Protestant artists with the West, and the poem, written in first person plural, eagerly shows both his and Mahon's foreignness to certain types of extreme Protestantism, as well as to the rural Catholicism they have witnessed at Inisheer. Therefore, the West of Ireland serves as a crucial vantage point in the poems to both Mahon and Heaney, though it offers a markedly different perspective. Revealingly, in a draft Longley made a personal note on both poems as "another attempt to define my Irishness."[100] In both cases the West clarifies characteristics of Longley's identity that he seeks to emphasize (as an *Irish* poet in "To Seamus Heaney," and as a thoughtful and sceptical Irish Protestant in "To Derek Mahon"), and provides the

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[98] John Hewitt, "The Colony," in *A Rage for Order: Poetry of the Northern Irish Troubles*, ed. Frank Ormsby (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1992), 9-13.

[99] This comment could allude to the legendary episode in British history whereby the Anglo-Saxons gained a victory over the Celtic Britons in 449 AD by betraying the British King Vortigern at a peace council in Salisbury Plain where the Anglo-Saxons drew their knives and killed hundreds of British chiefs. The treacherous massacre was subsequently referred to as "The Night of the Long Knives."

[100] Longley, "Table of Contents notes, *An Exploded View*."

bridge in each case for him to relate to the respective poet, and activate a use of the poetic *we* in relation to a shared *lieu de mémoire*.

Derek Mahon publicly disputed Longley's portrayal of their shared beliefs in "To Derek Mahon," and the disagreements he registered reveal how contentious claims of artistic solidarity proved to be during the stressful historical moment of early 1970s Northern Ireland.[101] Mahon privately asked Longley to change certain lines in the poem, and when Longley refused to do so Mahon published his reservations in the *New Statesman* where Longley's poem first appeared. In a 1971 letter to Longley, Mahon wittily protested that "I realise that 'The Catholics whose full human reality our upbringing might well have prevented us from always recognising' is not susceptible to scansion or paraphrase, but 'The Catholics we scarcely loved' still reads to me too much like 'The Catholics we didn't much like and hadn't any time for.'"[102] Brendan Kennelly, a friend and mentor to Mahon and Longley at Trinity, raised a similar concern in a letter sent to Longley soon after the publication of *An Exploded View*. In an otherwise complimentary letter, Kennelly questioned the volume's solidly declared allegiances, commenting that "your epistolary matiness with other poets smacks of membership of some trade-union of the imagination."[103] Longley seems to have taken Kennelly's criticism to heart, as he has never since created as extensive a grouping of poets, or argued so explicitly for an artistic community of shared concerns (though his most recent volume *Snow Water* [2004] does establish a looser grouping of contemporary artists).

Longley's connection to other Northern Irish poets remained a central concern in the early 1970s and the controversial nature of the debates reveal how much, in terms of artistic identity, was at stake. In a 1973 letter to the *Irish Times* Longley referred at length to an interview that John Montague gave to poet Eavan Boland. Longley felt that both interviewer and interviewee misrepresented the coterie in the North:

> Mr Montague also compares what is happening now in 'Ulster Poetry' to the often deliberately regional school of the Fifties. None of my contemporaries from the North operates in this way: poets like Mahon, Heaney, Simmons and Muldoon just happen to come from Ulster and quite naturally reflect the fact and the resulting circumstances to a greater or lesser degree in their work. I

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[101] Recall that, in Chapter 1, I showed that the historical timing of *North* ensured that most critics (especially those writing from Northern Ireland such as Edna Longley and Ciaran Carson) had definite opinions concerning Heaney's effort.

[102] Derek Mahon to Michael Longley (n.d., 1971?), Box 13, Folder 8, Emory.

[103] Brendan Kennelly to Michael Longley (23 November 1973), Box 1, Folder 2, Emory.

> do believe, however, that most of the good contemporary Irish poetry is being written by 'Ulster poets' at the moment. This doesn't mean that I am trying to purvey, as Miss Boland suggests, a 'cult,' or draw borders...The 'Ulster poets' I admire do not write 'Ulster poetry': their work seems to me more *Irish* than the bulk of the poetry emerging from south of a border which Mr Montague's and Miss Boland's non-controversy recreates.[104]

Longley's statement that the Northern Irish poets he most appreciates "do not write 'Ulster poetry'" contends that though the poets feel a natural connection with each other, they do not write consciously either for a region or as a group. Further, Longley's controversial argument that the Northern Irish poets of his generation are writing more "*Irish*" poetry than poets in the South underscores his desire to complicate traditional delineations of Irishness. Yet, the verse letters of An *Exploded View*, published in the same year, partly contradicts his response to Montague and Boland. Specifically, one can read the line in "To Seamus Heaney," of "Ulster Poet our Union Title" as mobilizing a coterie of poets (including Mahon and Simmons) to break down the entrenched categories of Catholic and Protestant, nationalist and unionist.[105] Still, perhaps by the time of his response to the *Irish Times*, Longley had already begun to be sceptical about the effectiveness and reality of artistic solidarity, as his peers chose very different ways of responding to the political situation in Northern Ireland. The product of a particularly intense historic moment, Longley's small community of like-minded poets in *An Exploded View* clearly represented for him an important resource within the context of the larger political crisis, and his perceptions regarding the notion of an artistic community understandably shifted during the course of the tumultuous 1970s. As Peter McDonald argues, "The poetic solidarity of *An Exploded View* is a prelude to Longley's increasing isolation in the 1970s, as his writing continues to disappear around various corners, concentrating its efforts on acts of the most minute (but complete) imaginative fidelity to a complex home ground."[106]

The foundation of the "complex home ground" implicitly contrasts with Heaney's concerted effort to forge a mythic bridge to address the contemporary violence in *North* (1975), which I discussed in Chapter 1. McDonald also bases his understanding on the elements of Longley's identity that most set him apart from

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[104] Longley to Editor of *Irish Times*, 21 March 1973, Box 1, Folder 9, Emory.
[105] In a note on the poem, Longley qualified that "Union Title" referred ironically to "the Act of Union between England and Ireland: Union Titles were privileges handed down to those who acquiesced." Longley, "Table of Contents notes, *An Exploded View*."
[106] McDonald, "Michael Longley's Homes," 111.

both Mahon and Heaney. As Longley has explained, compared to Heaney's "much publicized farm in County Derry, [and] Mahon['s] working-class background and the shipyards," he lacked a solid identity.[107] Born of two English parents, Longley grew up in a middle class home in Belfast, and recalls in "Tuppenny Stung" (1994) that "There was no hinterland of aunts, uncles and cousins to which Wendy, Peter and I could escape and still feel at home."[108] Though his parents' Englishness made him feel conspicuously less culturally defined in religious terms than his Northern Irish Protestant classmates, economic class rather than religion formed his childhood understanding of personal identity:

> We attended the local Public Elementary School where, out of a large class of nearly forty pupils, we were almost the only middle-class children. Most of the others lived on 'the wrong side' of the Lisburn Road...I noticed at once their skinny knees and snotty noses, but most of all the accent, abrasive and raucous as a football rattle. This I soon acquired in order to make myself less unacceptable...By the age of six or seven I was beginning to lead a double life, learning how to recreate myself twice daily.[109]

His childhood experience of a schizophrenic-like split, "learning how to recreate himself twice daily," presenting different faces to the domestic and outer world, often reoccurs in his adult poetry as a split between his Mayo and Belfast homes.

"The West," a poem from *An Exploded View* discussed at the opening of this chapter, overtly expresses this sense of dislocation, as do two other poems from the same volume: "Ghost Town" and "Alibis."[110] "Ghost Town" offers a different perspective on being away from "home." Longley parodies the quiet of Mayo and his own motives for visiting the area, as he depicts the town as the place he has been looking for; a "ghost town" to convert into a personal project of renewal. He claims that the trip seeks to fill "Several gaps in my education - / The weather's ways, a handful of neglected / Pentatonic melodies and, after a while, / Dialect words for the parts of the body" (*EV*, 53). The self-ridicule is also aimed more generally at the tradition of cultural and literary pilgrims to the West, as his list of educational interests recall the pleasure recorded by other prominent travelers to the West, such

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[107] Longley, "Strife and the Ulster Poet," *Hibernia* (7 November 1969): 11.
[108] Longley, "Tuppenny Stung," in *Tuppenny Stung*, 20.
[109] Ibid., 25.
[110] Interestingly, in a early draft of "The West," entitled "Accident," Longley uses many of the same lines, but he portrays Mayo in terms that align it more with the violence of Belfast, as the landscape is full of "rats / Inflected teeth at the ventilation grating its windows / Cows ubiquitous but no milk for sale, / Green fields and not a vegetable in sight" and littered with "Smashed christening mugs, toys, the small bones." For fear of the "web of family and clan" in both places, the poet vows to "lock / The door for fear of patriots tonight." Longley, "Accident," Box 29, Folder 2, Emory.

as Synge, in noting the severity of the weather and dialect words for random things. Longley imagines himself as the lone person of action in the town (earning him the label of "local eccentric") as well as a kind of freelance curator of the arts: "Since no one has got around to it yet / I shall restore the sign which reads CINEMA." The poem's final stanza bears the weight of the poem when he admits that "by the time I am accepted" in the town "I shall have written another letter home," which shows his self-recognized inability to identify solely with one place.

"Alibis," a poem written with true theatrical flourish, opens with the statement that "My botanical studies took me among / Those whom I now consider my ancestors" (*EV*, 59). Though "botanical studies" suggests a certain detachment, his sense of ancestry signifies the western location as his symbolic homeland, as he claims an Irish lineage with the landscape through affiliation rather than genealogy. Still, the exaggerated style of the poem, which on one hand notes his acceptance by the local inhabitants, "they named after me / A clover...," also hints at its opposite, that as in "Ghost Town," he can never truly be an insider. The poem begins with a list of his various activities in his new western location, so numerous that "I started, in desperation, to keep a diary," and continues to imagine more improbable alternative existences for himself in the North. The ironic and uncharacteristic positions he imagines, as he "hurtled to join, among the police files, / My obstreperous bigfisted brothers," ends with the poet describing the reality of his life as a perpetual state of "being in two places at the one time." Longley does not spell out the names of the two places, but it seems likely that (as in "The West") he sees himself at once in the creative quiet of Mayo, while also in the urban excitement of Belfast. Heaney's commentary on Northern Irish poets more generally in "Place and Displacement," applies to these poems by Longley. They ratify Heaney's argument that "the poet is stretched between politics and transcendence, and is often displaced from a confidence in a single position by his disposition to be affected by all positions...."[111]

While I have traced the theme of "being in two places at the one time" in several of Longley's poems, the human inhabitants of these places are less defined. The lack of a discernible human community in his early poems about the West, though it may owe something to Mayo's relatively sparse population, is strongly

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[111] Heaney, "Place and Displacement," 119.

linked to Longley's poetic interests. Longley acknowledges this in an explanation about his impulse to write the "Mayo Monologues" sequence in *The Echo Gate* (1979), a series of four poems written in the first person that concerns different Mayo characters:

> I recall a conversation in Mayo with an American visitor who asked why I kept returning there. 'The birds, the flowers, the seascape, skyscape, landscape,' I replied. 'But aren't the people wonderful too?' she queried. To be honest, I discovered that I wasn't sure how much I liked them and at the same time realised that I had omitted them from my Mayo obsessions. So I started observing them closely, listening to local stories and gossip. The first to arrive was 'self-heal' which is an amalgam of two stories plus some imagination. That's true of the others. I didn't set out with a sequence in mind, but did eventually find it releasing to adopt personae. I feel nearly as much an outsider, foreigner, stranger there as an American or Brit would. So the personae allowed me to explore what I find cruel and bleak in Irish rural life without being condemnatory.[112]

Longley's sense of being an outsider in Mayo has certainly decreased since the publication of *The Echo Gate*, as evidenced by the greater confidence displayed in matters of belonging in his last four collections. Mayo's significance as a particularly Irish point of access (as in "To Seamus Heaney") is echoed in his explanation of "Mayo Monologues" as offering him a way "to explore what I find cruel and bleak in Irish rural life without being condemnatory." However, while "Mayo Monologues" represents an intriguing set of linked poems, owing much to local stories, they do not completely succeed in capturing an authentic sense of the people. The different characters are surely not representative figures (in Mayo or elsewhere in rural Ireland), with the man arrested "Because I made love to animals" (*EG*, IV.30), or the housekeeper who "jokes to the friendly gardener / About my whiskery chin, my varicose veins" (*EG*, II.28). Ultimately, the series offers interesting snap-shots of different characters, but lacks the rounded feel of Longley's other poems about the region. Seemingly harking back to a tradition of larger-than-life western characters, such as those depicted in Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, Longley's "Mayo Monologues" have the coarse feel of the stories that are traditionally credited to western speakers, yet remain as caricatures of traditional types. They fall short of Longley's stated goal of getting inside the consciousness of the native westerners, "observing them closely, listening to local stories and gossip."

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[112] Longley, "Additional Notes to an Interview," Box 37, Folder 14, Emory.

As I argued in the case of Mahon and Heaney, so Lucy McDiarmid notes in the case of Longley:

> In Mr Longley's map of Ireland, County Mayo, in the West, stands for unembattled territory, a place peaceful because no one is fighting over it. The Revivalists of 100 years ago - Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory - also idealized the West, but on the ground of national identity and a source of cultural renewal. Mr. Longley's West is also restorative, but on a purely personal level; his cottage in Carrigskeewaun is a place to recuperate in isolation.[113]

McDiarmid observes that Longley most often enjoys Mayo "in isolation," and this tendency toward introversion is clearly revealed in earlier poems such as "Landscape" (*MLW*, 1976) and "Spring Tide" (*EG*, 1979). In "Landscape," Longley is "clothed, unclothed" by the scenery "or else disintegrate[s] / Like a hillside neighbour / Erased by sea mist" (*MLW*, in *SP*, 49). Longley's affiliation with the West has heightened his awareness of his unsettled identity ("schizophrenic on the levels of nationality, class and culture").[114] Speaking of "Landscape," Peter McDonald argues:

> Longley's West always tends to unsettle or in some way alter the self that has come to visit. This results in the prominence of the first-person voice in so much of the poetry, which speaks, not for a settled and rooted identity, finding images of itself in everything, but for a self absorbed in, and maybe also in the process of being absorbed by, its surroundings.[115]

"Landscape" ends with Longley looking at his own reflection, and contemplating the way that he becomes part of the natural scenery. Ultimately, the ability of his imagination to take in the landscape forms the true subject of the poem. As reflected in Longley's comments about Mahon and Heaney's more solid sources of identity, Longley at times regrets his lack of roots. However, more often he uses the unsettled qualities of his identity to inform his poetry positively, molding it into a constructive viewpoint from which to examine all aspects of life, the enabling "double vision" which Robert Welch finds in Longley's poems of the West.[116] Longley's poetry makes a claim that having a more fluid identity enables him to avoid making partisan and unambiguous statements of political or social affiliation. He does not only use the West of Ireland as a family retreat, or as an isolated work-space, but also as a

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[113] Lucy McDiarmid, review of *GF*, *New York Times*, 2 August 1992.
[114] Longley, "Strife and the Ulster Poet": 11.
[115] McDonald, "Michael Longley's Homes," 119.
[116] Welch, "Michael Longley and the West," 58. See my discussion of "Second Sight" in Chapter 2 for the way that Longley creates an unstable identity in his poems of the Great War.

source of community that has opened up over time to include a variety of plant, animal and human inhabitants. While recognizing the omnipresence of "Irish" collective memory in Mayo, Longley's poems superimpose a uniquely personal face, and thus fashion the region as his own *lieu de mémoire*.

For example, "Between Hovers," from *Gorse Fires*, touchingly elegizes a Mayo neighbor, Joe O'Toole. In the poem, Longley still acutely recognizes the distance between himself and the other western residents, but now acknowledges it as implicit in the region rather than a personal deficit. Longley finds the type of community in the West especially appealing and healthy when set beside the oppressive intimacy of identity awareness in Northern Ireland: whether as Protestant or Catholic; unionist or nationalist. "Between Hovers" recalls that "not even when we ran over the badger / Did he tell me he had cancer" (*GF*, 5), and goes on to reveal that his Mayo friend's "way of seeing me safely across the duach / Was to leave his porch light burning, its sparkle / Shifting from widgeon to teal on Corragaun Lake." This type of community allows Longley to be himself. He deeply appreciates this warm brand of distance and the type of community that fosters it, as evidenced by the dedicatory poem to Ron Ewart from *The Weather in Japan*. In the West, one's identity stretches easily in different places, allowing him to explore seemingly conflicting parts of his own character. In a 1986 letter to Paul Muldoon, Longley explains the importance of Carrigskeewaun in reaffirming his sense of individuality:

> I have enjoyed being on my own in this remote place at a time of year when the great migrations bring unusual birds to the lakes of the machair. I have been thinking, producing some rows of words, but mainly eliminating from my hair the bureaucratic life. I shall never again take the wrong things so seriously. Carrigskeewaun has allowed me to feel healthily lonely rather than lonely because of the shortcomings of other people and myself.[117]

His connection remains a kind of elective outsider's sense of belonging, and his western poems also take their bearings from other places (such as Belfast, Japan and Italy). Yet, in the spread-out community in Mayo, Longley has found a place where he feels free to concentrate on the flora and fauna, and on the different aspects of his identity, and free also to contemplate the weighty questions of life and society, such as the one posed in "Out There," the last poem of *The Ghost Orchid* (1995):

> Do they ever meet out there,
> The dolphins I counted,

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[117] Longley to Paul Muldoon (19 March 1986), Box 3, Folder 18, Emory.

The otter I waited for?
I should have spent my life
Listening to the waves.
(*GO*, 60)

III. "YOUR BODY COLOURING THE MOUNTAINSIDE": LOVE AND LANDSCAPE POETRY IN THE WEST

Dawns and dusks here should consist of
Me scooping a hollow for her hip-bone,
The stony headland a bullaun, a cup
To balance her body in like water:

Then a slow awakening to the swans
That fly home in twos, married for life,
Larks nestling beside the cattle's feet
And snipe the weight of the human soul.

Michael Longley, "In Mayo" (*MLW*, in *SP*, 47)

"In Mayo," from Longley's third collection *Man Lying on a Wall* (1976), is a love poem directed both to a woman and the natural landscape that the couple discover together.[118] The stanzas quoted above comprise the fourth and final section, and yield a serenely compounded vision of the couple and the landscape, which represents each in terms of the other. However, the connection does not arise immediately in the poem. In the first section, the poet acknowledges his lover's struggle to pull him out of a self-chosen seclusion attached to his vocation as a poet. As a result, he, "for her sake once again," somewhat laboriously includes her in his poetic explorations of his "Imagination like a brittle skull" (*MLW*, in *SP*, 46). At the beginning of the poem, the poet approaches her request in a programmatic fashion -

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[118] I refer variously to the female subject of Longley's love poems as lover, woman and/or wife. I try to avoid speaking of the "her" as wife, but do feel justified in doing so in some of the recent poems written about domestic life in the cottage in Carrigskeewaun. Longley himself, however, cautions against this type of reading. When asked in an interview by Dillon Johnston if he directly addresses his love poetry to Edna, he responded: "I suppose that my love poetry is addressed to what I grandiosely call the female principle, to the Gravesian notion of the muse. It's written out of my experience of womankind, and of course Edna makes a big contribution to that experience...If I were a painter and couldn't afford a model, I should feel free to paint my wife in the nude without everyone that came to look at the picture rubbing their hands and thinking they were having a glimpse of my wife in the nude. They would simply be looking at a painting, and I hope the same thing applies to my poems." Longley, "Interview with Dillon Johnston, c. 1986," Box 43, Folder 2, Emory.

he has to "circle / This burial mound" in order to get close to his partner - reaching her by assiduously paying attention to the landscape. The somewhat reluctant and studied tone of the opening stanza opens up in the second to an almost youthful glee. The couple appear carefree, co-conspirators in a game of outdoor love-making and secretive activities, delighting in the idea that the local people try to document their actions:

> Though the townland's all ears, all eyes
> To decipher our movements, she and I
> Appear on the scene at the oddest times:
> We follow the footprints of animals,
>
> Then vanish into the old wives' tales
> Leaving behind us landmarks to be named
> After our episodes, and the mushrooms
> That cluster where we happen to lie.
>
> (*MLW*, in *SP*, 46)

The untroubled aura that the couple radiates, and the casualness invoked in phases like "happen to lie," as they imagine their exploits becoming fodder for gossip and "old wives' tales," depends on their foreignness to the place and its inhabitants. Instead of the human population, they concern themselves with the natural wonders of the land, as they "follow the footprints of animals" in their erotic excursions and contemplate the final peaceful vision of "Larks nestling beside the cattle's feet / And snipe the weight of the human soul." This intimate sense of place as animal habitat relies upon their distance from the people who also live there. The couple's delight centers around a tourist-like sense of discovery, as they explore each other and their new terrain, imagining that they leave "landmarks to be named / After our episodes."

In Longley's poetry, Mayo offers both a solitary workplace, and a meaningful retreat for him and his wife. His early Mayo poems also possessed a sense of family, as they often recorded his children and their expeditions to look for birds and flowers. In recent books, however, with his children now adults, Carrigskeewaun has settled comfortably into a place that he visits either by himself or together with his wife. For example, "The Excavator" and "The Meteorite," from *The Weather in Japan*, generate a strong sense of "we," which sets them apart from an earlier placed poem such as "The Lapwing," where the apparently solitary speaker becomes disconcerted by "Carrigskeewaun in May light" (*WJ*, 3) and "speak[s] in tongues" with the lapwing about the unsettling atmosphere and the need to mutually watch

over each other. Likewise, in "Washing," from *Gorse Fires*, this overt solitude appears even more vividly, as he writes, "All the washing on the line adds up to me alone" (*GF*, 3). The familiar sites of "Dooaghtry Lake and David's Lake and Corragaun" only remind him of what is missing, thus leaving on the clothesline, "a sky-space for the lapwings / And the invisible whiteness of your underthings." The easily released rhyme of "lapwing" and "underthings" confirms the erotic and domestic dimension of Longley's western landscape by revealing a marked shift from the "me alone" of the first line.

In "The Sense of Place," a lecture delivered in 1977 at the Ulster Museum, Seamus Heaney observed that, in Longley's "botanically abundant West of Ireland and his nostalgically apprehended bleaching greens," the poet does not submit "himself to the mythology of his place" but rather "subdues the place to become an element in his own private mythology...."[119] Heaney must have had "In Mayo" in mind when making this argument, as the couple write themselves into local legends, without seeming to interact directly with the Mayo locals. Robert Welch has similarly noted of "In Mayo" that "this is a magical lyricism, but when looked at closely it becomes clear that there is no blurring of clear distinctions to evoke a rhapsodic blur."[120] Welsh emphasizes the distance between the couple and their surroundings by claiming that the act of leaving behind "landmarks," acknowledges that they will not remain in person. The poet writes in awe of the magnificence of the landscape as he thinks about the simple beauty that a permanent life in Mayo would offer, dreamily meditating on the harmony of what "Dawns and dusks here should consist of." The young couple, however, remain transitory presences, flitting in and out of the view of the watching townland, "appear[ing] on the scene at the oddest times," but will soon return to a different reality.[121]

Longley has commented, "if Heaney is allotted water and earth, Mahon fire and air, I would have to grant myself water and air. Water is the most feminine of

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[119] Heaney, "The Sense of Place" (1977), in *Preoccupations*: *Selected Prose 1968-1978* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), 148. Heaney also includes Paul Muldoon's home of Armagh and Derek Mahon's Glengormley and North Antrim in this argument, as he argues that their places "do not have to be proved or vindicated in the way Kavanagh's Monaghan or Montague's Tyrone or John Hewitt's braes and glens have to be. They exist to serve the poet and not vice versa."

[120] Welch, "Michael Longley and the West," 62.

[121] The poem's inclusion in *Man Lying on a Wall* (1976) reveals that it was written during Longley's early association with Mayo, as he started visiting in the early 1970s, and the holiday-like spirit of the couple's activities and escapist vision surely owes much to this fact.

the four. One reviewer has pointed out its omnipresence in my work."[122] As I argue in Chapters 1 and 4, Heaney also fills his landscapes with a watery ground gendered female (especially in *North* and *Wintering Out*), but this "omnipresence" is felt in many of Longley's love poems set in the West of Ireland. Longley's poetry does not evoke a goddess, but does actively merge and relate the features of the female form with the topography of the West. For example, "In Mayo" figures the image of the "stony headland" of the landscape as "a cup / To balance her body in like water."

Likewise, in *The Echo Gate* (1979), Longley powerfully merges landscape and love poem when the poet "eavesdropped on water washing itself" (*EG*, 43). The poem's title, "On Mweelrea" asks readers to identify the poem's specific location as the highest mountain in County Mayo, the striking outline of which is visible from the Killadoon coast, not far from Longley's "home from home." "On Mweelrea" showcases Longley's characteristic fusion of love, nature and landscape poetry. It is a poem of multiple places, explicitly of the mountain itself but also of the female body as a landscape. Furthermore, the poem offers a metaphor for the way that the West influences the poet's perspective, as the allure of the landscape infiltrates his perception of his lover. The portrayal of the female body as a mysterious landscape becomes even more explicit when reading "On Mweelrea" alongside the poem "Metamorphoses," which Longley places two poems earlier in *The Echo Gate*. In "Metamorphoses," Longley describes items from a natural landscape in terms of a woman's body. The opening stanza depicts "her" waiting "for rain to hollow out a font / And fill her eye in, blink by blink," and by the final stanza "Her legs are the roots of a tree / That have grown around a boulder / As though she might give birth to it / By pressing hard into the ground" (*EG*, 41). Two other poems from the same volume take the metaphor even further. In "Botany," flora become sexualised as duckweed "draw in their skirts" and the orchid's "one artery" shoots "upwards to support a flower" (*EG*, 32), while in "Meniscus" the crescent shaped landscape has "breasts" that "condense and adhere, drops of water. / And where your body curves to a basin, faces are reflected, then dissolved by swaying water" (*EG*, 44). It is difficult to determine, in "Metamorphoses" and in these other poems of metaphorical metamorphoses, which comes first - landscape or woman - or which gives birth to the other in the poet's mind.

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[122] Longley, "Additional Notes to an Interview."

"On Mweelrea" depicts the female body in ways that blend and compare her to the physical location on the mountain.[123] He listens to the signs of the mountain, as well as to the body of his lover, putting his ear "to the mountain's side / And eavesdropped on water washing itself... / When I dipped my hand among hidden sounds / It was the water's pulse at wrist and groin" (*EG*, 43). Like "In Mayo," the speaker approaches his lover by going closer to their natural surroundings, and reciprocally becomes more attuned to nature by his focus on her body as he gains access to the most elemental processes such as "water washing itself." The outdoor setting intensifies his sensory understanding of his lover, and in "On Mweelrea" Longley marks the moment of climax by a heightened perception of his lover and their outdoor location, "Behind my eyelids I could just make out / In a wash of blood and light and water / Your body colouring the mountainside / Like uncut poppies in the stubbly fields."

Longley also uses the western landscape as the setting for the couple's outdoor sex in "Mountain Swim," ("Our bodies sustained as by a hammock, / Our nakedness water stretched on stone" [*EG*, 42]) and "Autumn Lady's Tresses" ("the aftermath of lit thistledown" [*GO*, 2]). In all of these poems, Longley depicts Mayo as the sponsoring landscape for an intimate correlation between the closeness of the lovers to each other and nature. The short poem "Sheela-na-gig" suggests a mythological foundation for Longley's poetic mergings of his western landscape and sex:

> She pulls her vulva apart for everyone to look at,
> Not just for me, a stonemason deflowering stone.
> She behaves thus above the church door at Kilnaboy
> Where the orchids have borrowed her cunty petals.
> A proper libation would be sperm and rainwater.
> Ivy grows over her forehead, wall-rue at her feet.
> (*GO*, 12)

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[123] Longley uses this technique as early as in the title poem of his first collection *No Continuing City* (1969). Written before his wedding for his "wife-to-be," "No Continuing City" playfully recounts the items due for "spring cleaning," referring to his former girlfriends as "Locked in their small geographies. / The hillocks of their bodies' lovely shires / (Whose all weathers I have walked through) / Acre by acre recede entire / To summer country" (*NCC*, 32). Also, from the same collection, "In a Convent Cemetery" introduces the theme of outdoor lovemaking, and ends with the stanza: "They find us here of all places, / And I abandon to the weather / And these unlikely mistresses / Where they bed down together, / Your maidenhair, your night-dresses" (*NCC*, 47).

Sheela-na-gig stone carvings are erotic and usually exaggerated representations of a female form.[124] They exist mostly on Norman churches, though the origin of many carvings could pre-date the churches they reside on, and the Sheela-na-gig of Longley's poem resides on a church in County Clare. As vestiges of Celtic culture, scholars have variously interpreted the carvings as icons to ward off evil, as pagan representations of mother earth, and/or as a type of character similar to the Banshee in Irish mythology. The explicit sexuality displayed in the carving seems at odds with its ecclesiastical location, but Longley's poem shows the ways that the natural surroundings have made her seem a native presence, as the "orchids have borrowed her cunty petals," with ivy "over her forehead," and "wall-rue at her feet."

As the natural world is often a location of sexuality for Longley, so he often brings elements of the natural landscape into the bedroom, indicating his pleasure in blurring the lines between nature and love poetry. In "Love Poem," from *An Exploded View*, Longley likens sexual foreplay to birds: "These wide migrations begin / In our seamier districts - / A slumdweller's pigeons / Released from creaking baskets" (*EV*, 15). The connection between water imagery and love poetry comes to the fore in "The Linen Industry" (*EG*, 45). The couple pulls "up flax after the blue flowers have fallen / And laying our handfuls in the peaty water" finally becomes "part of the linen industry" through their lovemaking. "Even," he claims, when the couple are "in our attic under the skylight / We make love on a bleach green, the whole meadow / Draped with material turning white in the sun." Similarly, in "An Amish Rug" a patchwork rug becomes a ceremonial object as they "lay it out on the floor beside our bed / So that whenever we undress for sleep or love / We shall step over it as over a flowerbed" (*GF*, 19). The antitype of Wordsworthian nature, Longley's nature is profoundly erotic.

Significantly, in "On Mweelrea," Longley writes, "it was the water that reminded me / To leave all of my jugs and cups behind," to discard all baggage and use his essential instincts to increase his intimacy to both mountain and woman. He admits, as the poem follows the seasons as well as his changes in outlook, that "he had made myself the worried shepherd," and only in the last stanza does he fully let go of his impulse to over-analyze. By the end, he can only "just make out" her body as it blends in with the beautiful hues of the mountainside. Yet, the final image

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[124] Heaney wrote a poem entitled "Sheela na Gig" (*SI*, 49-50), about a carving on the outside of the church of St. Mary and St. David at Kilpeck, in Herefordshire, England.

triggers a more menacing allusion, as the mountain "grew to shadows," and his lover is compared to "uncut poppies." A knowledge of Longley's other major themes makes the reader think, at least for a moment, about the poppy as a symbol of loss, renewal and remembrance, in its association with the First World War. In this reading, the symbol of the poppy deepens the scene's location as a place of memory for the poet. He can at once mentally return to the site of intimacy by recalling the vivid images of the landscape, and also appreciate the poppy as a symbol for a new flowering of the couple's relationship. The poppies are "uncut" and therefore in the full blossom of life.

As with many poems set in the West, the slow lesson the mountain teaches about love also represents the shift in perception that he must make when travelling to Mayo. Though Longley doesn't assume the culturally loaded tone of a traveller such as O'Faolain, he has in various interviews credited his trips to Mayo for providing an opportunity to relearn how to pay attention to the small details of nature and the important people in his life. His trips to the West allow him to become immersed in place, though as I argued in the last section, he is unable to fully dissociate from his other key places. Most recently, a series of short poems in *The Weather in Japan* further our understanding of Mayo as a resonant location for Longley and his wife. "The Excavator," a typically subtle love poem, evokes a gentle intimacy in its calm assurance of many shared future trips to Carrigskeewaun. The intimacy is established by the first person address and by the central weight given to the double bed the couple will occupy. Remarking upon the creation of a pond near their Mayo cottage, he explains that it will be "no more than / More space for water and water birds, a pond / For you and me to look at from the double-bed" (*WJ*, 4). The couple and their future visits, rather than the creation of the new pond, is the true subject of the poem as he addresses his partner with a firmly established familiarity. The speaker asks his lover to imagine all their forthcoming visits to the cottage in his request that she think about the prospects of activity in the new pond, an expectation that takes bodily reality from the idea of "a kestrel stooping to tipple there," which they will view from the privacy of their bedroom window. The imagined scene mirrors the intimacy of the aging couple who lie together in bed and watch birds. There also might be a veiled allusion to Heaney (a persistent poetic excavator), as Longley shows his enjoyment, not of personally engaging in excavating, but in the simple natural consequences of the process. Or, to put it

another way, Longley focuses upon what will eventually fill the hole, rather than on what the opened ground revealed in the dirt.

The small window into the couple's relationship in "The Excavator" offers a good example of Longley's love poems of older age, or as he writes in "Couplet," "When I was young I wrote that flowers are very slow / flames / And you uncovered your breasts often among my images" (*GO*, 27). His mature love poems widen the intimacy of the couple while maintaining the original connection between the female body and the natural world. Longley's sense of flowers as "very slow flames" has changed with age, and he now often emphasizes the fleeting quality of all living things. For example, in "Lizard," from the same volume, Longley explained that "the moment I moved / It skittered" out of reach (*GO*, 28). Nonetheless, the erotic charge remains intense. For example, the double-bed in "The Excavator" harks back to "The Linen Industry," as well as the fantastical and passionate vision in "Snow-Hole" from *The Ghost Orchid* (1995), where the couple, as they fall "asleep in the snowscape of the big double-bed" (*GO*, 34), their hands entwined, "catch fire / And the snow begins to melt and we sink down and down, / The fire and ourselves...." The matter-of-fact confidence of the speaker's voice in "The Excavator" builds upon the assured "we" of the previous poem, "The Meteorite," which recalls the night that they "crossed the field by moonlight and by moonlight / Counted the whooper swans" (*WJ*, 4). The poem offers a subliminal allusion to W. B. Yeats' counting of swans in "The Wild Swans at Coole" ("The nineteenth autumn has come upon me / Since I first made my count; / I saw, before I had well finished, / All suddenly mount"),[125] which reveals Longley consciously adding to the tradition of writing about the natural landscape of the West while occupying a context far removed from the original Anglo-Irish setting.

The love poem "Autumn Lady's Tresses," from *The Ghost Orchid*, written as one long sentence, proposes something comparable to the assertion, made playfully in a later poem in the volume, "According to Pythagoras," of "The fundamental interconnectedness of all things" (*GO*, 8). The poem incorporates many of the features traced in other western love poems:

> How does the solitary swan on Dooaghtry Lake
> Who knows all about the otter as a glimmer
> Among reeds, as water unravelling, as watery

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[125] Yeats, "The Wild Swans at Coole," in *Collected Poems*, 131.

Corridors into the water, a sudden face,
Receive through the huge silence of sand-dunes
Signals from the otters' rock at Allaran Point
About another otter, the same otter, folding
Sunlight into the combers like brown kelp,
Or the dolphins whose waves within waves propel
You and me along the strand like young lovers,
Or the aftermath of lit thistledown, peacock
Butterflies above marram grass, lady's tresses
That wind into their spirals of white flowers
Cowrie shells for decorating your sandy hair?
(*GO*, 2)

Though it opens with a "solitary swan," the poem weaves a series of loose yet "interconnected" lives around the "you and me" of line ten. The sonnet displays a mixture of specificity and fluidity, as the sentence turns and twists from line to line and place to place, completely at home by Dooaghtry Lake but also suggesting the landscape's open, unpredictable energy. Though "solitary," the swan as Brian John notes, "nevertheless receives signals, about the meetings of otters, dolphins, lovers, flowers, butterflies, all in celebration of dynamic life itself."[126] The dolphins send waves that "propel / You and me along the strand like young lovers" thus pushing the lovers back in time. However, the poem's setting in autumn underscores the speaker's awareness that the transitory quality of life adds to its magnificence. The final adorning of his lover with wild flowers encircles the beauty of both woman and flower, and celebrates them for their ephemeral splendour. Otters, dolphins and lovers share the landscape that yields decorations for his partner's "sandy hair." The West surrounds the aging lovers in a spacious natural setting, where the natural, the erotic and the domestic converge.

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[126] John, "The Achievement of Michael Longley's *The Ghost Orchid*," 144.

IV. "ALL THE WILD FLOWERS OF THE BURREN I HAD SEEN IN ONE DAY": NATURE, LISTS AND LONGLEY'S PUBLIC VOICE

> If we stop caring about blackbirds and the yellow mountain saxifrage, we become less human and more likely to damage or destroy each other. I hope it doesn't sound self-important, but perhaps my poems might be read as a reflection of life in Northern Ireland even when (or especially when?) they do not deal directly with the Troubles. Even if I'm writing about a butterfly's wing only, or a bird's egg, between the lines can be read my concern, firstly, for the fragility of experience, the vulnerability of the human body to bullets and bombs; and, secondly, my concern not to intrude on the suffering of fellow citizens, not to be an impertinent nosey-parker.
>
> Michael Longley, "Explorations: A Poet at Work" (1988)[127]

Here, Longley makes an important argument about how to read his poetry. His defensive tone reveals how much is at stake, as he asserts that his poetry, which cares deeply "about blackbirds and the yellow mountain saxifrage" also significantly engages with public issues. The relevance of his poetry to contemporary events emerges he says, "especially when" he writes about the natural world, and this is especially true in the poems of his last four volumes. Since *Gorse Fires* (1991), Longley has consciously written poetry that has a "between the lines" political resonance, as well as dealing with such explicit subjects as a "butterfly's wing only, or a bird's egg...." He blends the particular (usually objects from rural surroundings) with more public concerns to form a general argument about how poetry and politics *should* be connected.[128] Throughout his career, critics have attacked a perceived lack of political statement in his work. Yet, as Longley himself intimates in the above passage, his attention to details, however far removed from bombs and shootings, subtly introduces public issues. As Heaney perceptively observed as early as 1984, in Longley's poetry, politics and public concerns are often expressed through "the intent, close-up numbering and savouring of each tiny identifying mark, the cherishing and lingering name laid upon the thing itself."[129]

In a review of *The Ghost Orchid*, Brian John cautioned, "it would be a serious misreading to confuse Longley's elegant diction and strict forms, his County Mayo landscapes and acute observations of flora and fauna, with indifference

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[127] Longley, "Explorations: A Poet at Work" (March 1988), Box 40, Folder 11, Emory.
[128] In this, he parallels Edna Longley's critical stance.
[129] Heaney, "Place and Displacement," 130.

towards or evasion of twentieth-century horrors."[130] John seeks to defend Longley against his critics, but his argument can be taken much further. Far from Longley's poems about the West (especially those since *Gorse Fires*) being indifferent or evasive, the West in fact provides the setting for some of his most public and political poems. In Chapter 4 I will argue for Heaney's use of pastoral to blend nature poetry with political concerns, and Longley too belongs to a larger tradition of Romantic adaptations of classical pastoral poetry. To pursue this further I concentrate in this section on three recent poems: "The Ice-cream Man" (*GF*); "At Poll Salach" (*WJ*); and "Burren Prayer" (*WJ*).

"The Ice-cream Man" offers a good introduction into Longley's characteristic poetic entry point into political matters. The ten-line poem showcases a shift in Longley's poetry (beginning with *Gorse Fires*) towards shorter-length poems where nothing is superfluous. Reviews of *Gorse Fires* immediately recognized "The Ice-cream Man" as a pivotal poem, and critics continue to cite the poem to illustrate the uniqueness of Longley's poetic techniques:

> Rum and raisin, vanilla, butter-scotch, walnut, peach:
> You would rhyme off the flavours. That was before
> They murdered the ice-cream man on the Lisburn Road
> And you bought carnations to lay outside his shop.
> I named for you all the wild flowers of the Burren
> I had seen in one day: 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.
> (*GF*, 49)

The poem is a reflective attempt to sooth, as Longley sets an accumulation of flower names against the violent murder of "the ice-cream man on the Lisburn Road." "The Ice-cream Man" demonstrates Longley's care not to overstep self-imposed poetic boundaries, especially in relation to the Troubles (not to be a "nosey-parker"). He consistently refuses to make poetry out of events that cannot be grounded in the personal (as I argued about his overlapping of the Great War with the Troubles in Chapter 2). Therefore, the poem, though certainly acting as a memorial to the murdered ice-cream man, explicitly addresses the poet's own daughter. The list of "all the wild flowers of the Burren / I had seen in one day" seeks to assuage the

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[130] John, "The Achievement of Michael Longley's *The Ghost Orchid*," 145.

traumatized child who used to "rhyme off the flavours," and who bought flowers to lay outside the dead man's shop. In addition to the familial intimacy of his address, Longley further anchors the poem in an explicit time period, as he recalls the flowers he saw "in one day." Neil Corcoran notes of the poem, "There is in Longley a sweet lyricism of the onomastic, ambivalently caught between wildflower delight and something more melancholy and resigned."[131] As his daughter laid flowers outside the shop, so Longley leaves his own memorial bouquet, a quilting of wild flower names. Setting up a continuity with the classical pastoral elegy from Theocritus to Milton's "Lycidas," the natural rhythm of the list of names performs a soothing function, as well as subtly emphasizing (through the specificity of the list of flowers) the beauty and fragility of life.[132] Corcoran argues persuasively that:

> The list asserts, I suppose, the fact of botanical persistence, the wonderful rich profusion of the natural world, even in the face of the grotesque damage done by human atrocity; but it also, beyond that, offers to helplessness the resistance that is the act of naming itself, the patient onomastics of recital in which rhyming and naming, however tentatively and pitifully, bravely encounter and resist that other verb prominent in 'The Ice-cream Man,' 'murdering.'[133]

The poem does "bravely" name the violence as "murder" in an effort not to downplay the horror of the act, while at the same time affirming some of the simple joys and beauty of living. The list of ice-cream flavors, the eating of which is one of the purest and simplest of pleasures, speaks for itself, as the child's rhyme of delight evokes other children and their shared happiness, as well as making the death of the vender of such delights seem all the more incongruent. The act of naming, according to Peter McDonald, offers the poet a "voice which can remain uninfected by rhetoric in addressing violence."[134] Longley does not propose any grand explanations for such violent acts, or attempt to console on a large scale, but in the simplicity of his list of flowers he manages to transfer the poem's memorial wreath and sentiment to a wider public importance. The poem does not give any indication of whether the murdered man was Protestant or Catholic, or what group was responsible for the murder. Longley stays far away from any possible classifications as a "nosey-

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[131] Corcoran, "My Botanical Studies: The Poetry of Michael Longley," in *Poetry of Michael Longley*, eds. Peacock and Devine, 104.
[132] See also "The Yellow Teapot," where Longley uses a list of quilt names to act as a protection for his wife against her enemies, "stitched together" to "keep you warm in the dark" (*WJ*, 44).
[133] Corcoran, "My Botanical Studies," 104.
[134] McDonald, "Michael Longley's Homes," 135.

parker," and yet still touches those closest to the tragedy. For instance, Longley received a letter signed by "The Ice-cream Man's Mother,"[135] as well as one from "the father of Paul Maxwell, the sixteen-year-old boy who had been blown up with Lord Mountbatten" after the publication in a newspaper of "Ceasefire" from *The Ghost Orchid*. In a revealing statement, Longley has stated that "those letters matter more to me than any amount of criticism I might receive in literary journals or attention in the public."[136] Sean O'Brien, of the *Sunday Times*, sums up the effect of poems like "The Ice-cream Man" when he credits Longley as having "one of the gifts of the major poet, of making the one life speak for all, and its corollary, of seeming to be able to speak to anyone."[137]

The four-line poem "At Poll Salach," from *The Weather in Japan* (2000), offers another primary example of Longley's fusion of personal and political, and reveals him at his most subtle and transcendent. Longley's recent poems consistently show him to be an artist in touch with the events of the day, but characteristically through personal experience and at an oblique angle. The place named in the title, Poll Salach, is in the Burren, and the poem describes a pilgrimage Longley made there with a friend. Instead of the "Easter snow" that Longley expected to find, he found "a single spring gentian shivering at our feet" (*WJ*, 17). The gentian, according to a book about flora of the region, is "the most celebrated member of the Burren flora, and is rightly regarded as its chief glory."[138] Gentians flower from mid-April until early June, so Longley viewed the bloom at the very beginning of the flowering season, which accounts for the poet's heightened sense of joy in his discovery. Further, the luck of finding "a single" flower invests the discovery with a stark magnificence.

Longley's botanical jubilation in "At Poll Salach" is not uncommon in his poetry, but the tone of the poem takes on a greater significance when considering the

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[135] The letter from "The Ice-cream Man's Mother" stated: "My daughter bought your book 'Gorse Fires' for me, after hearing you on the Radio. Your verse on the Ice-cream Man was clear to us who you were writing about...I do appreciate very much that someone outside our family circle remembered my son John (R.U.C.)…I do bless you for your kind thoughts, and may God bless you." Rosetta Larmour to Michael Longley (c. 1992), Box 6, Folder 7, Emory.

[136] Longley, "Au Revoir, Oeuvre, An Interview with Michael Longley by Peter McDonald," Box 43, Folder 6, Emory.

[137] Sean O'Brian, quoted on the back of *Gorse Fires*, *Selected Poems*, and *The Weather in Japan*. This type of praise, a positive evaluation of the public voice of his poetry, decorates the back of three of his recent publications.

[138] D. A. Webb and Mary J. P. Scannell, *Flora of Connemara and the Burren* (Cambridge: Royal Dublin Society and Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 141.

subtitled date. Directly beneath the title, the poem is dated as "Easter Sunday, 1998," a simple detail that dramatically increases the possible readings of the poem's symbolism, for it indicates that Longley's Burren journey took place at a very climactic moment in recent Northern Irish history. During Easter of 1998 the key political parties in Northern Ireland debated and accepted the Belfast Agreement (also referred to as the Good Friday Agreement).[139] The date of Longley's poem would register with anyone familiar with contemporary Northern Ireland, and it helps to explain the statement of hope when the poet likens the discovery of the single blooming flower to "a concentration of violets / Or a fragment from some future unimagined sky." This political resonance is also strengthened by the shadow of another Easter poem, Yeats' "Easter, 1916." By Easter Sunday of 1998 the Belfast Agreement had passed its first test when the Ulster Unionist Party approved the accord on the previous day,[140] and Longley's mention of a "fragment from some future unimagined sky" acknowledges the shaky foundations of peace, while still allowing himself to rejoice in the unexpected joy of the historical moment. The specificity of the date, as the flower names harness it to Longley's preference for poetry of specification, creates an atmosphere where two seemingly disparate events shed light on each other.[141] Not only does Longley's Burren journey crystallize the collective feelings of hope surrounding the Belfast Agreement, but the promising negotiations in the Northern Irish Assembly heighten Longley's personal sense of expectation as he sets out for his Easter walk in the West of Ireland.

The third poem I want to look at, "Burren Prayer," is an eight-line poem from *The Weather in Japan*, which invokes the *genius loci* (defined here as a spirit of the place) in order to make a statement against proposed plans to build in the Burren. Longley believes the building plans would lead to the devastation of the abundant and irreplaceable plant and animal life. Thus, the poem acts as an eco-protest poem

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[139] The historic Belfast Agreement called for, among other things, power sharing between unionists and nationalists, as well as a greater degree of cross-border co-operation with the Republic. Sinn Fein agreed to start the process of IRA disarmament in return for a "soft landing" in regard to the release of Catholic prisoners. The most important clause in the agreement was an acknowledgement that the Union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain "would continue as long as it was supported by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland." Paul Bew and Gordon Gillespie, eds., *Northern Ireland: a Chronology of the Troubles, 1968-1999* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1999), 359-60.

[140] Ibid., 361.

[141] See Chapter 1 for my discussion of the significance of Heaney's dating of "Antaeus" as "1966." See also Heaney's revisiting of the moment of *North* in "Tollund" (*SL*, 69) dated "September 1994." The poem records Heaney's physical trip to Aarhus, promised over twenty years earlier in "The Tollund Man," and explores the difference the twenty years have made to Heaney's outlook.

in the tradition of John Clare's "Swordy Well." Longley calls on the *genius loci* to save the land, using his extensive knowledge of the unique varieties of flora to create an elaborate description of her presence:

> Gentians and lady's bedstraw embroider her frock.
> Her pockets are full of sloes and juniper berries.
>
> Quaking-grass panicles monitor her heartbeat.
> Her reflection blooms like mudwort in a puddle.
>
> Sea Lavender and Irish eyebright at Poll Salach,
> On Black Head saxifrage and mountain-everlasting.
>
> *Our Lady of the Fertile Rocks, protect the Burren.*
> *Protect the Burren, Our Lady of the Fertile Rocks.*
>
> (*WJ*, 9)

Longley sent a much different earlier draft of "Burren Prayer" to the editor of *Verse*, along with a letter that explained that it was "written in protest against plans to build an interpretative centre at Mullaghmore which is the soul of the Burren which is the soul of Ireland (I hope you approve of the marsupial drift of my theology)."[142]

This earlier version is much longer (eighteen-lines long) and reads more overtly as a protest poem, with lines such as "Because we shall die too if we let the wild flowers die," than the subtle quilting of natural images in the published book version. It also more fully seizes the rhythms and repetitions found in traditional Irish Catholic prayer:

> In one gryke blackthorn and spindle, bloody cranesbill
> And madder lifted up by the blackthorn into daylight:
> *Protect the Burren, Our Lady of the Fertile Rocks.*
>
> Above the pavement and the stone-bramble's procession
> Scarlet lanterns on the guelder rose begin to glow:
> *Protect the Burren, Our Lady of the Fertile Rocks.*
>
> Spring gentians and lady's bedstraw embroider your frock
> And your pickets are full of sloes and juniper berries:
> *Protect the Burren, Our Lady of the Fertile Rocks.*
>
> The panicles of quaking-grass monitor your heart-
> Beat, your reflection blooms like mudwort in a puddle:
> *Protect the Burren, Our Lady of the Fertile Rocks.*
>
> Sea Lavender and Irish eyebright at Poll Salach,

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[142] Longley to the Editor of *Verse* (19 December 1992), Box 6, Folder 3, Emory.

On Black Head saxifrage and mountain-everlasting:
Protect the Burren, Our Lady of the Fertile Rocks.

Our Lady of the Fertile Rocks, protect the Burren
Because we shall die too if we let the wild flowers die:
Protect the Burren, Our Lady of the Fertile Rocks.

The draft of the poem offers a window into the workings of Longley's craft. Many of the poems included in the last three volumes of poetry are very short, reflecting his desire to be as exact as possible, an artistic effort founded in his interest in the concise but various nature of Japanese art and poetry. This earlier version suggests that other poems, following what we can see about "Burren Prayer," could have been pared down significantly in size during his process of revision.

Longley has written of his technique in "Burren Prayer," in a preface to a general book on the Burren:

> On my most recent visit to the Burren I wrote the names of the plants into my notebook as usual, a fresh page for each location. This time the names arranged themselves rhythmically, as though to release their power into prayers or spells... Prayers for what is irreplaceable. Spells muttered in the shadow of exploitation and destruction. At Corcomroe Abbey on my way home to Belfast this line came into my head: *Protect the Burren, Our Lady of the Fertile Rocks*.[143]

This statement highlights the specifically Catholic sentiment of the poem, as he renders his process of composition as a spiritual revelation at "Corcomroe Abbey" where the crucial line "*Protect the Burren, Our Lady of the Fertile Rocks*" came to him. As the listed names of the wild flowers in "The Ice-Cream Man" perform a subtle soothing function, in "The Burren Prayer" Longley capitalizes on the natural power of the names of Burren flora to generate a spiritually resonant atmosphere. While the spirituality is still evident in the final version, the overtly Catholic rhythms have been reduced by only including one incantation of the line that was repeated at the end of each stanza in the earlier draft. The draft reveals Longley's knowledge and use of traditional depictions of the West by the poets and painters discussed in the first section of this chapter, as a spiritual and authentically Irish setting. Nevertheless the final version is more in line with his characteristic poetic voice.

In the three poems discussed here Longley draws on the poetic power found in the names of the West's plants and flowers, following in the footsteps of the Celtic

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[143] Longley, "Preface" to "The Burren," Box 36, Folder 18, Emory.

Revivalists and painters discussed in the first section, who found beauty and inspiration in the landscape. Like previous literary investors in the region, Longley recognizes its larger significance, but he maintains an emphasis on the particular and avoids making large-scale cultural statements. He is not overtly interested in folk beliefs or cultural survivals like his predecessors Gregory, Synge and Yeats, but rather in the West's abundance of botanical and natural life. The specific national agenda has given way to more personal expressions of Irish identity. The early draft of "Burren Prayer" shows Longley at his most willing to equate the specific area's health with national health (as Yeats argued for the West as the spiritual core of Ireland), with the *Lady of the Fertile Rocks* owing much to earlier representations of the spirituality of the West. However, the final version of the poem minimizes the epic implications and tone of "Burren Prayer," and reads more as a personal prayer to a beloved region in a time of need. Thus, the final draft shares the subtly public voices of "The Ice-cream Man" and "At Poll Salach." Each of these poems convey a larger significance, but Longley grounds them in the particular beauty of flower names, place names, and in his own pilgrimages to locate rare plant life. In this way they epitomize the personal foundation of Longley's political poetics. "At Poll Salach" and "The Ice-cream Man" notably demonstrate how Longley's position in the West allows him to deal with events in Northern Ireland without entering into partisan territory. In this vein, "Burren Prayer" highlights Longley's use of the listing technique to increase awareness of the region's unique qualities in order to stress the West's importance to him personally, and for society more generally, in terms that are both ecologically and culturally resonant.

V. "OUR WINDBREAK OF BOOKS": MEDITATIONS ON POETIC LEGACY

> Added to its few remaining sites will be the stanza
> I compose about leaves like flakes of skin, a colour
> Dithering between pink and yellow, and then the root
> That grows like coral among shadows and leaf-litter.
> Just touching the petals bruises them into darkness.
>
> Michael Longley, "The Ghost Orchid" (*GO*, 52)

In *The Weather in Japan*, Longley's poetic concerns revolve around legacy, valediction, aging, and reflection on how his and other's lives have been spent. Like the later Yeats, Longley has become a poet of old age. The book contains a number of traditional elegies, and over half of the poems have an elegiac foundation, though not always directed to a specific person. The volume concentrates on Carrigskeewaun, as well as other special locations, most notably the small village of Cardoso in Tuscany. *The Weather in Japan* is deeply cyclical, and forces the reader to re-read poems. For example, the second to last poem, "The Waterfall," asks "If you were to read my poems, all of them, I mean / My life's work, at the one sitting, in the one place, / Let it be here..." (*WJ*, 65). Thus, Longley issues a general call to look again at his oeuvre, and think about the importance of his attachment to his primary landscapes. Finally, the four-line epilogue touchingly brings the themes of legacy and aging back into the familial domain, noting that "There's a dip in the mattress where I sleep. / Rise out of your hollow hours before me / Every morning, and on the last morning / Tuck me in behind our windbreak of books" (*WJ*, 70). "The dip in the mattress where I sleep" naturally harks back to other glimpses of the Carrigskeewaun double-bed in "The Excavator" and "Snow-Hole." Longley allows himself to think about the "last morning" and uses the meditation to emphasize routine ("Every morning"), as well as allowing the "windbreak of books," to reflect a hope that the "books" that he spent so much of his waking hours enjoying may still offer comfort and significance in death. The image of his "windbreak of books" offers a specific glimpse into the interior of his family home, but also hints at literary concerns as the chance harvest of a 'windfall' is converted into something resembling a legacy.

The title poem of *The Ghost Orchid* showcases Longley's general concern for the fragility of the world, and his awareness of the brevity of life which I highlighted

earlier in discussing the transitory beauty of lover and flower in "Autumn Lady's Tresses." Longley describes the delicate flower in pointedly human terms. The orchid's "leaves like flakes of skin" that can be "bruise[d] into darkness" by a mere touch represents the fragile quality of all living things, but also suggests something about the legacy of his art. For, though the ghost orchid only now grows in a few sites in the world, Longley's poetry marks another site, "the stanza / I compose." The poem displays Longley's confidence in his ability to offer an accurate description of the rare plant (enabling it to count as an *authentic* site that can be visited), as well as his belief that attention to plants and animals forms a vital role in human culture. As the ghost orchid disappears into darkness by "Just touching the petals," the line between life and death in human terms is similarly fragile. The rare and fragile quality of the flower enhances Longley's admiration, and the poem serves to prolong the life of the orchid while also celebrating Longley's characteristic appreciation for minute details.

"Detour," from *Gorse Fires*, is a light-hearted poem that imagines the poet's own funeral procession. He wishes the procession to include "this detour / Down the single street of a small market town" (*GF*, 7). Adding to the any (Irish) town aspect of his vision, he provides a list of the sort of names that you'd find in such a place, "Philbin, O'Malley, MacNamara, Keane," a regular town where after "A reverent pause to let a herd of milkers pass" he will come "face to face with grubby parsnips, / Cauliflowers that glitter after a sun shower." The poem continues:

> I shall be part of the action when his wife
> Draining the potatoes into a steamy sink
> Calls to the butcher to get ready for dinner
> And the publican descends to change a barrel.
> From behind the one locked door for miles around
> I shall prolong a detailed conversation
> With the man in the concrete telephone kiosk
> About where my funeral might be going next.
>
> (*GF*, 7)

John Lyon argues that the poem "preserves a certain decorum in the detailed continuities of the various catalogues and names which define the life of a small market town. And, in doing so, the poem comes humorously to predict Longley's last effort at prolongation and particularity in the face of disintegration."[144] The description of the town shows Longley's career-long interest in everyday events and

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[144] John Lyon, "Michael Longley's Lists," *English* 46.183 (1996): 238.

small details (the way "Cauliflowers…glitter after a sun shower"), and humorously proposes that such an interest can be maintained even in death. However, the poem can also be read as another expression of Longley's lack of a solid identity. As argued earlier, Longley has always felt slightly outside of most communities, and though "Detour" has a light tone, the poem acknowledges that perhaps he can succeed in blending in with the community more easily in death than in life.

Other poems take a more serious stance to the themes of legacy, aging and death. The formal elegies of *The Weather in Japan*, for instance, give the volume a pervading elegiac atmosphere, though in a celebration-of-life rather than a heavily sombre context, as Ramazani argues for Heaney's elegies in *Field Work* as "tip[ping] the balance towards beauty."[145] In one of two elegies for his mother-in-law, Longley writes in "The Daffodils" that "she wants you to turn away from the wooden desk / Before you die, and look out... / Where all the available space is filled with daffodils" (*WJ*, 36). The wish for the dying woman is taken more generally in the volume as an imperative to the poet to enjoy life's beauty, while still being realistic about what it means to get older. For example, in the four-line poem the "The Blackthorn," Longley finds new virtues in the process of aging, using the blackthorn as a metaphor:

> A bouquet for my fifties, these flowers without leaves
> Like easter snow, hailstones clustering at dayligone -
> From the difficult thicket a walking stick in bloom, then
> Astringency, the blackthorn and its smoky plum.
> (*WJ*, 60)

Though from a "difficult thicket," the blackthorn still resides in the "bloom" of life, and offers a practical service as "a walking stick" as well as setting an example with its toughened brand of resiliency.[146] Yet, on the same page as "The Blackthorn," "Fragment (after Attila József)" admits that age does not necessarily increase clarity. For, while he is a "poetic pro, no longer the neophyte" (*WJ*, 60), he still "can't find the words for this starry night." The awesome quality of nature still leaves him grasping for words (like Heaney in "Postscript" [*SL*]).

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[145] Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994), 335.

[146] Longley is here showing his Ulster artistic pedigree, as Derek Mahon called Louis MacNeice an "Ulster Blackthorn" in a review of MacNeice's criticism, "An Ulster Blackthorn" in *Journalism: Selected Prose 1970-1995*, 43-46. Further, though "The Blackthorn" is not an elegy, one might compare Heaney's "I.I.87" where Heaney views the process of getting older (and losing loved ones) as a gaining of strength, as he faces "the ice this year / With my father's stick" (*SS*, 22).

In "The Waterfall," Longley directly contemplates his poetic legacy, as he imagines his work being read in its entirety:

> If you were to read my poems, all of them, I mean,
> My life's work, at the one sitting, in the one place,
> Let it be here by this half-hearted waterfall
> That allows each pebbly basin its separate say,
> Damp stones and syllables, then, as it grows dark
> And you go home past overgrown vineyards and
> Chestnut trees, suppliers once of crossbeams, moon-
> Shaped nuts, flour, and crackly stuffing for mattresses,
> Leave them here, on the page, in your mind's eye, lit
> Like the fireflies at the waterfall, a wall of stars.
>
> (*WJ*, 65)

The poem does not name the location of the "half-hearted waterfall." The mention of "overgrown vineyards and / Chestnut trees..." connects with the other Italian poems in the volume, while also linking it to the waterfall at Glenariff near Belfast mentioned in "The Hut." However, the poem's emphasis on a desired setting to have his career reviewed, focuses attention on the importance of specific places in Longley's poetry. This chapter has considered the West of Ireland as the area most crucial to Longley's artistic expression, but it also functioned as a template for others. As *The Weather in Japan* includes many explicit references to Carrigskeewaun and other western locations, "The Waterfall" likewise turns the reader's attention towards the West, and back into the detailed images of the landscape that he has recorded in verse. Longley's request to the reader to leave the poems upon completion "on the page, in your mind's eye, lit / Like the fireflies at the waterfall, a wall of stars" expresses a wish that his poems will have a lasting and also a living resonance as they stay alive "in your mind's eye." "The Waterfall" subtly acknowledges that the durability of his art must be judged by the readers, and recognizes that he can only hope his audience will consider the weight and variety of his whole career, allowing "each pebbly basin its separate say." Longley implies that his readers will occupy both a real and a metaphoric place in establishing the significance of his poetry. He also constructs the memory of his poems as a mental location in the imagination of the reader, mirroring the way he has positioned his elective western homeground as a place that he can both physically and imaginatively reside.

The poem "Remembering Carrigskeewaun," from *Gorse Fires*, offers a helpful way to conclude, as it reveals again the significance of the western locale in Longley's imaginative landscape:

> A wintry night, the hearth inhales
> And the chimney becomes a windpipe
> Fluffy with soot and thistledown,
> A voice-box recalling animals:
> The leveret come of age, snipe
> At an angle, then the porpoises'
> Demonstration of meaningless smiles.
> Home is a hollow between the waves,
> A clump of nettles, feathery winds,
> And memory no longer than a day
> When the animals come back to me
> From the townland of Carrigskeewaun,
> From a page lit by the Milky Way.
> (*GF*, 12)

The poem, written away from Carrigskeewaun, employs mnemonic devices to help create a rounded vision of his most important *locus*. Longley sets himself a poetic challenge to condense his memories of Carrigskeewaun, as memory becomes "no longer than a day." The poem showcases the sounds and sights of Mayo (the hearth "inhales" and the "chimney becomes a windpipe") as he uses a "voice-box" to conjure the animals. In the end, as suggested by the full rhyme of "day" and "Milky Way," the poem is as much about Longley's ability to write poems as it is about the physical place of Carrigskeewaun. The "page lit by the Milky Way" anticipates the request in "The Waterfall" for the reader to send his poems up "Like the fireflies at the waterfall, a wall of stars." Longley's poetry about the West of Ireland will indeed have an enduring significance, for the region provides an enabling and inspiring foundation for his most resonant poetic meditations. The poems of memory and commemoration, built around multiple specificities, amount to a luminously consolidated place of memory that bears his own signature. As other western locations bear the imprint of literary personalities such as Yeats and Joyce, so too Longley's poetry has subtly carved out his "part of Mayo" as a particular "Ireland of the mind" - *Longley Country*.

CHAPTER 4

HEANEY'S POINT OF "ORIGINAL DESCENT": MOSSBAWN AS PRIMARY LANDSCAPE

I. "TRUE TO THE KINDRED POINTS OF HEAVEN AND HOME"

> As we stood to toast our Nobel Laureate, the townland of Bellaghy was behind us, around us, in front of us. And then its significance rippled outwards to encircle the world.
>
> Michael Longley on Seamus Heaney's Nobel Prize for Literature[1]

Michael Longley's tribute emphasizes the centrality of Heaney's homeground in his poetry, as well as Longley's sense that art moves through the local townland, whether Bellaghy in Heaney's case or Carrigskeewaun in his, to "encircle the world." Written in the context of the Belfast celebration to applaud Heaney's Nobel Prize, and the dedication of the library at Queen's University Belfast in his name, Longley praises Heaney as "*our* Nobel Laureate." This seemingly minor statement reveals the complex nature of identification in Northern Ireland, as the possessive "*our*" could refer to the community at Queen's, the city of Belfast, Northern Ireland and/or Ireland. However, despite this complexity, Longley places the most importance on the poet's local affiliation, as Bellaghy's significance reverberates "outwards to encircle the world." Implicitly, Longley understands Heaney as a distinct product of the landscape that he came from, while also hinting that Bellaghy is also a product of Heaney's poetry. For, Heaney's poetry has actively labored to explicate his origins and make Bellaghy's "significance" apparent to his readers. The "townland of Bellaghy," the location of Heaney's childhood home of Mossbawn, has directly provided the inspiration and location for many poems from first to last. Furthermore, Heaney uses the landscape as a poetic compass, keeping

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[1] Longley, "The Heaney Bash" (n.d.), Box 35, Folder 25, Emory.

him in touch with the core elements of his identity and heritage.[2] Longley explains in the same piece that:

> It's always a revelation to try to picture an adult as a child (sometimes you can't). More than most poets Seamus keeps reliving his childhood. In so doing he gives us back our own…A poet takes his childhood with him through life. He does not grow up completely. Instead, he comes of age again and again…Like Wordworth's skylark [Heaney] has remained 'True to the kindred points of heaven and home.'[3]

Heaney's preoccupation with his homeground, in both prose and poetry, becomes especially stark when compared with the work of Northern Irish contemporaries Longley and Mahon, who have written relatively few poems about their childhoods in Belfast.[4] The area around Mossbawn functions as Heaney's "Personal Helicon" (to take the title of a poem from *Death of a Naturalist*), a point of inspiration able to sustain both a physical reality, and a more intangible but equally powerful symbolic force. This chapter charts Heaney's career-long engagement with his most central of landscapes, the primary memory-place and homeground of his art. Heaney "comes of age again and again" through his poetry, and by looking at his persistent returns to the Derry countryside, with his deep and complicated relationship to the landscape, his changing attitudes towards poetry and home come into focus.

Longley's evocation of Wordsworth's skylark draws attention to a primary point of argument in this chapter; that Heaney, in both his poetry and critical writing, makes a crucial link between his poetic voice and his original home. Heaney reveals his personal formulation of Wordsworth's sentiment when he declares that the best poems have the ability to keep your "feet on the ground and your head in the air simultaneously."[5] He claims for his art the ability to travel in multiple and varied

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[2] Many critics have noted the importance of Heaney's attachment to Mossbawn. See: Christopher T. Malone, "Writing Home: Spatial Allegories in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon," *ELH* 67 (2000): 1083-1109; Henry Hart, "Pastoral and Anti-pastoral Attitudes in Seamus Heaney's Early Poems," *Southern Review* 23.3 (July 1987): 569-88; and Michael Parker, *Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993).

[3] Longley, "The Heaney Bash."

[4] Mahon writes strikingly about his homeground and childhood in the early poems "Spring in Belfast," "Glengormley," and "Grandfather," in *Collected Poems* (Oldcastle, Co. Meath: Gallery, 1999), 13-15. However, his poetry does not regularly return to obvious childhood memories. Longley wrote "Readings" (*EV*, 29) about his twin brother's eye surgery, and has also written several other poems about family members such as "Master of Ceremonies" (*MLW*, in *SP*, 53). He has also reflected on his childhood in prose in *Tuppenny Stung: Autobiographical Chapters* (Belfast: Lagan, 1994). Yet, he has written noticeably few poems that directly engage with his childhood landscape. His homeground, as I argued in the previous chapter, is in the West of Ireland – the place he has consistently sought solace in as an adult.

[5] Heaney, "Something to Write Home About" (1998), in *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 48-49.

directions and still stay rooted to his original identity and place.[6] The work of several other poets frame Heaney's understanding of his rural homeground. In the second section, I briefly consider some of the most influential of these: William Wordsworth, John Clare, Patrick Kavanagh and Ted Hughes. The always looming figure of Yeats undoubtedly influences Heaney's reading of place, not least in the second part of *North*, but Yeats' poetry more directly applies to the previous chapter concerning Longley's homeground in the West of Ireland. For my argument here, Yeats' attention to place provides an important entry to Heaney's use of his homeground as both a physical place and a more abstract location in his imaginative landscape. Yeats, in Heaney's words, created a "country of the mind" through his careful molding of place, and so has Heaney.[7]

Wordsworth and Clare further help to establish life-long artistic involvement with a particular place as a crucial source of poetic identity. Their work demonstrates the distinctions between the pastoral and anti-pastoral traditions, which have a direct bearing on Heaney's mixing of the genres. Kavanagh and Hughes, closer to Heaney in time and subject, had a more direct influence on Heaney's willingness to trust his rural background to provide his initial artistic material. Kavanagh came from a comparable rural Catholic background in Ulster and his work showed Heaney that poetry could be made from the materials of the Ulster countryside. Similarly, Hughes' deliberately rough language and primitive choice of subjects in *Lupercal* (1960) combined an emphasis on the rural with a primordial reading of the landscape, and influenced Heaney's impulse to look to the language of his homeground for his voice as well as his subjects. The work of all four poets offer "kindred points" against which to situate Heaney's poetic project "to be at home in his own place."[8]

Many critics have touched upon the subject of this chapter, especially in looking at Heaney's first two volumes of poetry, when noting his heavy emphasis on

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[6] Despite this claim, Heaney routinely worries about whether his voice remains true to his origins, and this type of self-searching emphasizes how fundamental and potent the question is for him. For examples see: "Singing School: Exposure" (*N*, 67-68); "Making Strange" (*SI*, 32-33); and "Station Island" (*SI*, 61-94).

[7] Heaney, "The Sense of Place" (1977), in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1980), 132. Heaney's poetry reveals a different territorial sense than Yeats, filled with farms rather than towers.

[8] Heaney, "An Open Letter" (London: Field Day Theatre Company, 1983). Heaney has other obvious poetic exemplars in developing his early pastoral renderings of his homeground, including Robert Frost and Gerard Manley Hopkins.

his childhood landscape. However, the persistence of Heaney's poetic efforts to call our attention back to his original source requires a more thorough analysis of the role of this particular landscape in terms of his entire career, something previous critics have not done adequately. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews offers a window into Heaney's complicated relationship to place when he states that in Heaney's poetry "landscape is sacramental…Landscape becomes a memory, a continuity, a piety, a feared and fecund mother, an insatiable lover."[9] I believe that Heaney's poetic explorations of the area around Mossbawn have much light to shed on his relationship to place and memory more generally, and elucidate the most important themes and questions in his poetry: such as the balance between place and displacement; the poet's responsibility to community and art; and the relationship between language, culture and landscape.

Section III analyzes Heaney's introduction of his homeground in his first two volumes, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *Door into the Dark* (1969), as they provide an indispensable entry into my discussion of Heaney's involvement with poetic commemoration of the landscape surrounding his childhood home. Section IV looks specifically at Heaney's reading of the place-names of his homeground in *Wintering Out* (1972) in order to probe the contentious linguistic and cultural history of Northern Ireland, thereby linking personal memories of place to cultural memory. The fifth section examines a more abstract relationship with his primary landscape by focusing on it as the foundation of his poetic voice. Finally, Section VI analyzes Heaney's family poems. In memories from childhood, as well as in formal elegies, his earliest home serves as a reference point for evaluating the quality of his relationships with loved ones. Like Longley's poetry of the West, Heaney's poems can be read as a sustained mapping of the domestic, personal and familial, upon the geography of 'home.'

In 1978 Heaney began a meditation about the farm of Mossbawn, his childhood home, with an incantation:

> I would begin with the Greek word, *omphalos*, meaning navel, and hence the stone that marked the centre of the world, and repeat it, *omphalos*, *omphalos*, *omphalos*, until its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside our back door.[10]

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[9] Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: All the Realms of Whisper* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 3.
[10] Heaney, "Mossbawn: Omphalos" (1978), in *Preoccupations,* 17.

Heaney has travelled diverse and distant ground in his poetic career, both physically and artistically, but in every collection of poetry he returns to the symbols and memories of Mossbawn and the surrounding area. As Heaney defined the childhood home as the center of the child's world, "Mossbawn, the first place," so too his original home has remained at the center of his poetry.[11] The images and occupiers of the farmhouse and townland, along with the physical and symbolic boundaries of the landscape, have been consciously and repeatedly drawn in both Heaney's prose and poetry. Therefore, a small place in Country Derry on a physical map becomes a large and familiar place on Heaney's poetic map. The previous chapter argued that the West of Ireland, Longley's "home from home," offers Longley an entry point into matters of community and belonging, which he couldn't access from his "home" of Belfast. In contrast, Heaney has always been clear about the location of home. However complex his affiliation, ever since the beginning of his poetic career he has challenged himself to keep his voice in line with his origins, and to create an art true to the influences resonant in his foundational landscape. Heaney's interest in "digging," using poetry to excavate hidden meanings, has been traced throughout his career by critics as well as Heaney himself, and is an artistic approach solidly connected to the rural landscape of his youth - the *omphalos* of his first inspiration.[12]

John Wilson Foster notes:

> Heaney is first and fundamentally a country poet, locating the origin of his deepest values in the countryside of Ireland generally and of County Derry specifically. In his life and literature he has translated himself from his rural beginnings to Belfast, California, Dublin and Massachusetts, and as reader and lecturer, to cities and campuses of the world, but in a sense he has never left rural Ulster.[13]

Foster's statement oversimplifies the themes and locations of Heaney's poetry, but his emphasis on the importance of the area around Bellaghy is sound. The statements by Foster and Michael Longley (quoted earlier) imply that Heaney has gained an international reputation precisely *because* he has put such a strong emphasis on his origins.

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[11] Ibid., 18.
[12] See: Chapter 1 in relation to Heaney's excavations of bodies and buried history in *North* (1975). For Heaney, see: "Mossbawn: Omphalos" and "Feeling into Words" (1974), in *Preoccupations*. For critics see: Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Fontana, 1999); John Wilson Foster, *The Achievement of Seamus Heaney* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1995); and Kennedy-Andrews, *Poetry of Seamus Heaney*.
[13] Wilson Foster, *Achievement of Seamus Heaney*, 2.

In "Mossbawn," Heaney proceeds from his meditation on the Greek word *omphalos* to explain that the water pump was quite literally the hub of activity during his early years in the 1940s: "five households drew water from it. Women came and went...the horses came home to it...and in a single draught emptied one bucket and then another as the man pumped and pumped...."[14] In early poems such as the much-anthologized "Blackberry-Picking," "Churning Day," "The Outlaw" and "Thatcher" Heaney captures the vividness of the characters and activities in his native rural community.[15] The pump symbolizes the heart of his community, as it mixes the regional voices of the villagers with the sounds of livestock, and the rhythmic noises of the pump itself. Heaney does not only credit Mossbawn with providing much of the initial material for his poetry but as the origin of his particular brand of poetic music. As he explains in his influential 1974 lecture "Feeling into Words," " there is a connection between the core of a poet's speaking voice and the core of his poetic voice, between his original accent and his discovered style."[16] Thus, more abstractly in "Mossbawn," Heaney explains his desire to keep his voice in tune to the various strains of "blunt and falling music" that served as his first inspiration.[17]

Heaney no longer visits Mossbawn in an actual sense, as his family sold the property when he was fourteen and moved to a farm at the far end of the parish.[18] As a result of his inability to occupy Mossbawn physically, Heaney must travel back in the form of freeze-framed memories, and also, he claims, by conjuring a distinctive type of natural music that reveals a more fluid and continuous type of attachment.[19] In other words, by keeping his poetic voice in tune with his native or "natural" voice, he can always keep a strong sense of his original place in his art. In "Mossbawn," Heaney achieves this auditory connection through the mnemonic repetition of the word *omphalos*, which makes a familiar rhythm in the throat and on the tongue.

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[14] Heaney, "Mossbawn: Omphalos," 18.

[15] Section I of this chapter analyzes Heaney's first two books of poetry with an emphasis on how they were crafted so as to introduce a poet *and* a landscape.

[16] Heaney, "Feeling into Words," 43. Heaney writes that "Finding a voice means that you can get your own feeling into your own words and that your words have the feel of you about them; and I believe that it may not even be a metaphor, for poetic voice is probably very intimately connected with the poet's natural voice, the voice he hears as the ideal speaker of the lines he is making up."

[17] Heaney, "Mossbawn: Omphalos," 17.

[18] Neil Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 234-35.

[19] For Heaney's related discussion of Yeats and Wordsworth's unique poetic music, see: Heaney, "The Makings of Music: Reflections on Wordsworth and Yeats" (1978), in *Preoccupations*, 61-78. See also: Hugh Haughton, "Power and Hiding Places: Wordsworth and Heaney," in *The Monstrous Debt: Modalities of Romantic Influence in Twentieth-Century Literature*, eds. Damian Walford Davies and Richard Marggraf Turley (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 2004), forthcoming.

Thus, *omphalos* both symbolizes the physical features of the landscape (as it recalls the pump, the geographic center or navel of his early life), while also audibly replicating the sound of water being pumped (the music of his childhood that forms the heart of his poetic voice).

As *omphalos* identifies Heaney's home territory with Greek piety, so "Personal Helicon," the final poem of *Death of a Naturalist*, makes a connection between Mossbawn and classical poetic inspiration. In the poem, the wonderment of the child towards the activity of echoing parallels the language used, as the child's game of seeking out unique sounds in different wells sheds meaning on the adult's vocation of making poems from diverse material, forms, and sounds. Dedicated to Michael Longley, the poem acts as a subtle poetic manifesto, as it links Heaney's origins with a declaration of his poetic arrival.[20] He recalls his pleasure in the "dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells / of waterweed, fungus and dank moss," and elevates the ultimate experience of having the wells give "back your own call / With a clean new music in it" (*DN*, 46). At the end of the poem, Heaney claims that to "stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring / Is beneath all adult dignity." However, he makes this statement humorously, as implicitly writing poetry allows him to remain partly in the world of childhood, "finger[ing] slime" and consciously "pry[ing] into [the] roots" of personal experience. Heaney, as the adult poet rhyming "To see myself, to set the darkness echoing," is connected to his account of youthful pleasures and, crucially, to the distinctive rhythms associated to the process he refers to as "finding a voice."[21] He does not explicitly name Mossbawn in the poem, but the apparently casual opening ("As a child they could not keep me from wells"), sets the poet firmly on habitual home soil. As the water pump symbolizes a type of natural music, the well is here associated with the process of actually testing out his voice. The Greek usage of the word *Helicon* as the mountain sacred to the muses, a fountain of inspiration, provides an appropriate symbol for the way that Heaney's original landscape functions in his poetry as his personal sacred spring.

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[20] Thomas C. Foster observes, "As the inscription to Longley suggests, this is a poet's poem, and the language ratifies that suspicion…these lines strut across the page, reveling in their own sound." T. Foster, *Seamus Heaney* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), 18. In this light, it is interesting to consider "To Seamus Heaney" (*EV*, 38-39), Longley's dedication to Heaney, discussed in the previous chapter. Though "A Personal Statement" (*NCC*, 19-21), also dedicated to Heaney, is Longley's obvious complement to "Personal Helicon," Longley's "To Seamus Heaney" lays claim to the symbols of rural Ireland (if somewhat sarcastically) through the poem's deliberately stated rural western location.

[21] Heaney, "Feeling into Words," 43.

Heaney returns to the water pump to conclude his "Mossbawn" article, and makes the connection between the place and his technique even more direct. He explains that "the pump marked an original descent into earth, sand, gravel, water. It centred and staked the imagination, made its foundation the foundation of the *omphalos* itself."[22] Heaney invests the deep penetration of the pump into the soil at Mossbawn with symbolic significance, relating it to his characteristic technique of using poetry to excavate meaning, as well as offering a justification for how it is possible to travel great distances physically and artistically while maintaining strong roots. As the pump marks an "original descent into earth," so Heaney claims a deeper resonance for his art, with the earth and all humanity, "the foundation of the *omphalos*" as its rightful sphere. Ultimately, the symbolism of the *omphalos* provides an umbilical cord that connects Heaney's art to his original source of inspiration and identity.

Heaney also uses Mossbawn and its surrounding area as a tool for understanding the fractured history of Northern Ireland by reading his birthplace as a miniature version of the larger characteristics and problems of the province. I agree with Rita Zoutenbier's assessment that the "fact that Heaney's poetry is so much tied up with a particular locale may seem a limitation, but his feeling for his own territory is a source of emotion for the poet, which infuses his language, and makes it come alive."[23] Heaney's focus on a particular landscape is not, of course, something unique to him, especially in the specific field of Irish literature (the poetry of John Montague and the prose of John McGahern immediately come to mind), but Heaney is perhaps more persistent in his articulations.[24] In "The Sense of Place" (1977), Heaney acknowledges that the "nourishment which springs from knowing and belonging to a certain place…is not just an Irish obsession," but argues that the topic is of special interest in Ireland "because of the peculiar fractures in our history, north and south, and because of the way that possession of the land and possession of

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[22] Heaney, "Mossbawn: Omphalos," 20.
[23] Rita Zoutenbier, "The Matter of Ireland and the Poetry of Seamus Heaney," in *Modern Critical Views: Seamus Heaney*, ed. Harold Bloom (New Haven: Chelsea House, 1986), 52.
[24] See: John Montague, *The Rough Field* (Mountrath and Portlaoise, Co. Laois: Dolmen, 1972), and John McGahern, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002). Heaney contributes to a long tradition in Irish literature, as the Gaelic literary tradition has an entire form devoted to place name poems (*dinnseanchas*), which in Heaney's words are "poems and tales which relate the original meanings of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology." Heaney, "The Sense of Place," 131.

different languages have rendered the question particularly urgent."[25] Revealing his personal interest in place in a 1972 article, Heaney outlined the complexity of the landscape of his childhood, with its implicit connection to the question of Northern Ireland more generally, by explaining the etymology of local place names (a tactic he would bring to his poetry in the same year with the publication of *Wintering Out*):

> *Moss*, a Scots word probably carried to Ulster by the Planters, and *bawn*, the name the English colonists gave to their fortified farmhouses. Mossbawn, the planter's house on the bog. Yet in spite of this Ordnance Survey spelling, we pronounced it Moss *Bann*, and *bán* is the Gaelic word for white. So might not the thing mean the white moss, the moss of the bog-cotton? In the syllables of my home I see a metaphor of the split culture of Ulster. Mossbawn lies between the villages of Castledawson and Toome. I was symbolically placed between the marks of English influence and the lure of the native experience, between 'the demesne' and 'the bog.'[26]

Heaney interprets his homeground as a place caught "between" conflicting cultures and identities by looking at the linguistic complexities found in his local landscape. In a connected investigation of 'between-ness,' Heaney has consistently meditated on the need to bridge his origins and his learning, in his words, to fill the gap between his "roots" and his "reading," the "parish" and the "academy."[27] As he acknowledges, his "quest for definition":

> …while it may lead backward, is conducted in the living speech of the landscape I was born into. If you like, I began as a poet when my roots were crossed with my reading…My hope is that the poems will be vocables adequate to my whole experience.[28]

II. LITERARY EXEMPLARS OF THE HOMEGROUND: WORDSWORTH, CLARE, KAVANAGH AND HUGHES

The works of John Clare, William Wordsworth, Patrick Kavanagh and Ted Hughes are particularly useful in providing a clarifying lens for my discussion of Heaney's poetic homeground. Critics have commented upon Heaney's poetic debts

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[25] Heaney, "The Sense of Place," 136. See also: Heaney, "Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry of Northern Ireland" (1984), in *Finders Keepers*, 112-33.
[26] Heaney, "Belfast: 1972" (1972), in *Preoccupations*, 35.
[27] Heaney, "Belfast," 28-37; and Heaney, *Among Schoolchildren: A lecture dedicated to the memory of John Malone* (Belfast: John Malone Memorial Committee, 1983), 8.
[28] Heaney, "Belfast: 1972," 36-37.

to the four, as they undoubtedly helped him to begin as a poet, by crossing his "roots" with his "reading." He has written individual essays on each of them, and has edited a selection of Wordsworth's poems.[29] As Thomas Foster concludes, all four were pivotal in Heaney's formative years as a poet, as they "valorized the use of local, personal, rural, natural subjects for poetry and sanctioned the young poet's use of his background as material for his verse."[30]

Wordsworth, like Heaney much later, powerfully uses his childhood self and early memories to define the territory and perspective of his adult self and poetry. As Heaney says of Wordsworth's poetic foundations:

> Although Wordsworth, more than any writer before him, established how truly 'the child is father of the man,' it was not the grand old man of Rydal Mount who was fathered by the infant born to John and Ann Wordsworth in April 1770, in Cockermouth in Cumberland. If we look for the offspring of that soon-to-be-orphaned creature being nursed in earshot of the River Derwent, we shall find him in the twenty-eight-year-old poet listening in to himself in the covert of his poetic being.[31]

Heaney's understanding of Wordsworth as being created and marked by childhood ('the child is father of the man') is absolutely crucial to the way that he perceives his own poetic make-up. In the above quotation, Heaney is deliberately specific about Wordsworth's background, noting both the time and precise place of his birth as well as the names of his parents. Elsewhere (as in "Mossbawn" and "Something to Write Home About") Heaney provides a very similar account of his own particulars, seeing his identity as formed by family, time and locale.

Heaney's observations on Wordsworth directly highlight important aspects about his own work. For example, Wordsworth's poetic rendering of nature and the landscape of the Lake District of his childhood is extremely pertinent to Heaney's own framing of Mossbawn and the surrounding area in County Derry. Indeed, it is hard to read a poem like "Personal Helicon" without seeing Wordsworth's influence. For, as Heaney locates the real Wordsworth "in the twenty-eight-year-old poet listening in to himself," we glimpse Heaney's process of finding a voice as a child

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[29] See: Heaney, *The Essential Wordsworth: Selected by Seamus Heaney* (Hopewell, N.J.: Ecco, 1988); "The Makings of a Music: Reflections on Wordsworth and Yeats," in *Preoccupations*, 61-78; "From Monaghan to the Grand Canal," in *Preoccupations*, 115-30; "The Sense of Place," 131-49; "Englands of the Mind," in *Preoccupations*, 150-69; "The Placeless Heaven: Another Look at Kavanagh," in *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (1988; repr. London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 3-14; and "John Clare's Prog," in *The Redress of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 63-82.

[30] T. Foster, *Seamus Heaney*, 14.

[31] Heaney, "Introduction," in *The Essential Wordsworth*, 7.

searching out distinctive sounds among the wells of his childhood landscape.[32]

Heaney has explained that for Wordsworth:

> …nature forms the heart that watches and receives but until the voice of the poet has been correspondingly attuned, we cannot believe what we hear. And so we come to the beautiful conception [In *The Prelude*] of the River Derwent as a tutor of his poetic ear…the essential capacity was, from the beginning, the capacity to listen.[33]

Heaney describes the River Derwent as a *genius loci* - a landscape that informs and invades Wordsworth's poetry.[34] Interestingly, Dillon Johnston's analysis of Heaney's early method is nearly identical to Heaney's understanding of Wordsworth's: "the child's need to define the boundary between himself and encroaching nature has its correlation in the Romanticist interest in identifying the self in the perceived experience while attempting to make a more direct contact with nature."[35] Wordsworth's example provides Heaney (and critics of Heaney) with a powerful model for keeping a voice in tune with a landscape and thus the poet's natural music. As Hugh Haughton argues, Heaney's use of *The Prelude* to situate his own "poetic enterprise" emphasizes that "our first ground rules the rest of our life, an idea that haunts everything Heaney writes."[36] In his introduction to *The Essential Wordsworth*, Heaney praises the Romantic poet's special combination of qualities with a list that mirrors many of the values Heaney strives for in his own art:

> [Wordsworth] is an indispensable figure in the evolution of modern writing, a finder and keeper of the self-as-subject…it is not until Yeats that we encounter another poet in whom emotional susceptibility, intellectual force, psychological acuteness, political awareness, artistic self-knowledge, and bardic representativeness are so truly and responsibly combined.[37]

Heaney, like Wordsworth, bases "the self-as-subject" around his primary landscape, using it as a way to explore the identifying features of the land as well as himself.

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[32] Heaney was twenty-seven years old when *Death of a Naturalist* was published in 1966, strengthening the sense of connection between Heaney's identification of the period that Wordsworth found his voice, and when he found his own.

[33] Heaney, "The Makings of a Music: Reflections on Wordsworth and Yeats," 69. See: Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, in *The Oxford Authors William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984), bk. 1, lines 272-304, 381-82.

[34] Geoffrey Hartman argues of *The Prelude* that "the identity crisis is perhaps that of poetry itself. Wordsworth would not be so centrally concerned with the character of his leading genius unless prompted by the hope that an enlightened poetry – the union of poetical genius with English spirit of place – was possible." Hartman, "Romantic Poetry and the Genius Loci," in *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958-1970* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), 329.

[35] Dillon Johnston, "Irish Poetry After Joyce," in *Critical Essays on Seamus Heaney*, ed. Robert F. Garratt (New York: G.K. Hall, 1995), 198.

[36] Haughton, "Power and Hiding Places: Wordsworth and Heaney."

[37] Heaney, "Introduction," in *The Essential Wordsworth*, 4.

Further, Wordsworth and Clare are often discussed as exponents of the pastoral mode, and the way that they stretched the definition of pastoral helps when considering the ways Heaney has added to the tradition. Pastoral verse, strictly defined, is confined to depictions of country life that specifically concern the world of shepherds. However, this definition has been widened significantly to include idyllic representations of the countryside, whereas the term 'anti-pastoral' denotes poems that deliberately de-idealize rural life. As Heaney explains, pastoral "is a term that has been extended by usage until its original meaning has been largely eroded."[38] Several critics have made a case for viewing Heaney's work as part of a pastoral dialogue: Henry Hart has written an interesting article about Heaney's vacillation between the pastoral and anti-pastoral modes in his early poetry; and Sidney Burris has written a monograph on Heaney's addition to the pastoral tradition.[39] Indeed, Heaney demonstrated his strength of feeling for the pastoral mode in his harsh 1975 review of *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*. He criticized the editors John Bull and John Barrell for what he perceived as their restrictive and programmatic approach to what is, according to Heaney, a dynamic and varied tradition. Heaney argues that the editors chart "the rise and fall of the pastoral convention in England," rather than exploring, among other things, the genre's continuing appeal and its multiple forms and purposes.[40] Longley's poetry of the West, the Great War, and the classics, also actively adds to the pastoral tradition and its project of capturing the natural world in all its fleeting beauty. Since its foundations by Theocritus, pastoral verse has long been a genre receptive to political expressions, as the editors of the Penguin collection admit.[41] Wordsworth helped to re-direct its political characteristic, as well as adding to the tradition by developing a rural poetry with linguistic authenticity, "representing shepherds, to be speaking the real language of real men."[42]

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[38] Heaney, "In the Country of Convention: English Pastoral Verse" (1975), in *Preoccupations*, 173.
[39] Sidney Burris, *The Poetry of Resistance: Seamus Heaney and the Pastoral Tradition* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1990), x; Henry Hart, "Pastoral and Anti-Pastoral": 569-88
[40] Heaney, "In the Country of Convention," 174.
[41] Barrell and Bull note that "The Pastoral afforded a way of attacking contemporary abuses obliquely, by reference to an idealized vision of what life in the country was like. This strain was not present at all in Theocritus, and originates with Virgil, whose Eclogues are the chief model for early English efforts in the genre." John Barrell and John Bull, "Introduction," in *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse* (London: Allen Lane, 1974), 6. See discussion of Longley's "Burren Prayer" and "At Poll Salach" in Chapter 3. Heaney's most recent volume *Electric Light* (2001) (discussed in the Conclusion) has an extended dialogue with the pastoral genre, specifically with the figure of Virgil.
[42] Paul Alpers, "What is Pastoral?," *Critical Inquiry* 8.3 (Spring 1982): 460.

Wordsworth is a crucial figure for Heaney both in the elder poet's relation to his childhood home in the Lake District, and in his use of a rural landscape to address weighty political issues through a refashioning of the pastoral tradition (creating poetry out of a "marriage of genius and genius loci"[43]). However, in some ways, John Clare's explorations of his homeground provide a more directly relevant example.[44] Born in Northamptonshire in 1793, Clare based much of his poetry around his two homes, the nearby villages of Helpston and Northborough. Like Heaney, Clare fluctuates between pastoral and anti-pastoral modes, and articulates the difficulty of staying true to one's art and origins. Originally classified as a peasant poet, Clare started out writing traditional pastoral verse about countryside shepherds, but also adopted an anti-pastoral mode to lament changes to the landscape around his childhood village of Helpston. A description of Clare's home village, as it was during his youth, portrays it as a hold-out from another age: "off the highway and behind the times" where "books were few and education was got at the knee of some old dame," but "festivals, religious and pagan, were assiduously kept."[45] Likewise, Heaney has described the landscape of his childhood as a chronologically transitory space. Caught between two eras, he could remember the energy of the traditional cattle-markets, and was still young when they all but disappeared. He witnessed the use of traditional farming tools, but could already see signs of new technology. Similarly, Clare's poetry is marked by his witnessing of profound changes in his rural landscape, which he interpreted as intensely negative. The changes began with the enclosure of the land and continued with the general migration of people away from the countryside and towards the materialism of the cities. As a product of the rural working class, Clare insists in his poetry on accurately rendering a picture of an area undergoing a major transformation. Because of this emphasis, one critic has argued that Clare's poetry, "though composed in an isolated village, reflects the changing temper of the times much more accurately than Wordsworth's ever did...."[46] Like Wordsworth (and I argue like Heaney), Clare grasped the artistic capital to be found in basing his poetry on the

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[43] Hartman, "Romantic Poetry," 333.
[44] Clare was also an important influence on Longley's early work. See: "Journey Out of Essex" (*NCC*, 54).
[45] David Powell and Eric Robinson, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Authors John Clare* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984), xvi.
[46] Ibid., xviii.

experiences of his own life, "the self-as-subject" set in the landscape he knew intimately.

Clare's fundamental insecurity about how his poetic vocation fit in with his rural background and community (what Blake Morrison has identified in regards to Heaney's work as a fundamental vacillation between "speech and reticence") offers perhaps the most enlightening connection to Heaney's poetry.[47] Clare's poem "The Progress of Rhyme" reveals the tension between his role as poet and his sense of original identity:

> In silent shame the harp was tried
> And rapture's griefs the tune applied,
>
> Yet o'er the songs my parents sung
> My ear in silent musings hung.
> Their kindness wishes did regard,
> All else was but a proud decree,
> The right of bards and naught to me,
> A title that I dared not claim
> And hid it like a private shame.[48]

Heaney has often expressed similar sentiments, that "'the pen's lighter than the spade,'" and used this awareness to solidify a sense that writing poetry is, in some ways, the total opposite of the traditional working of the land.[49] In a 1981 interview he explained:

> …there is indeed some part of me that is entirely unimpressed by the activity [of writing], that doesn't dislike it, but it's the generations, I suppose or rural ancestors – not illiterate, but not literary. They in me, or through them, don't give a damn.[50]

This type of feeling is expressed negatively in *North* as a debilitating regional problem, "The famous / Northern reticence, the tight gag of place" (*N*, 55), but is visible in many poems and prose writings as a type of guilt over his successful literary standing, and a fear that he has lost touch with his roots. Importantly, Heaney holds Clare up as an example of staying linguistically true to his origins and poetic sensibilities, claiming that though Clare was once "lured to the edge of his

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[47] Blake Morrison, "Speech and reticence: Seamus Heaney's *North*," in *British Poetry Since 1970: A Critical Survey*, eds. Peter Jones and Michael Schmidt (Manchester: Carcanet, 1980).
[48] John Clare, "The Progress of Rhyme," in *The Selected Poems of John Clare*, ed. James Reeves, (London: William Heinemann, 1954), 32.
[49] Heaney, "Feeling into Words," 42.
[50] Heaney, "Interview with John Haffenden," in *Viewpoints: Conversations with Poets*, by John Haffenden (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 63.

word-hoard and his tonal horizon" he then deliberately "withdrew and dug in his local heels."[51] Through Clare's concerted effort to "not think twice" about his use of local language, he offers Heaney a powerful example and a challenge not to push his original voice out of the published poetry.[52]

Kavanagh, like Clare, struggled to align his poetic vocation with his homeground. In relating Kavanagh's importance (as with Clare and Wordsworth), Heaney credits him with bringing to poetry something that can also be applied to his own work:

> …Kavanagh forged not so much a conscience as a consciousness for the great majority of his countrymen, crossing the pieties of a rural Catholic sensibility with the *non serviam* of his original personality, raising the inhibited energies of a subculture to the power of a cultural resource.[53]

Heaney, like Kavanagh before him, shaped his early poetry out of the images of his rural upbringing. And, Heaney's poetry, especially the poems of the first two books, similarly elevated a rural "subculture," a landscape not often the subject of literature, "to the power of a cultural resource." Heaney's insistence in his early poems of the need to stay near his childhood home translates into a wider significance because, "it was, as Patrick Kavanagh said of such poetry, universal because it dealt with fundamentals."[54]

Kavanagh's career offers many obvious points of interest for Heaney, especially during his formative years as a student, when he was searching for appropriate poetic exemplars. Born in Inniskeen, County Monaghan in 1904, Kavanagh, like Heaney, was the son of a small farmer.[55] Though he left for Dublin in 1939, Kavanagh based many of his poems on his childhood parish. Further, through the short-lived *Kavanagh's Weekly*, he critically advocated a healthy parochialism that he felt would combat the over-grandness he identified in contemporary Irish poetry that followed the example of Yeats.[56] Kavanagh's

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[51] Heaney, "John Clare's Prog," 64.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Heaney, "From Monaghan to the Grand Canal" (1975), 116.
[54] Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, "Introduction," in *Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 1. See also Heaney's situating of Kavanagh in "Crediting Poetry (*OG*, 450-51).
[55] Monaghan was one of three Ulster counties to become part of the Irish Free State in 1922 (the other two being Donegal and Cavan). Thus, Kavanagh offered a regional, as well as a rural, link to Heaney.
[56] Kavanagh argued that: "Parochialism and provincialism are direct opposites. A provincial is always trying to live by other people's loves, but a parochial is self-sufficient…My idea of a cultural parochial entity was the distance a man could walk in a day in any direction…For me, my cultural parish was certain hills that I could see from my own hills…And those bicycle journeys that I made to

unsentimental but overtly appreciative rendering of his rural parish, as well as his sense of being an outsider in his own home as a result of his poetic vocation provided Heaney with a powerful father figure in the field of Ulster poetry.[57]

Kavanagh deliberately recorded his primary landscape with anti-pastoral flourish. In "Shancoduff," for instance, he describes the rugged and seemingly inhospitable quality of his homeground, noting that "My black hills have never seen the sun rising," which contains literal as well as symbolic significance.[58] Kavanagh emphasizes the outsiders' view of the land and its inhabitants as "poor," but also provides his own frank assessment of the roughness of his place as cold, remote and hard to farm. At the end of the poem, he asks "'Who owns them hungry hills / That the water-hen and snipe must have forsaken? / A poet? Then by heavens he must be poor.' / I hear and is my heart not badly shaken?" The question provides a key to unlocking Kavanagh's relation to his landscape. Elsewhere, Kavanagh wrote of the harshness and loneliness attached to the landscape of his youth, but he definitely did not feel "poor" as a poet. The tough realities of the land (with its "sleety winds") provided Kavanagh with rich material, and far from being offended by the negative assessments of others, he often reveled in celebrating an area that others would so readily disregard.

Kavanagh's ambitious anti-pastoral poem "The Great Hunger" (1942) concentrates with determined detail on the harshness of the land and life in the countryside. The title obviously refers to the Famine, and the poem loudly rebuts idealizations of rural culture; tracing not only the actual failure of crops, but also the more constant fear that goes along with farming.[59] "The Great Hunger" emphasizes the cruel reality of daily life in the countryside through an unemotional narrative voice, with precise metaphors used to describe the land and its inhabitants. The poem reveals a more negative vision than often found in Heaney's own work, yet it is the later Kavanagh that Heaney feels closest to. For, while Heaney's early poems record a world that at times borders on the Arcadian (more akin, perhaps, to *The Prelude* than "The Great Hunger"), this sense is countered by an undercurrent of fear

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the limits of my kingdom were the greatest adventures of my life." Quoted in Terence Brown, *Northern Voices: Poets from Ulster* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), 218.

[57] Incidentally, Heaney published his first book of poetry just one year before Kavanagh died in 1967, creating a sense that a poetic torch had been handed off in the realm of rural Ulster verse.

[58] Kavanagh, "Shancoduff," in *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. Paul Muldoon (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 24.

[59] See, for example, stanza XII. Kavanagh, "The Great Hunger," in *Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, 48.

and violence that pervades *Death of a Naturalist*, as Heaney also populates his landscape with frightening symbols such as rats and vengeful frogs. Further, Heaney's poems "The Early Purges" and "At a Potato Digging," reveal the severity of rural life, and create a sense in his early poetry of a child's coming to consciousness by trying to embrace the complexities of his experience.

Importantly, for the argument of this chapter, Heaney uses Kavanagh to distinguish between different ways (in the Irish tradition) of relating to place. He defines the two primary ways in the opening lines of his 1977 lecture "The Sense of Place":

> I think there are two ways in which place is known and cherished, two ways which may be complementary but which are just as likely to be antipathetic. One is lived, illiterate and unconscious, the other learned, literate and conscious.[60]

As Heaney's lecture concerns Ulster specifically, he offers Kavanagh as his example for the "lived, illiterate and unconscious," and John Montague to illustrate an awareness of place that is "learned, literate and conscious." Kavanagh's "fidelity to the unpromising, unspectacular countryside of Monaghan and his rendering of the authentic speech of those parts" was done without a larger "political purpose."[61] Kavanagh returned back to his homeground again and again because it was, quite simply, where his interests were, and thus he used the specificity invested in his poetry (names of local people and places) "to stake out a personal landscape" and give authenticity and immediacy to his scenes.[62] In contrast to Kavanagh, Montague sees a "prehistoric timelessness" in his homeground of County Tyrone, and place names take on a larger learning-inspired significance.[63] In his own poetry, Heaney has constantly shifted between the two approaches. The Bellaghy-related poems of *Door into the Dark* (1969) and *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) offer the clearest examples of Heaney's use of place as "lived," while poems in *Wintering Out* (1972), showing the direct influence of Montague, act as an overt exploration of a "learned" relationship to place. However, many of Heaney's poems about his homeground cannot be easily equated to one sense of place, and appear to straddle the two notions, thus blurring the lines of his own distinction.

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[60] Heaney, "The Sense of Place," 137-38.
[61] Ibid., 137.
[62] Ibid., 140.
[63] Quoted in Heaney, "The Sense of Place," 140.

Like Montague, in poems such as "Like Dolmens round my Childhood, the Old People,"[64] Ted Hughes often found a primordial timelessness in his home landscape in England, locating new origin myths in the Anglo-Saxon and Norse traditions.[65] Born in 1930 in West Yorkshire, Hughes' first two books of poetry *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960) made a big impact on Heaney's generation of poets. Heaney and Hughes became close friends, a friendship surely strengthened by their shared interest in the way that places mark poets and inform poetry. In a 1971 interview, Hughes expressed a strikingly similar view of poetic voice, intricately connected to the landscape and community of childhood, as that articulated by Heaney. Hughes explains:

> I grew up in West Yorkshire. They have a very distinctive dialect there. Whatever other speech you grow into, presumably your dialect stays alive as a sort of inner freedom…it's your childhood self there inside the dialect and that is possibly your real self or the core of it.…[66]

Similar to the way that Heaney fashions the pump at Mossbawn, Hughes claims a resonant symbol in the cliff that was visible from his childhood home in Yorkshire. The cliff functioned, in Heaney's analysis of Hughes' poetry, as the "equivalent in his poetic landscape of dialect in his poetic speech. The rock persists, survives, sustains, endures and informs his imagination, just as it is the bedrock of the language upon which Hughes founds his version of survival and endurance."[67] While this understanding was non-localized in much of Hughes' early poetry, through the pagan myths employed and the purposely coarse language, he also wrote two books of poetry completely devoted to his homeground: *The Remains of Elmet* (1979) and a revised and extended edition of *Elmet* (1994), which feature poems by Hughes alongside photographs of the area by Fay Godwin. These books, though written after Heaney's entry onto the poetic scene, nevertheless reveal Heaney and Hughes' shared investment in mapping the territory of their respective homegrounds. Hughes' *Elmet* volumes represent a concerted effort to render the complexities of his isolated Yorkshire homeground, a region he calls the "last independent Celtic

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[64] John Montague, "Like Dolmens round my Childhood, the Old People," in *Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, 182-84.
[65] See: Hughes, "The Hawk in the Rain" and "Wind," in *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957; repr., London: Faber and Faber, 1979), and "Thistles," in *Wodwo* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967).
[66] Hughes, *London Magazine* (January 1971). Quoted in Heaney, "Englands of the Mind" (1976), *Preoccupations*, 156.
[67] Heaney, "Englands of the Mind," 159.

kingdom in England."[68] The area was overtaken in the modern period by the mills and factories of the industrial revolution (described in one poem as a "womb" of "chymney after chymney"[69]), and then was marked by the subsequent decline of industry. As Hughes recalls "When I came to consciousness there in the 1930s, the process was already far gone…Gradually, it dawned on you that you were living among the survivors, in the remains."[70]

Hughes often informs his language and subjects with a need to retrieve something lost, and the landscape evoked in his early poetry is a powerful, if sometimes forsaken force, often suspicious of human inhabitants.[71] In *Lupercal* (1960), Hughes weaves myth and folklore with a calculated realism into the landscape of the poems. Hughes' grounding of poetry in a regional understanding of identity, along with the exactness of his descriptions, resonate in Heaney's early work, and several poems such as "Trout" and "Turkeys Observed" from *Death of a Naturalist*, reveal a debt that borders on mimicry. Hughes' technique, so appealing to Heaney, is typified by "View of a Pig" from *Lupercal*, where Hughes uses exact descriptions of the dead animal in order to strip the subject to "A poundage of lard and pork."[72] Boiling the pig down to its elements, the poem celebrates poetry's power to de-sentimentalize. Hughes' language and anti-pastoral tone offered Heaney an example of the way that language can wield a powerful and deliberate roughness, founded in a rural homeground.[73] Ultimately, Heaney's praise of Hughes as "a guardian spirit of the land and language," is also a powerful description of the aspirations of his own poetry.[74] As Heaney argued for Hughes' unique creation of an "England of the Mind," Heaney has persistently looked to his homeground to mark his 'Ireland of the Mind' with a distinct signature.

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[68] Hughes, "Notes: Elmet," in *Elmet*, poems by Ted Hughes, photographs by Fay Godwin (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 9

[69] Hughes, "The Dark River," in *Elmet*, 13.

[70] Ibid., 11. Further, in "First, Mills," the homeground is called his "childhood of earth," and the railway station is described as a "bottomless wound" that "bled this valley to death." The hills "were requisitioned / For gravemounds. / And the towns and villages were sacked," painting a very bleak landscape deserving, Hughes claims, of "two minutes' silence." Hughes, "First, Mills," in *Elmet*, 22.

[71] See: Heaney, "Englands of the Mind," 152-55. Hughes' landscape has been ominous from his earliest work. See: Hughes, "The Hawk in the Rain," in *The Hawk in the Rain*, 11.

[72] Hughes, "View of a Pig," in *Lupercal* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 40.

[73] However, as Michael Parker explains, part of the initial appeal of Hughes for Heaney was based on the differences in their upbringings. Heaney was keen to explore the physicality of his rural landscape as Hughes did for West Yorkshire, but Hughes' emphasis on the "animal and physical world…to express that 'thisness' by means of vigorous and vivid diction" and his "celebration of sublime power" was a sharp contrast to Heaney's "upbringing [that] had stressed humility and awe." Parker, *The Making of the Poet*, 44.

[74] Quoted on dust jacket of Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003).

III. GIVING "BACK YOUR OWN CALL": INTRODUCTIONS OF POET, LANDSCAPE AND VOICE IN *DEATH OF A NATURALIST* AND *DOOR INTO THE DARK*

> Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
> Over his shoulder, going down and down
> For the good turf. Digging.
> The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
> Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
> Through living roots awaken in my head.
> But I've no spade to follow men like them.
>
> Between my finger and my thumb
> The squat pen rests.
> I'll dig with it.
>
> Seamus Heaney, from "Digging" (*DN*, 3)

In "Remembering the Sixties," Michael Longley reflects, "in his spectacularly successful first collection *Death of a Naturalist* Heaney created from the Derry countryside and the smallholding around Bellaghy his 'soul-landscape,' to borrow Beckett's coinage, and brought to light a 'hidden Ulster.'"[75] Longley's use of the phrase "hidden Ulster" refers to Daniel Corkery's influential historical study *Hidden Ireland* (1924), and emphasizes the originality of Heaney's first collection, which brought a wealth of images from rural Northern Ireland into the realm of poetry.[76] Heaney consciously formed his early poetry largely from his earliest experiences, and by focusing on the characters found in his childhood in rural Derry he captured the natural wonders of his youth for a large readership in Ireland and elsewhere. Indeed, the Bellaghy-related poems from *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *Door into the Dark* (1969) are the best known and most frequently cited of all those that engage with Heaney's most familiar landscape. Longley's description of Bellaghy as Heaney's "soul-landscape" underlines the prominence of Heaney's childhood home within the overall space of Heaney's imaginative landscape (which Longley later echoes in his observation that Heaney "keeps reliving his

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[75] Longley, "Remembering the Sixties," Box 35, Folder 4, Emory.
[76] Daniel Corkery, *Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (1924) (Dublin and London: Gill and Macmillan, 1970). In his study, Corkery aims to illuminate the lives and works of Munster Gaelic poets, as he claims that mention of them and their world was missing from the mainstream studies of the period, written from an English bias. Implicit in his effort to write a missing history of the "native" Irish is the implication that he is uncovering a more true and real history, unknown by the contemporary citizens of Ireland.

childhood").[77] Heaney's hugely popular debut volume, in both commercial and critical terms, introduced a compelling new poetic voice *and* a landscape.

Longley's utilization of Corkery is doubly appropriate. *Death of Naturalist* did reveal a "hidden" part of Ireland, drawing on the Catholic hedge-school culture Corkery celebrates in his study of Munster poets, and bringing a landscape not often the subject of poetry into the domain of art. The Corkery allusion also indicates another important aspect of Heaney's first book; the use of poetry as a record of a disappearing way of life. As John Wilson Foster explains, Heaney, in *Death of a Naturalist*:

> …[is a] folklorist, recalling old customs that survived into his native Derry of the 1940s…. Heaney is no longer at one with his country origins, and so his rehearsal of the customs he witnessed or participated in as a child assumes the quality of incantation and commemoration.[78]

Corkery's study of eighteenth-century Gaelic poets from Munster offers a glimpse of a "hidden" and (Corkery argues) more "real" Ireland for new generations. However, Corkery clarifies that the cultural damage has been done, and the Gaelic community he documents is almost completely irretrievable. As Heaney explains, "Corkery's message was succinct and potent. 'We were robbed,' he said. We lost what made us what we are."[79] Comparably, Heaney's first book is deeply invested in cultural memory, and the poet seems always aware of his anthropological purpose, as the poems work to commemorate, as John Clare did for Helpston, a rural community on the verge of permanent change.

Heaney directly claims Corkery's study as an early inspiration, but the work of the geographer E. Estyn Evans arguably had a more direct impact on his first two books.[80] Heaney read Evans' work while studying at Queen's University Belfast, the period when he began to seriously write poetry.[81] Evans' *Irish Heritage: The Landscape the People and Their Work* (1942) and *Irish Folk Ways* (1957) were widely read and influential in turning both scholarly and more general attention in

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[77] Longley, "The Heaney Bash."
[78] Wilson Foster, *Achievement of Seamus Heaney*, 7.
[79] Corkery notes that to find the "Hidden Ireland of the Gaels…one must [leave] the cities and towns behind, venture among the bogs and hills, far into the mountains even, where the native Irish, as the pamphleteers and politicians loved to call them, still lurked." Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland*, 19-20. Heaney, "Among Schoolchildren," 8.
[80] On Corkery see: Heaney, "Among Schoolchildren," 8. Further, Michael Parker notes that "Heaney had been introduced to *The Hidden Ireland* while at St. Columb's, but he re-read the book in the early sixties, and gave a brief lecture on Corkery as part of the Belfast Festival of 1965." Parker, *The Making of the Poet*, 39. On Evans see: Wilson Foster, *Achievement of Seamus Heaney*, 7.
[81] See: Michael Parker, *The Making of the Poet*, 69.

Ireland back to the countryside. At the beginning of *Irish Heritage*, Evans introduces his subject matter by positing a significant disclaimer, which must have attracted Heaney's attention:

> The Ireland I am writing about is one which is passing away, and some of the customs and tools described and illustrated in the following pages have almost entirely gone, but I have learnt that it is rarely safe to use the past tense in writing about Irish matters....[82]

Thus, Evans' book offers itself partly as an artifact, as his descriptions of traditional practices on the verge of extinction preserve them for future generations, while he also subtly indicates the possibility of cultural retrieval, if mostly in terms of perception rather than action.[83]

Evans describes his interest in the first chapter of *Irish Folk Ways*, noting that the "charm of Ireland, north as well as south, lies as much in the colourful speech and old-fashioned ways of her people as in the beauty of her green fields...."[84] In a statement that anticipates the commercial success of *Death of a Naturalist* in England, Evans notes, "the observant visitor cannot fail to be attracted by customs and turns of speech, by traditions and tools which are obsolescent if not archaic in England."[85] The theme of anti-modernization, with its interest for audiences far removed from country life, is central to the immediate acclaim of *Death of a Naturalist*. Kennedy-Andrews, for example, contrasts Heaney's unique approach with that of the general arts scene of the 1960s:

> For here was what seemed to be another poet in the proud peasant tradition, after Kavanagh, intent on swimming against the current of cosmopolitan modernism...Old ways and dying arts were what Heaney offered the Swinging Sixties. While the really advanced literary youth were discovering Black Mountain or the experiments on the Continent or in Eastern Europe, Heaney was absorbed by the family farm, playing around its barns and wells and fields with an imagination schooled in the traditional Eng. Lit. canon of Wordsworth, Keats, Hopkins, Frost and Eliot.[86]

Just as Evans hoped that his work would "arouse interest among Irish readers in the treasure-house of the past in which they live," so too Heaney returns his readers to a world of traditional practices, and the simple magic found by concentrating on one's

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[82] E. Estyn Evans, *Irish Heritage: The Landscape, The People and their Work* (1942) (Dundalk: Dundalgan, 1958), 2.
[83] Longley also shows his appreciation for Evans' project, writing an introduction for a new edition of E. Estyn Evans, *Irish Folk Ways* (Dublin: Lilliput, 2003).
[84] Evans, *Irish Folk Ways* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), 1.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Kennedy-Andrews, "Introduction," in *Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 2.

own very small landscape.[87] Through his verse the personal and local world enter the world of cultural memory.

Critics have often grouped together *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark* because of their perceived shared themes. Both, for example, emphasize initiation and exploration. And, when placed beside the more radical departures of *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975), the first two volumes look like similar poetic exercises. Indeed, critics have struggled to differentiate *Door into the Dark* from Heaney's debut volume, because, as Thomas Foster articulates, "it is neither a clear beginning nor an arrival."[88] Both volumes contain many poems that describe rural subjects with a strikingly physical language, and share the disposition towards an anthropological purpose. The poems portray the Northern Irish countryside as alive and beautiful, but redolent with more ominous signs of violence and lurking danger. As a result of this local focus, certain critics have labelled Heaney's early work as 'parochial'; a term that carries many connotations. Yet, despite the term's negative connotations, it also suggests Kavanagh's positive formulation of parochial poetry as a way to ground poetry in particulars rather than in overly general and grand statements and identifications. Kavanagh's trust of the local as a more authentic identification also demonstrates its larger significance, as in "Epic" where Kavanagh equates the neighborhood dispute between Duffy and McCabe with events of international importance ("the Munich bother"), and considers the quarrel comparable to the material of the classical epics (as Homer explains to the poet, "I made the Iliad from such / A local row").[89] The work of John Montague and John Hewitt, also Ulster poets, further explore the importance of regionality in their poetry. Edna Longley's article "Northern Irish Poetry: Literature of Region(s) or Nation(s)," highlights the fact that "the most prominent unit of Northern Irish poetic territory is neither nation nor region but parish."[90] While it would be misleading to label Heaney's Bellaghy-related poetry as purely parochial, his early volumes

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[87] John Wilson Foster notes the similarity between Heaney's "Churning Day" and Evans' account of how to churn milk. Indeed, poems like "Churning Day" are so specific in their descriptions as to feel like instructional pieces. Wilson Foster, *Achievement of Seamus Heaney*, 7. Significantly, most of Heaney's readers would not have come from similar rural backgrounds, so paradoxically he takes us back to a past that may not have been our own.

[88] T. Foster, *Seamus Heaney*, 24.

[89] Kavanagh, "Epic," in *Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, 76.

[90] Edna Longley, "Northern Irish Poetry: Literature of Region(s) or Nation(s)?," *Swansea Review: Writing Region and Nation*, ed. J. A. Davies (Swansea: Univ. of Swansea Press, 1994), 63.

nevertheless approach "the matter of Ireland" through a distinctly local point of entry.[91]

"Digging," the first poem of his first volume, reveals a fundamental tension between affiliation and difference. Countless critics have discussed and dissected "Digging," but the basic metaphor the poem introduces between the spade and the pen continues to offer a powerful introduction into Heaney's themes and techniques.[92] Heaney locates his method of poetic excavation in his family's traditional working of the land (later applied forcefully in *North*), which demonstrates his desire to stay symbolically connected to his origins. "Digging" also introduces the characteristic diction used throughout *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*, which emphasizes the earthiness and physicality of his subjects. Employing harsh alliterative sounds with a heavy use of onomatopoeia, the "squelch and slap / of soggy peat," the poem paves the way for the "gross-bellied frogs" that haunt the poem "Death of a Naturalist" with the "slap and plop" of their "obscene threats," as well as the domestic sounds and smells of "Blackberry-Picking" and "Churning Day." In "Digging," the speaker worries that he isn't cut out for the manual labor of his father and grandfather, as he had "no spade to follow men like them" (*DN*, 4). Yet, Heaney reconciles the physical digging of his father with his job as poet by viewing the act of writing as a way of digging with a pen; a tool that can harvest the "living roots" in his head. To connect the two enterprises, Heaney recalls his grandfather's technique for obtaining quality peat by "Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods / Over his shoulder, going down and down / For the good turf. Digging." Implicitly, for Heaney, the method for obtaining good turf has much in common with the way to create a good poem. As Heaney explains in "Feeling into Words," a good poem has "the aura and authenticity of archaeological finds." This observation of "poetry as a dig" hints at the close relationship that Heaney perceives between place and memory.[93]

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[91] Zoutenbier, "The Matter of Ireland," 51. Heaney's point of contact through his childhood landscape contrasts with Michael Longley's adopted homeground that is not connected to his birthplace. However Longley, like Heaney, puts great artistic emphasis on recording the specifics of their respective primary landscapes.

[92] It is not possible to ignore the fact that though, in Heaney's words, the poem is "a big coarse-grained navvy of a poem," it is, Heaney claims, the "first poem I wrote where I thought my feelings had got into words, or to put it more accurately, where I thought my *feel* had got into words." Heaney, "Feeling into Words," 41 and 43.

[93] Heaney, "Feeling into Words," 41. For a much more thorough analysis, see Chapter 1 on *North*.

However, despite the solace he finds in "Digging," by highlighting the excavating potential of poetry, Heaney returns to his anxiety about departing from his family's traditional occupation in "Follower." The father and son trade places, with the father symbolically troubling his son's poetry, "stumbling / Behind me, and will not go away." As an "expert" with "a horse-plough," the father seems to linger in order to add doubt about the degree of the poet-son's expertise, as well as to question the connection between farm work and poetry. Yet, the title of the poem asserts that, at least on some level, Heaney does "follow" in his father's footsteps. The uncertain resolution between crafts is also visible in "Digging," because despite the apparent reconciliation, the poem does not totally rid itself of the initial assertion that "Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests; snug as a gun" (*DN*, 3). These opening lines alert the reader to Heaney's complex inheritance and historical moment. In retrospect, the edged innocence of poetic discovery sits ominously on the verge of unrest and violence. Crucially, *Death of a Naturalist* appeared in print before the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland, and therefore "Digging" seems to reveal the different paths and affiliations available to a poet of Heaney's age and background. The poem ultimately chooses to use the gift of language to "dig" for meaning, but the call of certain nationalist groups to employ a political art hovers uncomfortably in the background.[94]

The pen-as-gun analogy represents the first example of many indications of a countryside filled with dubious shadows and bubbling pressure. Consistent glimpses of the poet's fear challenge the seemingly safe boundaries of Heaney's childhood territory, as the ground itself appears to gurgle with an explicitly sexual violence. In "Death of a Naturalist," Heaney evokes this tension in the description of the hostility felt between the frogs and the human inhabitants of the townland, as the frogs' act of "invasion" clearly resonates with deeper implications. The first sentence introduces a rottenness in the community, "the flax-dam festered in the heart / Of the townland" (*DN*, 5), with the rotting flax offering a physical symbol for a more fundamental problem, as the alliteration of the *f* and *h* sounds ("heavy headed," "heart," "huge"), contributes to the general heaviness of the atmosphere. The narrator admits that at

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[94] While looking with the perspective of retrospect is only helpful to a certain extent, there is a natural inclination on the part of critics to use this type of logic, with sometimes insightful results. Harold Bloom, for instance, notes that *Death of a Naturalist* was championed for "its countryman's veracity and vividness of soil-sense" but in retrospect it comes across as "as a kind of dark hymn of poetic incarnation, a somber record of the transgression of having been a Clare-like changeling." Bloom, "Introduction," in *Modern Critical Views: Seamus Heaney*, 1.

the beginning he enjoyed the natural experiments, coaxed by Miss Walls' watered down version of procreation, but soon became conscious of the frightening ramifications. The vocabulary of the poem changes from imitating primary school talk to a more urgent language, peppered with violent metaphors: the fields are "rank" and the "angry" and "cocked" frogs sit "Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting." The poem tells the story of the boy's dual discovery in the natural world of sex and fear, as he comes to believe that the "great slime kings / Were gathered there for vengeance." Immediately after "Death of a Naturalist," "The Barn" recounts another fearful memory, and furthers the atmosphere of stagnancy, as the barn's "one door meant no draughts," and in summer "burned like an oven" that gave the sensation of cobwebs "clogging up your lungs" (*DN*, 7). Rather than running away as he did from the "slime kings" of "Death of a Naturalist," the child-narrator in "The Barn" is paralyzed and forced to find cover "face-down to shun the fear above." The hanging tools and musty smell invade his mind, and it becomes clear that we are in the overactive imagination of a child, as the poem engages perception by blurring the distinction between darkness and light, wakefulness and dreaming.[95] Described as an "armoury," the claustrophobic environment of the barn holds the child captive, and introduces the rats that haunt so many of the poems of Heaney's first book:

> The dark gulfed like a roof-space. I was chaff
> To be pecked up when birds shot through the air-slits.
> I lay face-down to shun the fear above.
> The two-lugged sacks moved in like great blind rats.
> (*DN*, 7)

Heaney does not conquer his fear of rats in "The Barn," but in the aptly titled subsequent poem "An Advancement of Learning," which details the child's triumph over his fear as he successfully wills himself to cross the bridge in spite of the "terror, cold, wet-furred, small-clawed" (*DN*, 9).

The mood of the first two volumes suggests a coming of age story, and as Jonathan Allison explains of "Digging," it is a "poem of solitude, even if it is also

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[95] Comparing *Death of a Naturalist*'s exploration of nature to Hughes' *Lupercal*, Roland Mathias observes that "There is no acceptance here, no marveling at an intricate and dangerous Nature for its own sake. On the contrary, the centre of Heaney's poetry is always human: the emphasis is on the boy's imagination, on the shaping of the natural world by increasing skill and understanding, in the end on the naturalness of man's centrality in his chosen environment." Mathias, "Death of a Naturalist," in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. Tony Curtis (Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan: Poetry Wales, 1982), 16.

written out of a strong sense of community."[96] Indeed, many of the poems chart the poet's individual path to a voice, which is at once embedded in and distanced from his foundational landscape. The child-poet gains the courage to cross the bridge in spite of the rat (though importantly the rodents resurface in "Blackberry-Picking," "The Early Purges" and "Personal Helicon"), and learns about the sexual habits of animals (often described with violently physical imagery). Heaney charts the awakening experiences of his youth in multiple poems from the first two volumes, in the already discussed "Death of a Naturalist" and "An Advancement of Learning," as well as in "Blackberry-Picking," "The Early Purges," and "The Outlaw." The fermenting cans of fruit in "Blackberry-Picking" picks up the festering conditions and "jampotfuls" of frogspawn in "Death of a Naturalist," and reveal the poet's bittersweet understanding of the difference between hope and reality. The "stinking" juice returned every year, for always the "sweet flesh would turn sour" (*DN*, 10). Unlike the narrator's surprise in "Death of a Naturalist" at the invasion of the bullfrogs, the speaker of "Blackberry-Picking" appears more experienced and resigned, as he admits that he "hoped they'd keep, knew they would not."

Further, "The Early Purges" conveys the necessity for rural toughness, as the young boy learns that problem-solving necessarily differs in the towns and the countryside, pitting idealism against practical realities. "The Early Purges" must be one of the poems that caused Harold Bloom to look back at *Death of a Naturalist* with the retrospect of the Troubles in mind, and find clear signs of an unhealthy violence, as the poem's overtly anti-pastoral subject concerns the first time the narrator "saw kittens drown" in the water of the oft-recalled pump.[97] The child's fear of the man in charge of kitten-purging contrasts with the adult's defense of the practice, and thus makes the tone of the final stanza purposely difficult to read:

> 'Prevention of cruelty' talk cuts ice in town
> Where they consider death unnatural,
> But on well-run farms pests have to be kept down.
> (*DN*, 13)

The poem partly relies on shock tactics, as the sentiment seems distanced from the tone of the majority of other poems in the first volume. It is striking that the boy, so troubled by the "three sogged remains" left to "turn mealy and crisp," would be able

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[96] Jonathan Allison, "Seamus Heaney and the Romantic Image," *Sewanee Review* 106.2 (April-June, 1998): 194.
[97] Bloom, "Introduction," 1.

to recognize the kittens as troublesome "'Bloody Pups.'" Perhaps the final statement should be read as an ironic acknowledgement of the gulf between theory and practice, as "Blackberry-Picking" revealed the chasm between his hopes and the actuality of the situation.

The overarching exploration in *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark* is of poetry itself. Heaney uses a host of rural figures as doubles for the poetic vocation, which illuminate the inherently artistic nature of his community, as well as explore different poetic techniques. For example, in "Thatcher" the thatcher "spent the morning warming up" before going about his work, which Heaney describes as a finely tuned artistic process of "pinning down his world, handful by handful." He is much like the poet who chooses metaphors and symbols to make a complete poem:

> Couchant for days on sods above the rafters,
> He shaved and flushed the butts, stitched all together
> Into a sloped honeycomb, a stubble patch,
> And left them gaping at his Midas touch.
> (*DD*, 8)

The "Midas touch" that the thatcher brings to his art, with his impressive ability to shape his medium, combines with the example of other countryside artists in training the poet, as Heaney shows himself to be an attentive student of cultural memory.[98] For instance, "The Diviner" introduces the artistic difference between craft and technique (trainable skills versus instinctive practices), representing for Heaney an example of "pure technique" having "a gift for being in touch with what is there, hidden and real…to make palpable what was sensed or raised."[99] The diviner goes about his search "professionally" (*DN*, 25), but Heaney depicts his job as an almost magical skill, allowing his audience to "have a try" only to capitalize on the impact of his own talent to stir the hazel stick. Similarly, "The Forge," the poem that includes the title phrase for Heaney's second volume, provides a bridge between the work of the blacksmith and the poet:

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[98] Of this practice Helen Vendler argues that "By choosing as his subject anonymous rural labourers, the young poet erects a memorial to the generations of forgotten men and women whose names are lost…it is immensely important to Heaney to note down those expert movements…." Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (Hammersmith: Fontana, 1999), 20.

[99] Heaney qualifies craft as "what you can learn from other verse. Craft is the skill in making," whereas technique "involves not only a poet's way with words…it involves also a definition of his stance towards life…a dynamic alertness that mediates between the origins of feeling in memory and experience and the formal ploys that express these in a work of art." Heaney, "Feeling into Words," 47-48.

All I know is a door into the dark.
Outside, old axles and iron hoops rusting;
Inside, the hammered anvil's short-pitched ring,
The unpredictable fantail of sparks
Or hiss when a new shoe toughens in water.
The anvil must be somewhere in the centre,
Horned as a unicorn, at one end square,
Set there immovable: an altar
Where he expends himself in shape and music.
(*DD*, 7)

Iron forging is usually considered a craft, but Heaney's sonnet attributes the blacksmith with technique and intuition, as he feels in darkness for his tools, and fashions his art in an atmosphere of "shape and music." The word-choice of "altar" also suggests a sacred calling or dwelling. The blacksmith offers an example of the purity attained by keeping the formula simple; just a man and his traditional tools, unencumbered by external pressures.[100] The creative space of the forge mirrors the personal and mysterious spaces of the mind, with the blacksmith offering the poet advice to find "the center," art's "altar," and then labor the idea into a final product by trusting your instincts.

Finally, Heaney's use of the Bellaghy landscape in his first two books of poetry demonstrates his fascination with the ground (discussed in relation to the primary metaphor in "Digging"), and makes the connection between the matter of his *homeground* and the matter of *Ireland* even stronger in subsequent books. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Heaney acknowledges that his interest in the ground sprung from a childhood "initiation":

> To this day, green, wet corners, flooded wastes, soft rushy tundra vegetation, even glimpsed from a car or a train, possess an immediate and deeply peaceful attraction. It is as if I am betrothed to them, and I believe my betrothal happened one summer evening, thirty years ago, when another boy and myself stripped to the white country skin and bathed in a moss-hole…we dressed again and went home in our wet clothes, smelling of the ground and the standing pool, somehow initiated.[101]

Heaney makes the connection between water, ground and sexuality especially clear in several poems from *Door into the Dark.* For instance, "Rite of Spring" recalls the first pumping of water (from Heaney's *omphalos* pump) after the winter freeze in the explicit terms of a sexual release, "…we lifted her latch, / Her entrance was wet, and

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[100] See: Kennedy-Andrews, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 26.
[101] Heaney, "Mossbawn: Omphalos," 19.

she came" (*DD*, 13). In "Undine," water, figured as a female nymph, becomes the poem's narrator to recount the procreative connection between herself and the human laborer of the land, serving as a type of guardian spirit of farming.[102] The man clears the irrigation pipe enabling her to gain "right of way in my own drains," thus she runs "quick for him" (*DD*, 14).[103] She is "disrobed" and, mutating into the life-water of the fields, allows the phallic "spade" to be stuck "deep in my flank" so she can swallow "his trench / Gratefully." The final stanza brings a climax to the exploration of the sexual partnership between water and the farmer whereby the nymph "alone / Could give him subtle increase and reflection. / He explored me so completely...."

The water-sex-earth triangle in "Undine" and "Rite of Spring" paves the way for a series of poems concerning Lough Beg and Lough Neagh ("At Ardboe Point," "Relic of Memory," "A Lough Neagh Sequence," and "Bann Clay"), locations near Heaney's childhood home. Dick Davis observes:

> The speaker of the poems in Heaney's first two books is like the father in his poem 'Follower,' 'His eye / Narrowed and angled at the ground, / Mapping the furrow exactly'- his vision is held largely at ground level, tracing the contours of earth and the ways in which it will open before the feet to give on to pond, lough, well, clay-pit, bog, shore-line. In each case solidity gives way to what is viscid, liquid, ungraspable, untrustworthy.[104]

Heaney's "ground level" perspective always recognizes the watery origins nearby, and in "Relic of Memory" the lough waters possess preserving qualities, which "petrify wood: / Old oars and posts" (*DD*, 25). The "piece of stone / On the shelf at school, / Oatmeal coloured" (*DD*, 25) is a "Relic of memory," but so too are the loughs' "give and take" that remain in the poet's consciousness. The poem emphasizes "memory" as Heaney moves from personal memory to territorial commemoration. The lough waters tell a story of a long association, the "sudden birth / Of burnt meteor / Are too simple," as the lapping water figures as "Incarcerate ghosts" that produce their geological work "over the years." Similarly, in "Bann Clay" laborers cut turf "Sunk / For centuries under the grass" that "Relieved its hoarded waters / And began to ripen" (*DD*, 40). The lough poems evoke a deep sense of chronological continuity that Heaney later invests with linguistic meaning in *Wintering Out* (1972). In "Bann Clay" the river is the home to "Mesolithic / Flints,"

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[102] Heaney has explained that in the Undine myth, the water-sprite has to marry a man and bear a child in order to become human, making the "cold girl" gain a "soul through the experience of physical love." Heaney, "Feeling into Words," 53.

[103] See the related discussion of Longley's eroticized landscapes in Section IV of Chapter 3.

[104] Dick Davis, "Door into the Dark," in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. Curtis, 29.

and in "A Lough Neagh Sequence" the lifecycle of eels emphasizes an enduring progression.[105] Davis' account of Heaney's unstable landscape compares to Longley's unstable position in his western homeground in poems such as "The West" and "Landscape." For both poets, their explorations of the "untrustworthy" nature of their primary landscapes are also accompanied by a persistent attempt to chart the unique contours of the landscapes in their poetry and a sense (however unstable) of historical continuity.

Finally, "Bogland," which I discussed in Chapter 1, connects Heaney's local landscape to the larger matter of Ireland. The narrator assumes a collective voice, asserting that in Ireland "We have no prairies / To slice a big sun at evening," and instead have the underground possibilities of the bog soil, the "black butter" that "Our pioneers keep striking / Inwards and downwards" (*DD*, 41). Clearly, Heaney understands the possibilities for "downward" exploration. As in "Digging," where one must go deep to get the "good turf," "Bogland" recovers items of cultural interest: "the skeleton / Of the Great Irish Elk" and butter "recovered salty and white." Heaney's conception of the "bottomless" possibilities to be found in the ground appeared in the first two volumes as a belief in the bottomless symbols of his homeground. Through local folklore, Heaney found a link between his family name and the "hankering for the underground side of things" demonstrated in his poetry. He explains:

> …I find it altogether appropriate that an old superstition ratifies this hankering for the underground side of things…In Gaelic times, the [Heaney] family were involved with ecclesiastical affairs…of a monastic site at Banagher in the north of the county…[and] there is a belief that sand lifted from the ground at Banagher has beneficent, even magical, properties, if it is lifted from the site by one of the Heaney family name. Throw sand that a Heaney has lifted after a man going to court, and he will win his case. Throw it after your team as they go out on the pitch, and they will win the game.[106]

Through poetry, his family name and history could have a similar significance in modern times as they enjoyed in "Gaelic times." In Heaney's first two books of poetry he embraces the "magical" properties of the ground of his primary landscape, its activities and people, and extends the landscape's significance for a world-wide

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[105] Wilson Foster argues that the poem comes "out of the dark recesses of the poet's psyche and across his consciousness. These fears threaten with ancient, magical, and malign power, yet they curiously lend the poet's world its shape and continuity." Wilson Foster, "'A Lough Neagh Sequence:' Sources and Motifs," in *Modern Critical Views: Seamus Heaney*, 49.

[106] Heaney, "Mossbawn: Omphalos," 20-21.

audience, making a personal memory-place a poetic resource. By depicting the landscape of his childhood with Wordsworthian persistence, Heaney also reaches out to larger issues of Irish cultural memory, like Corkery and Evans, arguing for the particularly "Irish" importance of his rural homeground.

IV. "THROUGH VOWELS AND HISTORY": LANDSCAPE AND LANGUAGE IN THE ETYMOLOGICAL EXPERIMENTS OF *WINTERING OUT*

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

vestigial, forgotten
like the coccyx
or a Brigid's Cross
yellowing in some outhouse

Seamus Heaney, from "Traditions," (*WO*, 31)

In "The Sense of Place" Heaney quotes from American novelist Carson McCullers that "to know who you are, you have to have a place to come from."[107] Heaney's etymological poems of *Wintering Out* (1972) seek to understand his homeground in historical terms rather than the more overtly personal framework of *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*, by delving into the complicated linguistic history of words and place-names connected to his local landscape.[108] The place-name poems of *Wintering Out* marked a new stage in Heaney's relationship to his primary landscape. The poems now seem to be the fruit of a particular historical moment, much as Longley's appeal to poetic solidarity in *An Exploded View* (1973) can be read as growing out of the same troubled time. Written primarily between 1969 and 1972, the poems of *Wintering Out* correspond chronologically with Longley's volume. Both volumes offer a poetic response to years that witnessed the

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[107] Heaney, "The Sense of Place," 135.
[108] See: Andrew Waterman, "The best way out is always through," in *Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Kennedy-Andrews, 15; Bernard O'Donoghue, *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry* (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994).

idealistic and pacific hopes of the student-led civil rights movement escalate into violence, terror and suppression from both paramilitary groups and the police.[109] Heaney dedicated the volume to Longley and the Northern Irish folk musician David Hammond, his partners in the "Room to Rhyme" program which involved the three touring the province in 1968 in an overtly cross-confessional grouping.[110] The dedicatory poem of *Wintering Out* introduces an atmosphere of civil war, but also of community as the stifling environment is shared (indicated by the important "we" of the last line). They are mutually in "a bad dream with no sound" (*WO*, 5), and, in a pessimistic extending of solidarity, left to "hug *our* little destiny again."[111] Importantly, the dedication shows Heaney's sense that Longley's poetry also attempts to reveal the complexities of identity – cultural and personal – in terms of landscape. The title of the volume (taken from "Servant Boy") also indicates a change in direction for Heaney.[112] No longer merely exploring the child's world, the adult poet asserts the need to dig for the deeper roots of the contemporary problem in order, as the phrase "wintering out" implies, to survive the crisis.[113] The ironic statement of "Competence with pain, / coherent miseries…" made in the dedicatory poem still indicates Heaney's intention in the volume to try and make some sense out of the current downwards-spiraling situation. In his search for the origins of 'the problem' Heaney intermixes his own origins, and uses his childhood *lieu de mémoire* to understand the larger forces of history and language.

In an 1977 interview with Seamus Deane, Heaney admitted that in writing the poems of *Wintering Out* he felt:

> …a great sense of release…a joy and devil-may-careness, and that convinced me that one could be faithful to the nature of the English language – for in some senses these poems are erotic mouth-music by and out of the Anglo-

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[109] See: Paul Arthur and Keith Jeffery, *Northern Ireland since 1968* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1995 and the Search for Peace* (London: Hutchinson, 1995); F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 2nd ed. (Glasgow: Fontana, 1974), 760-80; and A. C. Hepburn, "Northern Ireland conflict," in *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, ed. S. J. Connolly, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 412.

[110] Like Longley, Hammond was raised in a Protestant family in Belfast. Hammond's occupation as a folk musician challenges the rigid dichotomy of Catholic versus Protestant characteristics and interests.

[111] Emphasis my own. The poem is also reproduced as Part IV in "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" (*N*, 55).

[112] The poem begins: "He is wintering out / the back-end of a bad year," and ends with an image of the boy as one of the native Irish, frustrated to be serving at "the back doors of the little / barons: resentful / and impenitent, / carrying the warm eggs" (*WO*, 17).

[113] In Ulster idiom 'to winter out' means to see through. Michael Parker notes that it is "derived from a farming custom" where cattle eat little during the winter months, but then are fattened with the coming of spring and summer. Parker, *The Making of the Poet*, 89-90.

> Saxon tongue – and, at the same time, be faithful to one's own non-English origin – for me that is County Derry.[114]

Heaney's "non-English origin" in Country Derry was obviously the primary landscape in the first two books, but he made the connection between politics and his homeground at rather oblique angles in those volumes. *Wintering Out* represents a more assertive and constructed approach to the questions of identity and language, because in part Heaney must have wanted to break out of the box that critics had started to seal him in. Christopher Ricks, for example, asserted that Heaney's second volume "consolidate[d]" him as "the poet of muddy-booted blackberry picking," while Harold Bloom admits that he put *Door into the Dark* aside "with the sad reflection that Heaney was fixated in a rugged but minimalist lyrical art."[115] However, *Wintering Out* extends the audible ruggedness of the previous books, which "set the darkness echoing" (*DN*, 46), and also looks to the origins of words as "bearers of history and mystery."[116] Nils Eskestad argues that the etymological poems of *Wintering Out* sought "not merely to establish a link with the Irish dimension, but just as much to bring the three linguistic strains of Ulster – Irish, Scots, and Elizabethan English – into some kind of alignment."[117] Ireland's history plays out in miniature form through Heaney's etymological readings of local place-names, as he inscribes them with significant political symbolism. As Henry Hart astutely observes, the poems "drew mythic and political force from the Protestant and Catholic conflicts raging beneath their linguistic surfaces."[118] Thus, the poems operate, as Wilson Foster asserts, as "stanzaic steps down and back through origins, declensions to what they grew up and out of."[119]

The first poem, "Fodder," launches the reader into the territory of local linguistic usage, "Or, as we said, / *fother*" (*WO*, 7). The poem reveals an exposed poet, seeking the safe and filling sensation of childhood, symbolized by the hay that could provide comfortable bedding, as well as seal the cracks of "half-doors," and soak up "mucky gaps." Many of the etymological poems center around water, but

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[114] Heaney, "Interview with Seamus Deane" (1977), in *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies: 1977-1981*, eds. M. P. Hederman and R. Kearney (Dublin: Blackwater, 1982), 70.
[115] Christopher Ricks, "Lasting Things," *Listener* (26 June 1969): 900; and Bloom, "Introduction," 1.
[116] Heaney, "Feeling into Words," 45.
[117] Nils Eskestad, "Negotiating the Canon: Regionality and the Impact of Education in Seamus Heaney's Poetry," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 29.4 (October 1998): 11.
[118] Henry Hart, "Seamus Heaney's Anxiety of Trust in *Field Work*," *Chicago Review* 36.3-4 (1989): 87.
[119] Wilson Foster, *Achievement of Seamus Heaney*, 27.

here the water nymph is less a sexual partner than in "Undine" (and later in *North*) and more an assuaging and educating presence. For example, the "riverbank" deposits in "Broagh" (*WO*, 27) express the linguistic history of Heaney's homeground, as the first line purposely moves from words of Irish, Scottish and Middle-English origin. In "Riverbank, the long rigs / ending in broad docken / and a canopied pad / down to the ford," "Riverbank" links with the title to recall the Irish word *bruach*, while the word "rigs" has a Scottish origin meaning riverside field, and in Middle-English "docken" signifies a coarse waterside plant. The historical dispossession of Gaelic is subtly recounted, but the ultimate statement in the poem concerns pronunciation rather than etymology: "the last / *gh* the strangers found / difficult to manage." For Heaney, this brings the disparate communities of Northern Ireland together, as both Catholics and Protestants, unlike the "strangers," have the guttural accent to pronounce "broagh" with ease.[120]

Water is a healing presence in the poem, as the river admits its different linguistic traditions, and meanders into a more fluid understanding of contemporary identity. "Broagh" seems to imply optimistically that if left on their own without the help of "strangers," the different communities of Northern Ireland could ultimately find (like their mutual intonation of the "*gh*" sound) shared ground.[121] I believe that the poem also alludes to the idea of having a brogue, the accent associated primarily with English speaking Irish. Heaney consciously uses the fact that he writes and speaks in English to bridge the differences between the diverse traditions of Northern Ireland (as symbolized by linguistic roots), enabling him to be "faithful to the nature of the English language…and, at the same time, be faithful to one's own non-English origin." In *Wintering Out*, Heaney is much closer to Montague than Kavanagh's sense of place, as the book shares an interest in what he credits as Montague's "sounding lines, rods to plumb the depths of a shared and diminished culture."[122] However, Montague's *The Rough Field* (1972) is a more overtly political sequence, as Heaney in *Wintering Out* is not interested primarily in "tribal etymological implications," but in the way that acknowledging the different linguistic traditions which have coalesced to create his personal voice and the history of his homeground

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[120] See: O'Donoghue, *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry*, 63.
[121] Kennedy-Andrews, *Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 55-6.
[122] Heaney, "The Sense of Place," 141.

can possibly break down "tribal" understandings.[123] Bernard O'Donoghue, for instance, uses "Broagh" and "Anahorish" to show that Heaney does not "establish their difference from the standard by etymological scrutiny like Montague's but by phonological distancing…."[124] "Broagh" repossesses and strengthens for both Catholic and Protestants a new claim to the English language by "planting in [English] sounds that are difficult to reproduce, and by taking over words of English origin but now of local Irish provenance."[125] Further, in "Traditions," Heaney quotes Joyce's Leopold Bloom to emphasize a more inclusive claim to Irishness (that implicitly includes Northern Irish Protestants), as Bloom "sensibly" explains that his nation is Ireland because "'I was born here. Ireland'" (*WO*, 32).[126] The politics of memory and language are here intimately allied.

One of the most powerful poems in the volume, "Gifts of Rain," is a meditation in a time of crisis. In the poem, Heaney returns to his homeground to reconnect with his origins, but is initially insecure about his identification with those once intimate places, and uncertainly makes "soundings" (*WO*, 23). He portrays this distance in the third person address whereby the poet envisions himself "wading lost fields" and "grop[ing] the cropping land." These images could represent both the contours of his homeground and the larger "lost fields" of Northern Ireland. Although the River Moyola ultimately becomes an assuaging presence, the poem opens ominously with a description of flood conditions: "Cloudburst and steady downpour now / for days." In sections III and IV the sounds of the river serve to educate the poet and make him once more at home in the landscape. The "Moyola harping on" teaches the poet much as the River Derwent caused Wordsworth's voice to be in tune with his environment, by reminding Heaney of the possibility of continuity. By listening to the water Heaney hears "the shared calling of blood," and remembers the "Soft voices of the dead" of all the lives lost to violence, which remind him that, "for my children's sake," he has a responsibility to look for "common ground." As in "Anahorish," where the memory of his "'place of clear water'" (*WO*, 16) reminds the poet of the affirmative connections between his original place and his voice, the Moyola acts as the spirit of the place. With its

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[123] Ibid.
[124] O'Donoghue, *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry*, 13.
[125] Ibid., 64.
[126] See: Wilson Foster *Achievement of Seamus Heaney*, 16; and James Joyce, *Ulysses, The Corrected Text*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (London: Bodley Head, 1986) l. 1431, 272.

"tawny guttural water" that "spells itself," the river offers an example of endurance, "breathing its mists / through vowels and history" ("Gifts of Rain," *WO*, 25). By maintaining its flow through the course of linguistic and cultural changes, the river ultimately incorporates the seemingly distanced and disparate traditions; as both poet and river become a "hoarder of common ground" (*WO*, 25). The poem acknowledges the poet's dual responsibility to art and community, with the river "swell[ing] in Heaney's memory to mythic proportions" offering "a model for linguistic integrity as it rolls along unaffected by cultural upheaval."[127]

Heaney's new linguistic and cultural participation continues in "A New Song," which arranges the place-names of local towns and villages and challenges them to go together for an Irish take-over of the English tongue. However, "A New Song" finds less "common ground" than "Gifts of Rain" or "Broagh" as it ultimately uses place-names to reinforce the entrenched positions of colonist versus colonized.[128] Heaney describes the Gaelic derived "Derrygarve" as "a lost potent musk" whose name recalls "the river's long swerve," while the overtly planter and Protestant origin of places such as "Castledawson" and "Upperlands" (the "planted bawn") are "enlist[ed]" to add their voices to "flood, with vowelling embrace, / Demesnes staked out in consonants" (*WO*, 33). The girl from Derrygarve, a "chance vestal daughter," relates to Heaney's association elsewhere of the Gaelic language as a feminine presence in contrast to the masculine English tradition, discussed in Chapter 1. Kennedy-Andrews reminds us that the use of the word "resumed" in the final stanza can either point to repossession by the "native Irish" or a return to origins that can be shared by both communities.

Perhaps because of this complexity, Edna Longley argues that rather than finding commonality, "A New Song" bases its meaning on "binary opposition[s]," which "belies the complexity not only of Ulster place-names but of the English language in Northern Ireland," and in doing so "annexes Northern Irish poetry to a Nationalistic model."[129] Indeed, like Edna Longley, I believe that through the employment of loaded phrases like "native haunts," "planted bawn" and "bleaching-greens," Heaney does replay the planter history of Protestant possession of Catholic

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[127] Burris, *Poetry of Resistance*, 86.
[128] In "The Wool Trade" (*WO*, 37), Heaney also engages with the question of language retrieval and loss, and starts with Joyce's quote by Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* that "'How different are the words 'home', 'Christ', 'ale', 'master', on his lips and on mine.'"
[129] E. Longley, "Northern Irish Poetry: Literature of Region(s) or Nation(s)?," 69.

lands, and thus sets the final shared linguistic challenge against a background of conquerors and conquered (even if they are called to join the same cause). Related to this is Heaney's explanation of the realization of cultural dispossession:

> What came to fill the gap between the parish and the academy, between the culture of the GAA [Gaelic Athletic Association] hall and the culture of Shakespeare, what realigned my sense of belonging to a place with the attendant sense of displacement, was, first of all, Daniel Corkery and his potent monocular vision of *The Hidden Ireland*. Corkery's message was succinct and potent. 'We were robbed,' he said. We lost what made us what we are. [130]

Further, Patrick Rafroidi explains that the "nature of Seamus Heaney's interest in places is undoubtedly to be found in such ancestral practice [as *dinnseanches*], as well as in the dispossession and in the political desire to repossess; in instinct as well as culture."[131] Repossession is a "political desire," and while Heaney often repositions language to carry a more inclusive understanding of identity in *Wintering Out*, "A New Song" falls back on a less productive dialectical understanding of history. However, while Edna Longley takes "A New Song" to highlight Heaney's lack of historical sensitivity more generally, I think that the *Wintering Out* experiments largely succeed in their purpose of finding similarities, even at the cost of sometimes feeling overly prescribed in their push to show Ulster's long history of language integration.

Though it doesn't specifically dissect language, Louis MacNeice's poem "Carrickfergus" sheds interesting light on Heaney's project in *Wintering Out* of reading the homeground for matters of larger historical and cultural importance. MacNeice describes his childhood landscape in order to confront the opposing influences which combined to form his complicated sense of identity:

> The Norman walled this town against the country
> To stop his ears to the yelping of his slave
> And built a church in the form of a cross but denoting
> The list of Christ on the cross in the angle of the nave.
>
> I was the rector's son, born to the Anglican order,
> Banned for ever from the candles of the Irish poor;
> The Chichesters knelt in marble at the end of a transept
> With ruffs about their necks, their portion sure.[132]

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[130] Heaney, *Among Schoolchildren*, 8.
[131] Patrick Rafroidi, "The Sense of Place in Seamus Heaney's Poetry," *Studies on Seamus Heaney*, ed. Jacqueline Genet (Caen: Centré de publications de l'Université de Caen, 1987), 82.
[132] Louis MacNeice, "Carrickfergus," in *Poems selected by Michael Longley* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 22.

MacNeice frames his identity in the historical complexities of the landscape as the town's old divisions remained alive in his childhood. His religion, "born to the Anglican order," serves to forever displace him from the type of devotion and community of the Catholic "Irish poor." Edna Longley explains that "Carrickfergus" "provides an enduringly powerful image for the interdependence of religion and politics, the collusion between castle and church" and is "prototypical in presenting a nexus of place, autobiography and history. Intertwined or tangled in the conditioning of the child and poet are: the advent of Normans, Scots and the Reformation…."[133] A poem named after a place becomes a poem about historical memory as well as a personal memoir. Similarly, Heaney traces these influences through the word-hoard of his local community. For example, in "The Other Side," Heaney describes a Protestant neighbor and investigates the differences between the two religious communities in order to discover areas of commonality. Though the Protestant farmer whose land bordered Mossbawn comes across as self-righteous, the poet ultimately views him affectionately. The poem confirms certain stereotypes of both communities: the Protestant farmer remarks that the Heaney's farmland is "poor as Lazarus" (*WO*, 34-35), with his "tongue of chosen people" that rules over his own "promised furrows / on the hill," but the Protestant's presence acts as the positive impetus for the poet to think about how his Catholic household looks to an outsider. The poet wonders if he should ever excuse himself from the rituals of Catholic prayer in order to strike up a conversation as his neighbor "taps a little tune with the blackthorn / shyly" as "if he were party to / lovemaking or a stranger's weeping" while waiting for the litany to end. Heaney's imagined conversation, "about the weather / or the price of grass-seed," reveals the significant barriers to deep exchange between the two religious communities, but also shows a desire on the part of both sides to make gestures and find a starting point for dialogue, however limited. The poem reveals Heaney's awareness of the existence of oppositional mnemonic frameworks between Catholics and Protestants, as explored in Ian McBride's *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, but it also cautiously suggests how breaking down such entrenched positions can start with individuals thinking from the other group's perspective.[134]

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[133] E. Longley, "Northern Irish Poetry: Literature of Region(s) or Nation(s)?," 66.
[134] See: Ian McBride, "Introduction: memory and national identity in modern Ireland," in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 1-42.

Wintering Out does not see the end of Heaney's poetic etymology. In "Belderg," from *North*, for example, Heaney examines the etymology of Mossbawn, which harks back to the place-name poems of the previous volume. In the poem, a visit to Mayo makes the narrator recall the complexities found in the name of his family farm, which explicitly also concerns the complexities of Northern Ireland:

> So I talked of Mossbawn,
> A bogland name. 'But *moss*?'
> He crossed my old home's music
> With older strains of Norse.
> (*N*, 4)

However, Heaney further complicates the reading of Norse "moss" by stating that "I could derive / A forked root from that ground, / Make bawn an English fort…" or "else find sanctuary / And think of it as Irish." As I noted earlier, Heaney has also meditated on the etymology of Mossbawn in prose as "a metaphor of the split culture of Ulster."[135] Ultimately, as Chapter 1 demonstrated, *North* doesn't allow Heaney to find "sanctuary" in an elevation of one tradition as "Belderg" hinted he might. Instead, it disturbingly shows the fruits of Northern Ireland's historical tangling. After the constricting experiment of *North*, Heaney returns in later books to the linguistic territory of *Wintering Out*, but uses it for different purposes.[136]

Though not explicitly etymological, "Terminus" from *The Haw Lantern* (1987), in many ways returns to the thematic territory of the place-name poems of *Wintering Out*. The title refers to the Roman god of boundaries, which instantly alerts the reader to Heaney's general fascination with how one is marked by place. The poem details the ways that Heaney "grew up in between," and uses the distinctions to make a statement about the long-term effects of such a precarious position. Offering three examples (naturalist, geographical and technological) to reveal the years of his childhood as a shift from traditional to newer technology in his rural community, he asks "Is it any wonder when I thought / I would have second thoughts?" (*HL*, 4). The second section of the poem continues this sentiment as he is placed between communities (symbolized in geographical terms), "Suffering the limit of each claim." The poem's final section begins with a local adage in order to map his place in the landscape:

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[135] Heaney, "Belfast: 1972," 35.
[136] See: "The Singer's House" (*FW*, 27); "Glanmore Sonnets: V" (*FW*, 37); and "Perch" (*EL*, 4).

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

My left hand placed the standard iron weight.
My right tilted a last grain in the balance.

Baronies, parishes met where I was born.
When I stood on the central stepping stone

I was the last earl on horseback in midstream
Still parleying, in earshot of his peers.
(*HL*, 5)

These lines place the poet in a middle-ground across both space and time. The earlier sections of the poem probed the reasons behind Heaney's trait of having poetic "second thoughts" (as he has repeatedly questioned his own themes and past decisions, and re-evaluated the relationship between community and art), and the third section emphasizes the unproductive position of being held by cultural boundaries. By imagining himself as Hugh O'Neill, the "last earl on horseback," Heaney acknowledges the dangers of being torn in different directions, as O'Neill found himself at a terminus, where he could still "parley" with his enemy the Earl of Essex, but could not find a way out of their historically determined positions.[137] "Terminus" reveals cultural boundaries as entrapping, but not in the sense explained by McBride. Heaney views these boundaries as things "to be crossed rather than to be contested,"[138] and thus again positions himself as a negotiator between communities, languages and traditions. Heaney's etymological experiments assert his role as a recorder of origins, and as a custodian of cultural memory grounded in the contours of his primary landscape.

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[137] Heaney notes that O'Neill was the last "native leader to hold out against the Tudor armies of Queen Elizabeth I," but "the first to suffer within himself the claims of two different political allegiances that still operate with such deadly force inside Northern Ireland to this day." O'Neill was Earl of Tyrone because of the Queen's grace, but as he was born in Ireland (and "descended from the mythic Irish leader Niall of the Nine Hostages") he also was positioned as the "defender of the Gaelic interest against the English." Heaney, "Something to Write Home About," 54-55.
[138] Ibid., 56.

V. "SO TAKE IT, FOR A WORD-HOARD AND A HANDSEL": THE LINGUISTIC INHERITANCE

…As from his small window
The astronaut sees all he has sprung from,
The risen aqueous, singular, lucent O
Like a magnified and buoyant ovum –

Or like my own wide pre-reflective stare
All agog at the plasterer on his ladder
Skimming our gable and writing our name there
With his trowel point, letter by strange letter.

Seamus Heaney, "Alphabets" (*HL*, 3)

Heaney connects his voice to his origins, specifically to the landscape of his childhood, as evidenced by the discussion of his *omphalos* in first section. As Robert Welch reminds us, "From start to finish [Heaney] wants to speak of the source; and he wants his language to have the weight, drive and authority that poetry originating in a source should have."[139] By consciously attaching his distinctive voice to the Bellaghy area, since *Wintering Out*, Heaney has also developed a more abstract connection to place through language, shifting the balance from a purely "geographical country" to a "country of the mind."[140] By the time that he wrote "Alphabets," in *The Haw Lantern* (1987), fifteen years after *Wintering Out*, Heaney examines the relationship between language, history and place in a much more complex cultural framework – with a different sense of the materiality of language.

In "Alphabets," Heaney traces the way that people learn about letters and writing, starting with his earliest memories when his father "makes with joined hands / And thumbs and fingers nibbles on the wall" and the young Heaney "understands / He will understand more when he goes to school" (*HL*, 1). Once at school, he engages in "'copying out,'" relating letters and numbers to their shapes, so "Y" is a "forked stick," while "2" is the "swan's neck and swan's back," before continuing on through secondary school, university, and life as an internationally renowned poet. Thus, by taking us through his process of education and language acquisition, the poem charts a trajectory from the local to the universal. Even as Heaney goes farther and farther from the first image, he subtly enforces his fidelity to his origins through

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[139] Robert Welch, "'A rich young man leaving everything he had': Poetic Freedom in Seamus Heaney," in *Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Kennedy-Andrews, 150.
[140] Phrases taken from Heaney, "The Sense of Place," 132.

descriptions that recall his rural environment (capital letters are "orchards in bloom," his early "poet's dream" passes into "tenebrous thickets," he drives a "team of quills on his white field" instead of a horse and plough). The poem's final image of an "astronaut" looking back to the "lucent O" of Earth, brings attention to how far he has come since his first lessons (seeing "all he has sprung from"), with his father making signs, but more importantly relates language's continued ability to captivate. Though his early school has since been "bulldozed," his connection to the written language learned remains resilient, and "Can still command him" (*HL*, 2-3). Here, Heaney does not focus on Irish etymology or local place-names, but on Latin ("new calligraphy that felt like home"). The learned scripts of the classroom, Latin, Greek, Irish as well as Shakespearean English seem a far cry from the "black O" in "Broagh" (*WO*, 27) that focused on the actual soil of his homeground. The older poet, looking at his source as if from space, experiences, Heaney claims, a similar sensation to what he felt as a child, watching the "plasterer on his ladder" write out the letters to spell "HEANEY" on the "gable" at Mossbawn. Words and the process of learning continue to be a "strange" and mysterious process, with the return to the local emphasizing just how much the power of written language can still fascinate.

Seeing Things (1991), the book immediately following *The Haw Lantern*, furthers the abstract relation to place as the first and most important source of language.[141] As "Alphabets" embraces the "strange" and thus always slightly elusive qualities of language, *Seeing Things* eagerly credits "marvels," including those found in the music of words, and sees the poet revel in taking away the "in placeness" of poems. In the sonnet "Fostering," a title that sends the reader back to other poems about mentors (among them "Fosterage" from "Singing School" in *North*, "Alphabets," and "Station Island"), Heaney admits that language can get stuck in the "lowlands of the mind," and become bogged down with "in-placeness" (*ST*, 52). Now the poet, "nearly fifty" claims his readiness to leave behind "sluggish" poetry, the overly grounded, and "credit marvels." Heaney symbolizes this "sluggish" language and concreteness of the poetic process as a landscape, the "immanent hydraulics of a land." In section *xix* of "Settings," Heaney uses a technique similar to that used in "Alphabets," but with places of memory rather than language pushed to the forefront. Evoking a classically derived mnemonic technique of remembering

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[141] See Heaney's explanation of place as absence in "The Placeless Heaven: Another Look at Kavanagh" (1985), in *The Government of the Tongue*, 3-14.

images by imagining them in specific places, as explained in Frances A. Yates' *The Art of Memory*,[142] Heaney's memory landscape is "Well lighted, well laid out…" (*ST*, 73). Familiar places are "linked deliberately / With a code of images," which enables the poet to rifle through his collection of images and places in a "meaningful order," lined up like "*Tableaux vivants*."[143] Thus, in the poem Heaney taps into a literary tradition that is Yatesian rather than Yeatsian. As Neil Corcoran notes, "the lost art of memory is read into the poet's own memorial processes in one of his earliest childhood 'settings'" with the larger sequence devoted to the art of "portent and concentration, since to know portent in a setting is fully to appreciate the miraculousness of the ordinary…."[144] Heaney returns to the area of his childhood home, the center of his imaginative landscape, in order to see with changed eyes the marvelousness of the familiar setting, while using schemata and iconography learned elsewhere.

Further, in "Squarings: *xl*" Heaney makes a bridge between the "ancient dampish feel / Of a clay floor" in the house at Mossbawn (his "Ground of being") with his real inheritance from childhood: "cold memory-weights / To load me, hand and foot, in the scale of things" (*ST*, 94). His connection to his homeground now appears conceptual, but the remembered physical sensation of being attached to something solid retains a crucial significance. The memories of his early experiences become a gauge that enables him to calculate "the scale of things" later in life. In the 1998 critical piece "Something to Write Home About," Heaney returns to the subject of "Squarings: *xl*":

> In the kitchen of the house where I grew up there was a cement floor, and one of my first memories is the feel of its coldness and smoothness under my feet…I'll never forget the contact of warm skin and cold floor, the immediate sensation of surprise; and then something deeper, more gradual, a sensation of consolidation and familiarity, the whole reassuring foundation of the earth coming up into you through the soles of your feet…When my feet touched the floor, I knew I was on my way somewhere, but at the time I could not have said exactly where. Nowadays I would say it was to poetic discovery.[145]

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[142] Yates, *The Art of Memory* (1962; repr., London: Pimlico, 2003).
[143] Connected to the way that Heaney describes his ability to return to places via specific images in "Settings: xix," in "At the Wellhead" song is depicted in its capacity to transport one back to a specific location through its associations. Listening to his wife sing "with your two eyes closed" (*SL*, 65), Heaney describes her songs as "like a local road / We've known every turn of in the past." Her voice has the ability to take her back to the source of her original music, as Heaney urges her to "Sing yourself to where the singing comes from."
[144] Corcoran, *Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 183.
[145] Heaney, "Something to Write Home About," 52.

Heaney's sensation of "consolidation and familiarity," here attributed to the contact between "warm skin and cold floor," relates to his much earlier description of the water pump as marking "an original descent into earth, sand, gravel, water" that "centred and staked the imagination."[146] Indeed, the next poem "Squarings: *xli*," engages the idea of the *omphalos*, as the poet swims through his memories with the "very currents of memory" (*ST*, 95) originating in the "gravel-bed" of his childhood landscape. The "banks of self," found in the "river pleasures" of returning to his collection of memories, expands to include "Everything accumulated ever." Thus, like "Alphabets," it moves from a personal to a more universal statement. The poet, now middle-aged, recognizes that memories are "places" to return to. However, they cannot "last," mutating over time and residing in the changing waters of the mind.

Heaney offers an anecdote that helps clarify his increased metaphysical connection with his childhood landscape by relating a story about a tree planted at Mossbawn in 1939, the year of his birth. He claims that "over the years I came to identify my own life with the life of the chestnut tree." After his family moved from Mossbawn, the new owners cut down the tree and "for years I gave no particular thought to the place." However, "all of a sudden" the cut tree held new meaning for him:

> I began to think of the space where the tree had been or would have been. In my mind's eye I saw it as a kind of luminous emptiness, a warp and waver of light…this time it was not so much a matter of attaching oneself to a living symbol of being rooted in the native ground; it was more a matter of preparing to be uprooted, to be spirited away into some transparent, yet indigenous afterlife. The new place was all idea, if you like; it was generated out of my experience of the old place but it was not a topographical location. It was and remains an imagined realm, even if it can be located at an earthly spot….[147]

This "imagined realm," "generated out of my experience of the old place" (an image which flowers again in sonnet VIII from "Clearances"), has been a freeing presence in Heaney's poetry, as his new understanding of "being uprooted" has enabled a much different but correspondingly strong connection to origins. In many cases, this new "imagined realm" of "all idea," relates to the original physical location through the crafting of language. In "The Schoolbag," also from *Seeing Things*, Heaney again declares (like "Squarings: *xl* and *xli*") his linguistic inheritance. The poem's

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[146] Heaney, "Mossbawn: Omphalos," 20.
[147] Heaney, "The Placeless Heaven: Another Look at Kavanagh," 3-4.

dedication to the memory of John Hewitt, emphasizes Heaney's regional debt in the overall making of his voice. Looking back at his earliest formal education, the poem repeats the familiar saying that the pen is lighter than the spade:

> Learning's easy carried! The bag is light,
> Scuffed and supple and unemptiable
> As an itinerant school conjuror's hat.
> So take it, for a word-hoard and a handsel.
>
> As you step out trig and look back all at once
> Like a child on his first morning leaving parents.
> (*ST*, 32)

Like the hole of the uprooted chestnut tree, the schoolbag becomes a symbolic repository that the poet can carry through life. It contains his "word-hoard," "unemptiable" and "light," revealing Heaney's increasingly characteristic transformation of initially tangible symbols.[148]

Similarly, Heaney often uses colloquial or familial phrases to remind the reader of his *omphalos*, even when the subject of the poem does not outwardly relate to his homeground. For example, in "The Sounds of Rain," an elegy for the literary critic and biographer Richard Ellmann, Heaney deliberately uses the word "thole" for its cultural currency. According to Eskestad, "thole" serves a dual purpose of on one hand acting as a linguistic reclamation (reminiscent of the experiments of *Wintering Out*), and also expressing familiarity by using vocabulary from his homeground, making the word "culturally 'proven' to the poet in a double sense":[149]

> …as a vernacular word, *thole* charges the last line with the intimacy of Heaney's private speaking self, expressing the grief over the death of a personal friend. But at the same time, *thole* functions as a canonized word that echoes back to Beowulf, firmly placing the poem within an established English language tradition, as a public tribute to a distinguished fellow writer.[150]

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[148] In "The Toome Road," Heaney describes the morning he "met armoured cars" and "headphoned soldiers standing up in turrets" (*FW*, 15). Wondering both how long they had been going down "my roads as if they owned them," and also "Whom should I run to tell," the poem ends with the poet's declaration that (as later he describes the word-hoard symbolically residing in his childhood schoolbag as "unemptiable") the soldiers cannot alter his connection and vision of his homeground, for "It stands here still, stands vibrant as you pass, / The invisible, untoppled omphalos."
[149] Eskestad, "Negotiating the Canon": 13.
[150] Ibid.

This dual significance allows Heaney to "negotiate freely between the local language heritage of Ulster and an official word-culture of English."[151] The word "thole," while obsolete in most areas, was still part of the spoken language in Heaney's childhood landscape. Thus, in an otherwise learned poem, "thole" briefly places the memorial to Ellmann in Heaney's homeground, as "You'll have to thole" would be offered to console someone for a loss in the south Derry landscape of his youth. In other poems from the volume, such as "Man and Boy," Heaney's language relates the intimacy of his subject through his utilization of colloquial phrases. The father describes a salmon splash "'As big as a wee pork pig by the sound of it,'" and the lawn is "'mowed as clean as a new sixpence'" (*ST*, 16-17). Heaney seeks to bridge the gap between the language of the "parish" and the "academy" in "Crossings, xxxii" where the "Stepping stones" that "were stations of the soul" become linguistic tools for the reader, with the poet acting as intermediary:

> A kesh could mean the track some called a *causey*
> Raised above the wetness of the bog,
> Or the causey where it bridged old drains and streams.
> (*ST*, 86)

Heaney explains that "it steadies me to tell these things," as the words "kesh" and "ford" recall both his father and his linguistic inheritance.[152] None of this was explicit in *Death of a Naturalist*. The landscape is re-mapped as an emblematic place of linguistic memory.

Yet, this linguistic inheritance introduces a tension in Heaney's poetry, described by Blake Morrison as Heaney's characteristic fluctuation between "speech and reticence."[153] Heaney's reticent approach may be an indication of his Northern Irish inheritance as much, if not more, than his open declarations. The title of Heaney's second volume of critical writings, *The Government of the Tongue* (1988),

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[151] For Heaney's increased use of Northern Irish dialect words in *The Spirit Level*, see Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 192-93.

[152] Related to this discussion of the merging of actual and linguistic inheritances, in "The Settle Bed" Heaney's inheritance of a piece of furniture after the death of both of his parents takes on an entirely new meaning, pushed on by a linguistic force, it becomes a creative "dower"(*ST*, 30-31) that, according to Corcoran, "suddenly sails free from its adjectival solidity into the directed, optimistic energy of imperative verb…rising above itself to erase itself, the bed unsettled…." Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 171.

[153] Morrison, "Speech and Reticence," 103-11. Morrison makes the point specifically about Heaney's first two books, but does contextualize the statement by discussing the pressures of Heaney's particular community: "…the community Heaney came from, and with which he wanted his poetry to express solidarity, was one on which the pressure of silence weighted heavily, It was not only rural, renowned like all rural communities for its inwardness and reserve, but also Northern Irish and Catholic, with additional reasons for claming up."

though ostensibly concerning the work of other poets, indicates the importance of "reticence" as a force in his poetic outlook. In the opening essay he relates a parable about being a child of two dissimilar parents, "Art" and "Life," which pull their offspring in different directions and cause the child to either choose one or compromise and find a way to navigate between them.[154] In the title essay, Heaney explains that "the tongue (representing both a poet's personal gift of utterance and the common resources of language itself) has been granted the right to govern."[155] However, he also recognizes the other meaning of "govern" as "a denial of the tongue's autonomy and permission."[156] While critics have noted Heaney's reserve, Heaney shows in "The Ministry of Fear," from *North*, that his personal learning curve in the value of reticence was rather steep. The poem discusses two separate moments of cultural initiation when his verbal answer denotes his naivety. After rehashing the traditional stereotype that Catholics don't speak as well as Protestants, Heaney moves on to describe an exchange between himself and one of the priests at school:

> Have our accents
> Changed? 'Catholics, in general, don't speak
> As well as students from the Protestant schools.'
> Remember that stuff? Inferiority
> Complexes, stuff that dreams were made on.
>
> 'What's your name, Heaney?'
> 'Heaney, Father.'
>
> (*N*, 59)

In the poem he exhibits a subconscious distance from using the familiarity of his first name in the strict and unfamiliar environment of St. Columb's in Derry, while later his response of "Seamus" reveals an overly trusting nature. As a young man, faced with a roadblock and "the muzzle of a Sten gun in my eye" (*N*, 59) he responds to the question "'What's your name, driver'" with the familial response of "'Seamus…'" an answer that immediately identifies him as a Catholic. Thus "The Ministry of

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[154] Heaney, "The Interesting Case of Nero, Chekhov's Cognac and a Knocker" (1986), in *The Government of the Tongue*, xii.
[155] Heaney, "The Government of the Tongue" (1986), in *The Government of the Tongue*, 92 and 96.
[156] Ibid., 96.

Fear" asserts that a bit of 'northern reticence' is perhaps a necessary thing, as people make assumptions by the way one talks as well as the words chosen.[157]

Many other poems explore the dual meaning of governing the tongue as a struggle not to veer too far from his origins. In "From the Frontier of Writing," from *The Haw Lantern*, the process of writing shifts between a desire for free creativity and the need to control; between the "clearance" of an idea, and the necessity of structure, which is graphically set in a landscape of authoritarian control, as there are "guns on tripods" and a "marksman training down" (*HL*, 6).[158] The political context is clearly the existence of border checks between the North and Republic of Ireland, which Heaney uses as a metaphor for artistic interrogation. Similarly, in "From the Republic of Conscience," the poet passes through an imaginary customs and is shown "a photograph of my grandfather" (*HL*, 12), and asked to declare "the words of our traditional cures and charms" as his passport for community membership. Then, on returning "from that frugal republic" he is asked "to consider myself a representative / and to speak on their behalf in my own tongue," revealing how language becomes a mark of faithfulness to origins, displayed as a matter of "conscience."[159] This struggle between the calls of "Art" and "Life" echoes what Heaney saw as Kavanagh's artistic and personal quarrel "between the illiterate self that was tied to the little hills and earthed in the stony grey soil, and the literate self that pined for 'the city of Kings / Where art, music and letters were the real things.'"[160]

Heaney acknowledges his own struggle to maintain his connections to his origins, often figured linguistically, in an affectionate elegy for his mother in the "Clearances" sequence from *The Haw Lantern*. "Clearances: 4" details Heaney's calculated decision to mask the extent of his learning (and thus his distance from his roots) from his family. Both mother and son are aware of the fallacy, as she also

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[157] In "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," for instance, Heaney notes how first names are enough to identify whether you are Protestant or Catholic: "That Norman, Ken and Sidney signaled Prod, / And Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape. / Oh, land of password, handgrip, wink and nod, / Of open minds as open as a trap" (*N*, 55). But perhaps Heaney's most open hatred of the yoke of reticence is made in "Station Island" when the poet declares that "'I hate how quick I was to know my place. / I hate where I was born, hate everything / That made me biddable and unforthcoming'" (*SI*, 85).

[158] The fact that Heaney sees writing as a "Frontier" supports my argument about the centrality of the homeground for any overall understanding of Heaney's creative landscape.

[159] In "From the Land of the Unspoken" the idea of reticence is taken to an extreme as the poet declares sarcastically that "Our unspoken assumptions have the force / of revelation. How else could we know / that whoever is the first of us to seek / assent and votes in a rich democracy / will be the last of us and have killed our language?" (*HL*, 19).

[160] Heaney, "The Sense of Place," 137.

pretends to know less than she really does for "Fear of affectation" in front of her well-educated son:

> Fear of affectation made her affect
> Inadequacy whenever it came to
> Pronouncing words 'beyond her.' *Bertold Brek.*
> She'd manage something hampered and askew
> Every time, as if she might betray
> The hampered and inadequate by too
> Well-adjusted a vocabulary.
> With more challenge than pride, she'd tell me, 'You
> Know all them things.' So I governed my tongue
> In front of her, a genuinely well-
> adjusted adequate betrayal
> Of what I knew better. I'd *naw* and *aye*
> And decently relapse into the wrong
> Grammar which kept us allied and at bay.
>
> (*HL*, 28)

The sonnet's understanding that a "genuinely well- / Adjusted adequate betrayal" is necessary to keep them "allied and at bay" reveals the importance of language for both community and family identification. Neither mother or son wants to seem above themselves, so both "governed" their exchanges, thus keeping a thin line between the truth, and a verbal acknowledgement of the differences between them.

Heaney's sense of his duty to negotiate between his original community (and voice), and his literary self-consciousness, is the central theme of "Making Strange" from *Station Island* (1984). The poem poignantly describes how bringing a stranger with "travelled intelligence" (*SI*, 32) into his homeground makes Heaney aware of the extent of his own distance from it. The experience shows Heaney the need to find a "cunning middle voice" to bridge the gap between two friends, one from the culture of his youth, "unshorn and bewildered / in the tubs of his wellingtons" and the other a learned outsider, with speech "like the twang of a bowstring." The mention of "middle voice" adds a learned twist as it recalls a linguistic tense in ancient Greek even as Heaney's use in the poem purports to lessen the distance between his friends. By telling "all that I knew" about the Mossbawn area, Heaney discovers that he "began to make strange / at that same recitation" (*SI*, 33). On one hand, the homeground made "strange" reveals Heaney's realization of his displacement from what was once intimately known, but the word "strange" also implies (as in "Alphabets") the positive effect that introducing an outsider has

allowed him to see a well-known landscape through new eyes.[161] Heaney's awareness of uprootedness now serves as an enabling rather than disabling force in his poetry.

VI: "NEVER CLOSER THE WHOLE REST OF OUR LIVES": FAMILY AND THE HOMEGROUND

When all the others were away at Mass
I was all hers as we peeled potatoes.
They broke the silence, let fall one by one
Like solder weeping off the soldering iron:
Cold comforts set between us, things to share
Gleaming in a bucket of clean water.
And again let fall. Little pleasant splashes
From each other's work would bring us to our senses.

So while the parish priest at her bedside
Went hammer and tongs at the prayers for the dying
And some were responding and some crying
I remembered her head bent towards my head,
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives-
Never closer the whole rest of our lives.

Seamus Heaney, "Clearances: 3" (*HL*, 27)

Among Heaney's other investments in his homeground, the poems that remember his family characteristically reside in the Mossbawn area. The landscape becomes inscribed with personal recollections, especially in the series of elegies written for his parents, in *The Haw Lantern* and *Seeing Things*. In the last chapter, I documented the way that the West of Ireland functions as a particularly resonant landscape for Longley and his wife. Similarly, for Heaney, the Mossbawn area often serves as the starting point for observations concerning his family, though unlike Longley's lived landscape, Heaney's emphasis on his homeground shows the importance he gives to childhood memories as the building blocks of adult experience. For example, the inheritance discussed in "Squarings: *xl*" of "singular, cold memory-weights / To load me, hand and foot, in the scale of things" (*ST*, 94)

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[161] This understanding, of being able to see differently by looking through someone else's eyes, is also central to "The Other Side" (*WO*, 34-36).

relates to Heaney's perception of his childhood home as the "scale" to judge familial connections. In "Keeping Going," from *The Spirit Level* (1996), dedicated to his brother Hugh, Heaney begins with the early and safe world of childhood before spanning out, so that the first image acts as a meter of how the world has become increasingly complex (*SL*, 10-12). In "Clearances: 3," quoted above, Heaney privileges a specific memory from childhood, and uses the silent understanding of mother and son as they peeled potatoes to gauge the closeness of their relationship. The recollection becomes a consoling image that the poet grasps during his mother's last hours.

In fact, the death of his parents has liberated his poetry in several respects, and his elegies to them show a new trust in the personal dimensions of childhood memory. Indeed, these poems constitute some of Heaney's most touching and intimate poetry. In *Death of a Naturalist*, closeness to his family comes across in the sheer emphasis on his childhood landscape and memories, but the poems are more informative about the rural community of his corner of Derry than about the individuals closest to the poet. The father in "Digging" and "Follower" is more symbolic than actual, and "Churning Day" includes the mother in order to capture the rhythmic scene of making butter but the poem does not focus on any identifying characteristics.[162] Heaney does try to understand his father and their relationship more specifically in "Ancestral Photograph," and in an early uncollected poem, "Boy Driving his Father to Confession," but these are exceptions. "Ancestral Photograph" shows the son's awareness that the world of his father had changed greatly in his lifetime. The son recalls his father's adeptness "at arguing / His own price on a crowd of cattlemen" (*DN*, 15), but realizes that those skills became trivial after the end of the traditional livestock fairs: "No room for dealers if the farmers shopped / Like housewives at an auction ring." However, while Heaney explores the biographical matter of his roots, the poem too quickly closes a chapter of the family "chronicle" by placing his father into the "sepia tints" of the past. Thus, the message of the poem ultimately fits into the overarching narrative of the volume that the son's artistic arrival heralds his succession to his father.

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[162] In "Mother" (*DD*, 17), the water pump situates the poem firmly on homeground. The woman is not recognizable as Heaney's mother, and like "The Wife's Tale" shows Heaney's effort to put himself in the position and mind of rural farmers' wives such as his own mother. These poems are early examples of Heaney's use of a persona, but like "Follower" (*DN*, 14) are more symbolic than direct engagements with family.

Heaney presented a "Boy Driving his Father to Confession" at the 27 April 1965 meeting of "The Belfast Group." The poem charts a development in the father-son relationship by highlighting the son's difficulty in finding shared ground, and discusses the four times that commonality was found.[163] The poem, never included in any of Heaney's published books of poetry, may have been deemed by the poet too personal and critical in its portrayal of the "Four times now I have seen you as another / Man," and "found chinks in the paternal mail." These "chinks," while seemingly negative symbols, reveal that in moments of vulnerability Heaney felt the closest to his father (first in a moment of loss, then in a moment of insecurity, through their sharing an explicit joke, and finally in the father's appeal to be driven to confession). In these brief moments their traditional roles are altered, though the son is left with unanswered questions regarding his father's request to be taken to church:

> Today, a sinner, and shy about it,
> You asked me to drive up to church, and sit
> Morose as ever, telling me to slow
> On corners or at pot-holes that I know
> As well as you do. What is going on
> Beneath that thick grey hair? What confession
> Are you preparing? Do you tell sins as I would?
> Does the same hectic rage in our one blood?
> Here at the churchyard I am slowing down
> To meet you, the fourth time, on common ground.
> You grunt and slam the door. I watch another
> Who gropes as awkwardly to know his father.[164]

The sense of "hectic rage" is mellowed significantly in the poems that are included in *Death of a Naturalist*, and though "Boy Driving his Father to Confession" is rather jagged, it represents a deeper look into human relationships than many of Heaney's other early poems about family. Heaney openly laments Northern Irish reticence in the poem, and desires a more open dialogue, but feels trapped by generational and cultural forces.

The most direct family poem from Heaney's first book, "Mid-Term Break," recounts the funeral of his four-year old brother Christopher. According to Vendler, "Mid-Term Break" offers the "most individualized of the first-person speakers" in

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[163] The set of drafts that I quote from belonged to Michael Longley, and are included among Longley's papers at Emory. I accept Longley's dating of the meeting.
[164] Heaney, "Boy Driving his Father to Confession," in Longley, "Belfast Group Sheets," Box 60, Folder 3, Emory.

Heaney's early childhood poems.[165] Though clearly biographical, the poem shows his feeling of loss through the use of exact and controlled descriptions, rather than through an overtly emotional style. The speaker is confused and slightly embarrassed by his new elevation as "the eldest, / Away at school" (*DN*, 17) with old men standing up "to shake my hand." Heaney accurately captures the pain of his mother, who "coughed out angry tearless sighs," as well as precisely recalling the scene at the house. As he was too young to attend the over-night wake, he saw the body for the first time in the morning:

> Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple,
> He lay in the four foot box as in his cot.
> No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.
>
> A four foot box, a foot for every year.
> (*DN*, 17)

Despite the poem's controlled emotion, the impact of the event and Heaney's sadness is felt in the straightforward equation of "a foot for every year." In a book concerned with the creation of the poet, this biographical poem offers a sensitive portrait of Heaney's initiation into loss.

In much the same way that "Making Strange" added new meaning to the Bellaghy area by introducing a stranger, "Changes" gave Mossbawn a new currency by flooding it with multiple associations. Heaney walks with his young daughter to show her the symbolically-invested water pump, and is acutely aware that "I heard much that you could not hear" (*SI*, 36). The "birds' eye view of a bird" recalls both an actual bird inside the unused pump and his own altered view of his homeground, now seen through his daughter's eyes. The fatherly advice at the end of the poem is directed to himself as well as his daughter:

> So tender, I said, 'Remember this.
> It will be good for you to retrace this path
> when you have grown away and stand at last
> at the very centre of the empty city.'
> (*SI*, 36)

The walk to the pump has the reverent atmosphere of a pilgrimage, as she "came with me in silence." His advice serves the dual purpose of passing on a cultural inheritance, found in the ground of her father's inspiration, as well as acknowledging

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[165] Vendler, *Seamus Heaney*, 30.

the creative force passing from his generation to that of his children's (much as *Death of a Naturalist* showed him as the inheritor of images and voices from his homeground). Two other poems in *Station Island*, dedicated to his children, further enforce Heaney's awareness of the generational shift. In "A Hazel Stick for Catherine Ann," Heaney returns the reader to "The Diviner," with the later poem asserting that the magical stick could be cut from her "family tree" (*SI*, 42). Heaney tries to instil the significance of the divining stick into his daughter as a particular familial place of memory. "A Kite for Michael and Christopher" also concerns inheritance, and exposes Heaney's fear that his children won't be properly grounded. The usually recreational kite becomes transformed into a metaphor for loss, as Heaney describes the experience of holding on to a kite as a "strumming, rooted, long-tailed pull of grief" (*SI*, 44). This negative inheritance, being "born fit" to take pain, shows the father's fear and resigned understanding of his inability to protect his children from grief. Figured in the poem as a particularly male bequest, Heaney symbolically asks his sons to "Stand in here in front of me / and take the strain," and as pain is figured as "rooted," it is a force that connects them to both place and family.

The significance of Mossbawn and the surrounding area as a place of family memory is most pronounced in elegies for loved ones. As discussed in Chapter 1, the dedicatory poems "Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication," placed before the formal two-part division of *North*, offer brief windows into Heaney's rural community, and serve to show what is missing from the rigid political explorations of Part I. Though the poems are not actual elegies, their setting in the past coats them with a nostalgic and elegiac gloss. "Sunlight" captures the memory of his aunt at Mossbawn, baking in the kitchen, with mention of the water pump recalling the childhood poems of *Death of a Naturalist*. The poem functions like the photograph in "sepia tints" discussed in "Ancestral Photograph," as the old-fashioned items of the kitchen, the "goose's wing," "tinsmith's scoop" and "bakeboard" (*N*, ix) combine with the lighting of the scene to give the clear impression of an old memory being recalled. Parker notes that Heaney's Aunt Mary "is realised in the poem as a physical and mythic entity," and in the shared act of baking "affirm[s] kinship and the depth of family feeling."[166] The sunlight acts as the spirit of the place, watching

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[166] Parker, *The Making of the Poet*, 127.

over the domestic scene, which offers an example of a healthy and loving ritual that contrasts with the unhealthy rites of violence investigated in the volume.

"The Strand at Lough Beg," from *Field Work*, emphasizes (despite his later questioning of the poem in "Station Island") Heaney's belief in the purifying and therapeutic quality of his homeground, and the poem still holds its own place in *Opened Ground* (1998). An elegy for his cousin Colum McCartney, a victim of the Troubles, the poem shows Heaney's resolve to situate his cousin in the familiar landscape of their childhood. Heaney does force himself to see his cousin as he was in death, "With blood and roadside muck in your hair and eyes" (*FW*, 18), but ultimately decides to symbolically transport the body of Colum back to their shared homeground in order to "gather up cold handfuls of the dew" around Lough Beg "To wash you, cousin. I dab you clean with moss / Fine as the drizzle out of a low cloud." The classical connection in the elegy is directly indicated by the lines from Dante's *Purgatorio* that preface the poem, and the moss scene recalls the moment when Virgil cleansed Dante with moss before the latter passed into purgatory. Thus, the elegy straddles a learned context and the intimacy of his homeground, as does the later "The Sounds of Rain" (*ST*, 50-51). It transports Heaney and McCartney back to the simpler times of childhood and demonstrates Heaney's belief in the symbolic cleansing qualities of the soil around Lough Beg. Instead of leaving his cousin in the place where he died, "Where you weren't known and far from what you knew" (*FW*, 17), Heaney remembers him in the *loci* where "you and yours and yours and mine fought shy, / Spoke an old language of conspirators." As Jahan Ramazani notes, Heaney intensifies Colum's isolation in the first section so as to ultimately restore him to a sense of community, "of mourner and mourned."[167] Heaney's later challenging of his technique in the elegy, when the ghost of Colum comes back to question him in "Station Island," does not lessen the overall significance of his impulse to credit his childhood landscape with assuaging qualities.[168] If early poems commemorated landscape, these elegies use landscape as a site of and focus of personal commemoration.

In "Clearances," a series of eight sonnets written in memory of his mother, Heaney confirms the prominence of foundational experiences in his overall memory

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[167] Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press), 345.
[168] See: "Station Island" (*SI*, 83).

of her. "Clearances: 3" depicts the harmony between mother and son as they are brought close through their steady effort to peel potatoes. The regular "pleasant splashes" are "things to share" (*HL*, 27), non-verbal signs that become mnemonic tokens of an intimacy that is re-evoked in Heaney's mind as she lay dying. Again, in "Clearances: 5," we witness the relationship between mother and son through their sharing of domestic tasks, as they work as a team to fold "sheets just off the line" (*HL*, 29). In this poem, Heaney recalls the awkward age of adolescence, and notes how they would "end up hand in hand / For a split second" and then pretend "nothing had happened." His description of their folding pattern as "Coming close again by holding back" shows the son's awareness of the necessary changes to their relationship, but confirms his continued desire to be near her as a source of love and stability. Indeed, his mother appears as a "source" for his own creativity generally in the sonnet sequence, a sense that Heaney proclaims in his opening plea for her to "Teach me now to listen, To strike it rich behind the linear black" (*HL*, 24). The final poem, "Clearances: 8," relates his loss of his mother to the hole left by the uprooted chestnut tree. Now "Utterly empty, utterly a source," her presence becomes "a bright nowhere" (*HL*, 32) as in the previous poem her death created "Clearances that suddenly stood open" (*HL*, 31). Like the idea of the chestnut's hole, the "idea" of his mother becomes a significant place of memory, unencumbered by physical roots.

Heaney's call for his mother to teach him to listen in "Clearances" also connects to her own reticent speech, a crucial part of his familial inheritance. In "Clearances: 8," for example, his mother becomes a "soul ramifying and forever / Silent," and in "Clearances: 3" their "fluent dipping knives" replace more direct forms of speech. This sparseness of verbal communication figures prominently in Heaney's elegies for his father. In "The Stone Verdict," Heaney imagines his father's soul receiving a trial like Hermes, a silent verdict of stones for his "lifetime's speechlessness" (*HL*, 17). His father's "old disdain of sweet talk and excuses" translate into the poet's own reticence in the poem about being too wordy in commemoration. In the "ultimate court," Heaney imagines his father with stones "piling up around him," turning him into "a gate-pillar / Or a tumbled wallstead," and when "Somebody will break at last to say, 'Here / His spirit lingers,'" they "will have said too much" for a man who embraced taciturnity. In "Seeing Things," Heaney positively recounts how his father's near-death experience brought them

close without the need to speak, as "there was nothing between us there / That might not still be happily ever after" (*ST*, 20). The near loss of his father while Heaney was still young functions, as Corcoran notes, as a "redemptive and consolatory memory" that Heaney uses to cope "in place of orthodox Catholicism, with the father's actual death."[169]

The Spirit Level (1996) returns to the world of childhood and the homeground in a collection of poems that offer perhaps Heaney's best example for what he credits Wordsworth as looking to the Lake District for, to "consciously":

> … retrieve for the chastened adult consciousness the spontaneous, trustful energies unconsciously available in the world of childhood. Memory in this poetry became not just a coffer of images, but a great projector of enabling light.[170]

For example, in "Mint" Heaney concludes that while the plant "looked like a clump of small dusty nettles" growing near the trash heap in their yard at Mossbawn, it "also spelled promise / And newness in the back yard of our life" (*SL*, 6). Heaney claims that he can still find "newness" and "promise" in his homeground, and the series of childhood poems that follow ratify this assertion. As his "last things will be first things slipping from me" a return to the "first things" represents both "promise" and durability. "A Sofa in the Forties" offers a touching and intimate view into the poet's childhood. It begins with a description of Heaney and his siblings, "All of us on the sofa in a line, kneeling / Behind each other, eldest down to youngest, / Elbows going like pistons, for this was a train," and widens out to a larger meaning as their closeness to one another remains implicit:

> We occupied our seats with all our might,
> Fit for the uncomfortableness.
> Constancy was its own reward already.
>
> Out in front, on the big upholstered arm,
> Somebody craned to the side, driver or
> Fireman, wiping his dry brow with the air
>
> Of one who had run the gauntlet. We were
> The last thing on his mind, it seemed; we sensed
> A tunnel coming up where we'd pour through
>
> Like unlit carriages through fields at night,
> Our only job to sit, eyes straight ahead,

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[169] Corcoran, *Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 167-68.
[170] Heaney, "Introduction," in *The Essential Wordsworth*, 11-12.

And be transported and make engine noise.
(*SL*, 8-9)

While the "spontaneous, trustful energies" of childhood are effectively captured in the description of the sofa-as-train, even this happy memory is shadowed by darker images. At the same chronological moment in the 1940s when Heaney and his siblings pretended to ride a train in Derry, other trains, the "Ghost-train[s]" and "Death-gondola[s]" of Nazi Germany, transported the Jews to concentration camps. By allowing themselves to be mentally "transported" out of the reality of their lives in Ireland, they enter "history and ignorance," and only through adult historical awareness are able to see the larger world picture.[171] The poem acknowledges a nostalgic wish for that period of solidarity and simplicity - a return to the safety of the childhood landscape and the closeness of family ties, while at the same time insisting that elsewhere the reality of the time was already fraught with complexity and horror.[172]

The next poem, "Keeping Going," is one of the most poignant of Heaney's poems of family and childhood, and offers a fitting way to conclude a chapter about Heaney's obstinate commitment to the poetic memory of his homeground. Written for his brother, the poem starts with a memory of Hugh pretending as a child to be a bagpiper by using makeshift items and a lot of imagination:

The piper coming from far away is you
With a whitewash brush for a sporran
Wobbling round you, a kitchen chair
Upside down on your shoulder, your right arm
Pretending to tuck the bag beneath your elbow,
Your pop-eyes and bug cheeks nearly bursting
With laughter, but keeping the drone going on
Interminably, between catches of breath.
(*SL*, 10)

But, similar to the technique used in "A Sofa in the Forties," the poem quickly moves into darker territory as the two brothers get older. Heaney remembers their sharing

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[171] Similarly, in "The Swing," the act of going "sky high" as the "townlands vanished into aerodromes" (*SL*, 49) allows them to sail "Beyond ourselves and over and above" though the mention of "Hiroshima made light of human bones" reveals the adult poet's historical awareness.

[172] Written at the same time as *The Spirit Level*, in his Nobel Lecture, Heaney contrasts the "Ahistorical…in suspension between the archaic and the modern" period of his childhood with his acquiring of a larger world-view through the World War II radio broadcasts. As I noted in the Introduction, the lecture forcefully confirms Mossbawn as his poetic homeground, and shows how he is simultaneously connected to his original place and "the wideness of the world." Heaney, "Crediting Poetry" (*OG*, 449).

of superstitions: if you "Piss at the gable, the dead will congregate"; Hugh's broken arm is viewed as retribution for cutting down a "thorn tree"; and they worry together about a "strange bird perched for days on the byre roof" (*SL*, 11). Then, later, the silly fears of childhood seem to gain a very real adult reality, as sectarian violence claims the life of a "Part-time reservist" from near Bellaghy. The brothers' loss of innocence is symbolized in the soiled image of the man's blood against the "parched wall," drastically altering their once happy and simplistic childhood memory of whitewashing the wall at Mossbawn, where the swatches of whiteness "worked like magic" (*SL*, 10). Importantly, Heaney's reaction to the death of the part-time reservist is not predetermined by a collective mnemonic framework. Instead, as James Young explained of Holocaust memories in *The Texture of Memory*, "Keeping Going" addresses communal suffering through an individual context.[173] Heaney claims that, unlike the soiled wall of his childhood, the bloodshed of the Troubles cannot be whitewashed. This adult understanding underscores Heaney's counsel to his brother that despite Hugh's best intentions he can't "make the dead walk or right wrong" (*SL*, 12). Addressing his brother directly, Heaney praises him for his "good stamina" and for staying "on where it happens" (*SL*, 12). Heaney acknowledges the practical difficulties Hugh faces by continuing the farming life: "I see you at the end of your tether sometimes," and he wonders if his brother ever asks "is this all? As it was / in the beginning, is now and shall be?" Hugh's "keeping going" reflects on him personally, and shows his allegiance to the family ways. The poet sensitively credits Hugh for keeping watch over their shared homeground, as Hugh possesses both commendable strength and loyalty. Hugh has stayed on where "it happens," a statement that indicates not only his living through the Troubles from a position in Northern Ireland, but also more specifically by continuing in their shared homeground. The landscape is as complex as Heaney's changing relationship with it, but it 'keeps going' in Heaney's poetry as a persistent and powerful reference point and source of inspiration.

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[173] Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993).

CHAPTER 5

"WALKING BACKWARDS INTO THE FUTURE LIKE A GREEK": LONGLEY AND HEANEY'S CLASSICAL IMPULSE

I. GREEK AND LATIN CONTEXTS: RECENT IRISH INTEREST IN THE CLASSICS

> But inside me like struck sound in a gong
> That killing-fest, the life-warp and world-wrong
> It brought to pass, still augured and endured.
> I'd dream of blood in bright webs in a ford,
> Of bodies raining down like tattered meat
> On top of me asleep – and me the lookout
>
> Seamus Heaney, "Mycenae Lookout: 1 The Watchman's War" (*SL*, 29)

Classical allusion re-maps the present in terms of the Greek and Roman past, and classical translation (explicitly or implicitly) does the same. Thus, when such self-conscious poets of memory and place, as Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley, turn to the classics, we enter a theatre of memory that recasts the Irish present as well as the literary past. In the opening of her article "The Irish and Greek Tragedy" Marianne McDonald notes that "In the twentieth century, there seem to be more translations and versions of Greek tragedy that have come from Ireland than from any other country in the English-speaking world."[1] A partial list of classical interests by recent Irish writers will suffice to make this point. Derek Mahon demonstrates his classical leanings in the translation of *The Bacchae: After Euripides* (1991), and also through his rendering of *Racine's Phaedra* (1996), a seventeenth-century French version of Euripides' *Hippolytus*. In addition to theatrical adaptations, Mahon has consistently peppered his poetry with classical scenes and writers (most notably

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[1] Marianne McDonald, "The Irish and Greek Tragedy," in *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy*, eds. McDonald and J. Michael Walton (London: Methuen, 2002), 37. I do not wish to give the misleading impression that Irish writers are the only contemporaries to look to the classics (Ted Hughes is an obvious example), but as McDonald correctly identifies, the trend among Irish writers is more widespread and the output more prolific.

Ovid).[2] Paul Muldoon regularly makes classical allusions, and a host of classical thinkers grace the pages of the highly inter-textual "Madoc: A Mystery" (1990).[3] Muldoon has also written the comically inventive *The Birds* (1999), after Aristophanes.[4] Heaney's use of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* for his bold departure "Mycenae Lookout" had already interested an earlier Northern Irish poet, as Louis MacNeice wrote a version for the stage, performed in England in 1936. Again, Sophocles' *Antigone*, which Heaney recently translated as *The Burial at Thebes* (2004), was also the inspiration for Northern Irish poet Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* (1984), produced for Field Day. Paulin also uses Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* as the inspiration for *Seize the Fire* (1989).[5] The Northern Irish poet James Simmons along with Tony Harrison wrote *Aikin Mata* (1966), a version of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. The Irish poet Brendan Kennelly has written versions of three classical plays: *Antigone* (1985) by Sophocles; and *Medea* (1991) and *The Trojan Women* (1993) by Euripides.[6] Further, such Irish playwrights as Brian Friel, Frank McGuinness and Marina Carr have reworked classical plots for their modern audiences.[7] In addition to Longley and Heaney, fellow Northern Irish poets Mahon, Paulin, Muldoon, and Ciaran Carson contributed poems to *After Ovid: New Metamorphoses*. And finally, as is so often the case with Irish poetry, the influence of Yeats is found lurking, as Yeats translated two Sophoclean plays, *Oedipus the*

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[2] See: Derek Mahon, "How to Live," "Ovid in Love," "Going Home," "Ovid in Tomis," "Galatea," "The Hudson Letter: Ovid on West 4th," "The Hudson Letter: Sappho in 'Judith's Room,'" "The Yellow Book: "At the Gate Theatre," and "The Yellow Book: The Idiocy of Human Aspiration," in *Collected Poems* (Oldcastle, Co. Meath: Gallery, 2001).

[3] See: Paul Muldoon, "Dancers at the Moy," "Making the Move," "Gathering Mushrooms," "Madoc: A Mystery," and "The Bangle (Slight Return)," in *Poems: 1968-1998* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001).

[4] Muldoon, "Ovid: Metamorphoses," in *The Annals of Chile* (1994), from *Poems: 1968-1998*, 325-27; and "The Lycians," in *After Ovid: New Metamorphoses*, eds. Michael Hofmann and James Lasdun (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 151-53; and *The Birds* (1999).

[5] Paulin was actually born in England, to an English father and Northern Irish mother, and moved to Belfast when he was very young.

[6] *Antigone* has had a particularly strong allure for Irish writers, because besides the versions by Heaney, Paulin and Kennelly, the Irish writer Aidan Carl Matthews also wrote *Antigone: A Version* (1984). Further, Field Day wanted to produce the South African playwright Athol Fugard's *The Island* (1974), which concerns two prisoners in a South African prison who act out *Antigone* in an effort to tell the story of "one lone voice raised in protest against what was considered an unjust law." *The Island* was never produced in Ireland because funding bodies considered it overly political. Athol Fugard, "Antigone in Africa," in *Amid Our Troubles*, eds. McDonald and Walton, 132. See also: Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, *The Island*, in *Statements: Three Plays* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974).

[7] Friel has reworked Euripides in several plays: *Hippolytus* forms the basis for *The Gentle Island* (1971) and *Living Quarters, after Hippolytus* (1977); and *Bacchae* inspired *Wonderful Tennesee* (1993). McGuinness's *Electra* (1997) and *Carthaginians* (1988) use classical allusions to add depth to the commentary on Bloody Sunday. Marina Carr uses Sophocles' *Electra* in *The Mai* (1994) and Euripides' *Medea* in *By the Bog of Cats* (1999).

King (1926) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (1927), as well as such challenging poems with classical referents as "Leda and the Swan" and "No Second Troy."

It would seem that this shared and yet diverse interest in the classics would have spurred numerous critics to analyze this Irish (and especially Northern Irish) impulse to look to Greek and Latin sources. However, this has not yet happened to the degree that the poets' works deserve. John Kerrigan's pioneering article "Ulster Ovids" helpfully introduces the Northern Irish interest in the classics as an essential area for analysis, and *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy* (2002), a collection of essays, has recognized the potential for study, and goes some way to rectify this critical oversight. However, as *Amid Our Troubles* only discusses Greek tragedy it is obviously limited in scope. In addition, the volume is scattered even in its analysis of Irish reworkings of Greek tragedy, and is too quick to consider all classical efforts in light of the political situation in Ireland (as the title, taking a phrase from Yeats, clearly advertises). Michael Cronin's ground-breaking study *Translating Ireland: Translation, Languages, Cultures* (1996) charts the history of Irish translation through the ages, but the chronologically large scope of the study affords scant attention to the last fifty years.[8] Clearly, scholarship has some catching up to do. This chapter does not set out to offer a full account of Heaney and Longley's classical influences, since this is only one aspect of the larger argument of this thesis. However, the central place of the classics in Heaney and Longley's poetry is made forcefully apparent by considering them side by side.

It is now a commonplace to discuss the work of translation as a subjective process whereby engagement with the original text alters and adds new meaning and connotations through the act of translating. As one critic has put it, "Every good translation, of course, is an interpretation."[9] Irish writers have certainly understood this, and many of their efforts in classical 'translation' have actively capitalized on this process of creative exchange, maintaining varying degrees of closeness to the original.[10] Many of the writers mentioned have rendered the classics in a way that

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[8] Michael Cronin, *Translating Ireland: Translation, Languages, Cultures* (Cork: Cork Univ. Press, 1996). See also: Robert Welch, *Changing States: Transformations in Modern Irish Writing* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[9] Raphael Lyne, "Ovid in English translation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 260.

[10] This is frequently alluded to in the title: Mahon's *The Bacchae: After Euripides* admits his own alteration of the original, while Heaney and Paulin indicate their own distance by offering their own titles. See: Paulin, *The Riot Act* (1984) and *Seize the Fire* (1989); and Heaney, *The Cure at Troy* (1990) and *The Burial at Thebes* (2004).

offers a contemporary (often political) relevance, yet this is by no means the sole reason that these artists look to Greek and Latin sources.[11] In "Place and Displacement" Heaney notes that the unique circumstances of recent Northern Irish history helps to explain why its writers often engage mythological characters and find grounding in traditions and places at a "spatial or temporal distance." Similarly, Cronin notes that the Irish tendency to translate is partly due to recent "Irish cultural and intellectual history," which has been "itself the product of multiple translations." Thus, for the poets, translation "is a mode of creative evolution that allows a culture to preserve what is valuable, while leaving itself open to the creative intervention of change."[12]

Though the recent influx in classical material can be partially attributed to Field Day's active commissioning of Greek translations as a way to comment on Irish circumstances, the classical impulse belongs to a much larger picture, and giving Field Day primary credit misses the main point. Of course, the classics have been revived to illuminate Irish situations, for often overtly political purposes (with Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* offering a primary example). Tom Paulin uses *The Riot Act* in part to wage a regional disagreement with Conor Cruise O'Brien and his reading of *Antigone*. For Paulin, O'Brien's condemnation of the character of Antigone within a discussion of Northern Irish politics, and his defence of Ismene means that O'Brien ultimately sides with Creon and thus the power of the state.[13] In protest against such a reading, in Paulin's version, Creon becomes a Northern Irish Unionist politician, talking in the clichéd terms of political discourse, promising in the opening speech to do "'…a very great deal of listening, sounding opinions and so forth,'" and then finishing with an abbreviated question period: "'…any questions

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[11] Though not a classical source, Ciaran Carson shows the capacity of translated texts to maintain regional contemporary meaning in his translation of Dante's *Inferno*, which Carson infuses with Northern Irish dialect and colloquial words that carry particular connotations for modern Ulster. Carson claims the importance of the place of translation in his introduction where he explains that, while translating Dante, "Belfast's sectarian fault lines" became like "an Italian hill-town," and the "British Army helicopter" buzzing overhead became an image of Dante "riding on the flying monster Geryon." Dante, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Ciaran Carson (London: Granta, 2002), xi.

[12] Michael Cronin, *Translating Ireland*, 2 and 168. See also: Patricia Palmer, *Language and Conquest in Early Modern Ireland: English Renaissance Literature and Elizabethan Imperial Expansion* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001).

[13] See: Conor Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland* (London: Hutchinson, 1972), 156-59. Paulin claims that O'Brien's "target was Irish nationalism, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey and the Northern Irish Civil Rights Movement, which he saw as responsible for the violent politics of Northern Ireland." Paulin, "*Antigone*," in *Amid Our Troubles*, eds. McDonald and Walton, 167.

just now? We have one minute' (*Flashes stonewall smile*)."[14] Paulin admits that he imagined Creon "partly as a Northern Irish Secretary," and wanted him to be "a kind of puritan gangster, a megalomaniac who spoke alternately in an English public school voice and a deep menacing Ulster growl." Paulin's combination of historical context and Ulster dialect would have certainly been recognized as a statement on contemporary politics by the audience in Derry's Guildhall where the play was first performed.[15] Taking another example, in the preface to *The Trojan Women*, Brendan Kennelly makes clear his original association between the women of Troy and Ireland:

> Almost fifty years ago, I heard women in the village where I grew up say of another woman, 'She's a Trojan,' meaning she had tremendous powers of endurance and survival, was determined to overcome different forms of disappointment and distress…with a consciousness that seemed to deepen both her suffering and her strength…within [*The Trojan Women's*] apparent passivity of victims, I increasingly found a strong, active, resolute and shrewd note.[16]

Kennelly finds his entry point into the classical text through his identification with a particularly familiar (Irish) characteristic of the Greek play, and, like Paulin, shows this aspect in his version through his use of Irish vernacular.[17] Further, Ciaran Carson, in "Aurora and Memnon" relates Ovid's story of the grieving mother to Northern Ireland; the Memnon birds "come back to re-enact / Their *civil war*" with the fighting factions likened to "Prods and Taigs," with "Celtic loops and spirals chawed each other, fell / down dead and splayed."[18] Finally, in Brian Friel's *Translations* (1981) most of the Irish characters know Latin and Greek (some

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[14] Tom Paulin, *The Riot Act: A Version of Sophocles' Antigone* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 17.
[15] Paulin, "*Antigone*," 167. See also: Fintan O'Toole, review of *The Riot Act*, by Paulin, *Sunday Tribune*, 23 September 1984; Anthony Roche, "Ireland's *Antigones*: Tragedy North and South," in *Cultural Contexts and Literary Idioms in Contemporary Irish Literature*, ed. Michael Kenneally (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988), 221-50.
[16] Brendan Kennelly, "Preface," in *Euripides' The Trojan Women* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1993), 5. Similarly, of his earlier *Antigone*, Kennelly noted that "The ancient, original Greek infiltrates life in modern Ireland. In many ways, the past shapes and directs the present. The past educates and enlightens the present. The present selects from that education, that enlightenment, and makes its own way forward…." Kennelly, "Doing Justice to *Antigone*" (1996), in *Sophocles' Antigone* (1986; repr., Highgreen, Tarset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2001), 51
[17] Kennelly's version emphasizes the strength of the Trojan women, even in the most horrible circumstances, rather than seeing them as passive victims. The play is powerfully anti-war and, in the Irish context, it sheds light on both the personalities of Irish women and also on their collective power in recent Irish history. For example, the Women's Peace Movement (renamed the Peace People) had a tremendous impact in bringing attention to the violence of Northern Ireland by marching in Northern Ireland and Ireland as well as in England.
[18] Ciaran Carson, "Aurora and Memnon," in *After Ovid*, eds. Hoffmann and Lasdun, 273. Emphasis mine.

fluently) but hardly speak any English. As Hugh, the Irish school-teacher explains to the inquiring British officer, "Wordsworth?...no. I'm afraid we're not familiar with your literature, Lieutenant. We feel closer to the warm Mediterranean. We tend to overlook your island."[19] In the conclusion to the play, a classical allusion illuminates the fate of the Gaelic-speaking townland of Baile Beag, with consequences for Ireland and Irish culture by taking lines from the *Aeneid* that clearly associate Ireland with Carthage, and England with Rome.[20]

However, not all Irish 'translations' of the classics relate as explicitly to Ireland. Mahon, for instance, in *The Bacchae* merely hints at possible connections for contemporary Ireland. He prefaces the play with three quotes, the last of which, by Louis MacNeice, is particularly revealing for the purposes of this chapter. Taken from MacNeice's book, *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats*, the quotation concerns how Yeats' "efflorescence in old age is perhaps unique in recent poetry. We might compare Euripides who, after a long life spent struggling with and digesting new ideas, in gradually formulating a sceptical, rationalist attitude, had in his old age the elasticity to admit that there was a case for Dionysus."[21] This quotation hints at a particularly Irish dialogue, and as Michael Walton argues, helps to "reinforce the idea of Euripides' *Bacchae* as a barometer of the current social and political moods of any era," thus opening up the door for Mahon's version to have contemporary political relevance, for Ireland and elsewhere.[22] Yet, crucially, in Mahon's translation, it is hard to pin down what, if any, significance Mahon intends specifically for Ireland.[23]

Further, many of the re-workings of Ovid by Irish writers included in the *After Ovid: New Metamorphoses* compilation do not rely on an overt set of Irish references. The editors of *After Ovid* relate Ovid's recent resurgence to his more

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[19] Brian Friel, *Translations* (1981; repr., London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 11 and 41.
[20] Ibid., 67-68.
[21] Derek Mahon, *The Bacchae: After Euripides* (Oldcastle, Co. Meath: Gallery, 1991), 9. The other two quotations are by F. W. Nietzsche, from *The Birth of Tragedy*, and E. R. Dodds, the Classicist from Northern Ireland, from *The Greeks and the Irrational*. All three quotations propose different readings of Dionysus, and demonstrate how much is at stake in the interpretation and 'translation' of the character.
[22] J. Michael Walton, "Hit or Myth: the Greeks and Irish Drama," in *Amid Our Troubles*, eds. McDonald and Walton, 21. See also: Hugh Haughton, "Translation and the poetics of adaptation," in *Derek Mahon and Modern Irish Poetry* (typescript, forthcoming).
[23] In Mahon's version, Tiresias describes the Dionysian dance as a "famous céilí." In this reference to Ireland, like others, the moral is hard to find as both Dionysus and Pentheus appear as laughable characters with Dionysus playing the card of free-love and Pentheus representing a stuffy leader with very black and white ideas. Mahon, *The Bacchae*, 15

universal 'modern' characteristics, and the "New Metamorphoses" aspect of the title acknowledges the "metamorphoses" that the original stories underwent in the process of engagement by contemporary poets:

> Such qualities as his mischief and cleverness, his deliberate use of shock…the stories have direct, obvious and powerful affinities with contemporary reality. They offer a mythical key to most of the more extreme forms of human behaviour and suffering, especially ones we think of as peculiarly modern: holocaust, plague, sexual harassment, rape, incest, seduction, pollution, sex-change, suicide, hetero- and homosexual love, torture, war, child-battering, depression and intoxication….[24]

Irish poets do not look uniformly to the classics in order to make statements about Ireland, but, as with all of their work, utilize the classics for diverse purposes. Further, the Irish obviously don't have a monopoly on recent interest in the classics (for example, the work of English poets Ted Hughes and Tony Harrison have been hugely influential), and indeed almost every generation of artists since the Renaissance have reclaimed the classics in some form.[25] Still, it is fair to say that contemporary Irish writers (especially from the North) have had a particularly intense engagement. What do the classics offer these writers, and in particular Longley and Heaney? Cronin compellingly argues that for Northern Irish writers during the Troubles translation becomes "a privileged mode of interrogation" as well as "a form of release, a creative opportunity that would open up different areas of Irish culture to each other and to the rest of the world."[26] Several essays on Heaney and Longley's classical efforts have made important contributions.[27] Critics have generally noted the prevalence of classically inspired material in Longley's work since *Gorse Fires*, but we still need to understand how his classical poems interact with his other primary poetic interests. In regards to Heaney, scholars have still not meaningfully considered his classical impulse in his poetry and Sophoclean plays.

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[24] Hofmann and Lasdun, "Introduction," in *After Ovid*, xi.

[25] See: Ted Hughes, *Tales from Ovid* (1997), and *The Oresteia* (1999); and Tony Harrison, *Oresteia* (1980). Additionally, a wide array of contemporary poets contributed to *After Ovid*.

[26] Cronin, *Translating Ireland*, 169.

[27] See: Peter McDonald, "Lapsed Classics: Homer, Ovid, and Michael Longley's Poetry," in *The Poetry of Michael Longley*, eds. Alan J. Peacock and Kathleen Devine (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2000), 35-50; John Lyon, "Michael Longley's Lists," *English* 45.183 (Autumn 1996): 228-46; Michael Allen, "Longley's Long Line: Looking Back from *The Ghost Orchid*," in *The Poetry of Michael Longley*, eds. Peacock and Devine, 121-41; Helen Vendler, "Seamus Heaney and the *Oresteia*: 'Mycenae Lookout' and the Usefulness of Tradition," in *Amid Our Troubles*, eds. McDonald and Walton, 181-97; Phyllis Carey, "Heaney and Havel: Parables of Politics," in *Seamus Heaney – The Shaping Spirit*, eds. Catherine Malloy and Phyllis Carey (London: Associated Univ. Pressses, 1996): 137-56; and Hugh Denard, "Seamus Heaney, Colonialism, and the Cure: Sophoclean Re-visions," *PAJ* 66 (n.d.): 1-18.

The classics have provided Longley with inspiration since his first collection *No Continuing City* (1969), as evidenced by such poems as "En Route," "Circe," "Nausicaa," "The Centaurs" and "Persephone."[28] Nevertheless, his plentiful classical engagement since *Gorse Fires* (1991) has signalled a more powerful and confident poetic voice.[29] After the long poetic silence that followed *The Echo Gate* (1979), Longley's free translations of Homer in *Gorse Fires* reveal a rejuvenated and learned poet, experimenting with shifts in geography, time and form. In addition to renderings of scenes from *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, Longley's recent volumes showcase an extended interest in Ovid, as well as minor experiments with Horace and a larger cast of classical writers.[30] Technically, his increased use of the classics has gone hand-in-hand with a shift towards his greater use of the long line. Longley has always found grounding in the classics, and his work since *Gorse Fires* is not a surprising departure. From his degree in Classics at Trinity (however lax he claims was his devotion[31]), to his affinity for the 'well-made poem,' Longley has long displayed credentials as a 'classicist.'[32] In a 1985 interview with the *Honest Ulsterman*, Longley describes the Latin love elegists as primary influences, with Catullus, Ovid, but especially Propertius ("an ancient ghost," "who's peculiarly modern in his sensibility") as major discoveries.[33] Despite this long term investment in classical material, critics rightly credit the classically inspired poems of his last four books for pushing his poetry in new directions, with one reviewer of *The Ghost Orchid* (1995) complimenting Longley as "that rare modern thing, a great poet

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[28] Longley's "The Ornithological Section" and "A Working Holiday" (*NCC*) are also relevant in this regard.

[29] Longley has said the "recovery of my balance" with *Gorse Fires* "is intimately tied up with the Homeric thing." Longley, "Interview with Michael Longley by Sarah Broom" (10 April 1997), Box 43, Folder 4, Emory.

[30] Longley contributed the largest number of poems (seven) to *After Ovid*, and admits that while he was only commissioned to do the "Baucis and Philemon" story, he "ended up intoxicated with Ovid." Longley, "Interview with Michael Longley by Sarah Broom."

[31] See: Longley, "Interview: The Longley Tapes," by Robert Johnstone, *Honest Ulsterman* 78 (1985): 17; "The Empty Holes of Spring: Remembering Trinity and The Group," in *Tuppenny Stung: Autobiographical Chapters* (Belfast: Lagan, 1994), 36 and 38; and "Interview with Michael Longley by Sarah Broom."

[32] Heaney, for instance, remembers "somebody describing Longley, Mahon, and myself as the tight-arsed trio. Speaking formally, of course." Heaney, "An Interview with Seamus Heaney," by Frank Kinahan, *Critical Inquiry* 8.3 (Spring 1982): 408. In an essay about the Belfast Group, included in *Tuppenny Stung*, Longley explains that "I believed that poetry should be polished, metrical and rhymed; oblique rather than head-on; imagistic and symbolic rather than rawly factual; rhetorical rather than documentary," and felt that many of the poems of the Group tended to be "underdone." Longley, "The Group," in *Tuppenny Stung*, 40-41.

[33] Longley, "The Longley Tapes": 16.

classicist."[34] Significantly, the classical poems are placed in a deliberate and revealing dialogue with the other poems in his books. Thus, poems about the West of Ireland, the battlefields of the world wars, and those about close family and friends reflect on and are in turn reflected by the Homeric and Ovidian material. This classical material, like the poems considered in earlier chapters, integrate Longley's individual memories and experiences with social memories and concerns. In the second section, I analyze the way that Longley uses the classics to frame and deepen his engagement with issues of home and continuity, before looking in the third section at Longley's classical adaptations as a way to make revealing (and often humorous) comments on the vocation of poetry and poets. As a final note, I use Longley's "Ceasefire," his most public poem, as a way to introduce Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*, another political statement in the form of a translation.

In his essay "The Impact of Translation," written in 1986, Heaney argues that "What translation has done over the last couple of decades is to introduce us not only to new literary traditions but also to link the new literary experience to a modern martyrology, a record of courage and sacrifice which elicits our unstinted admiration."[35] He was primarily discussing the influence of English translation of eastern European poets, but his words could also be applied to his own classical adaptations. Heaney's additions to the burgeoning field of classical translation are most obviously his versions of *Philoctetes* and *Antigone* by Sophocles. *The Cure at Troy* was first performed by Field Day in Derry's Guildhall on 1 October 1990, and *The Burial at Thebes* was written to commemorate the centenary of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (performed in spring 2004). Both plays received added force from their immediate political situations. *The Cure at Troy* directly suggests parallels between Sophocles' Homeric drama and the early 1990s hope for peace in Northern Ireland (realized by a heavy use of Ulster vernacular and explicit images: "hunger-

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[34] Chris Agee, "Chinese Whispers, Epic Recensions," review of *GO*, *Poetry Ireland Review* 49 (1996): 74.

[35] Heaney, "The Impact of Translation," *Yale Review* 76.1 (December 1986): 4. Heaney has written about translation as a right, for instance in the introduction to his translation of *Beowulf* he asserts that "Joseph Brodsky once said that poets' biographies are present in the sounds they make and I suppose all I am saying is that I consider Beowulf to be part of my voice-right. And yet to persuade myself that I was born into its language and that its language was born into me took a while: for somebody who grew up in the political and cultural conditions of Lord Brookeborough's Northern Ireland…." Heaney, "Introduction," in *Beowulf* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), xxiii-xxiv. Further, of *Sweeney Astray*, he notes, "My fundamental relation with Sweeney, however, is topographical. His kingdom lay in what is now south Antrim and north County Down, and for over thirty years I lived on the verges of that territory, in sight of some of Sweeney's places and in earshot of others…One way or another he seemed to have been with me from the start." Heaney, "Introduction," in *SA*.

striker's father," "police widow," etc.). Similarly, Heaney has commented that his impulse to translate Sophocles' *Antigone* was partly driven by his dismay over the war in Iraq (an underlying motive that is especially apparent in his rendering of Creon). His reading of the play's main conflict as "between family and state in a time of crisis" where "private allegiance" is set against "public service" has a definite immediacy for contemporary events (*BT*).[36]

Heaney's comments on *The Cure at Troy* reveal his philosophy towards translation more generally. He explained that while he did find particular resonance for Northern Ireland in the Sophoclean text, he did not try to alter the important registers of the original:

> In other words, while there are parallels, and wonderfully suggestive ones, between the psychology and predicaments of certain characters in the play and certain parties and conditions in Northern Ireland…the play does not exist in order to exploit them. The parallels are richly incidental rather than essential to the version.[37]

Heaney's own poems often mine the classical memory bank, most notably in "Antaeus" and "Hercules and Antaeus" (*N*), "Mycenae Lookout" (*SL*), and "The Golden Bough" and "Glanmore Revisited" (*ST*). He also contributed two translations for *After Ovid* ("Orpheus and Eurydice," and "The Death of Orpheus"), which he also published with translations from the eighteenth-century Gaelic poet Brian Merriman's "The Midnight Court" (*MV*, 11). The fourth section of this chapter looks specifically at Heaney's two Sophoclean plays, while the fifth focuses on Heaney's use of the classics in his poetry, an influence that has been much more marked since *The Haw Lantern* (1987), with classical referents assuming a primary importance in *Seeing Things* (1991), *The Spirit Level* (1996) and *Electric Light* (2001). Like Longley, Heaney's classical interest provides an important point of entry into his main artistic preoccupations, and in both cases the classics function as an abstract memory-place that broadens and complicates the Irish literary tradition.

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[36] Dust jacket, *BT*. Michael Billington notes that Heaney was inspired in particular by the argument in the debate over the Iraq war that "you are either for state security or an advocate of terrorism." Billington, review of *BT*, *Guardian*, 7 April 2004, 26.

[37] Heaney, "*The Cure at Troy*: Production Notes in No Particular Order," in *Amid Our Troubles*, eds. McDonald and Walton, 175.

II. HOMECOMINGS, ORIGINS AND CONTINUITY: CLASSICAL THEMES IN LONGLEY'S POETRY

> Headlands huddling together as breakwater, windbreak,
> Haven where complicated vessels float free of moorings
> In their actual mooring-places.
>
> Michael Longley, "Homecoming" (*GF*, 13)

"Sea Shanty," the first poem in *Gorse Fires* (1991), establishes a classical perspective by introducing a pattern of two-way cultural exchange. Carrigskeewaun becomes the ground to watch "Lesbos" and the "Pleiades," and thus triggers a geographical shift in space and time. Homer's Greece becomes Irish, and Longley's West of Ireland becomes Greek. Longley introduces himself into the dialogue, as his western Irish landscape merges with Ithaca, and Longley becomes like Odysseus, recalling his "repertoire of sea shanties and love songs" with a "sparkle of sand grains" on his "Wellingtons" (*GF*, 1). If the poem superimposes a classical landscape on Ireland, as the poet looks to the islands off the west coast of Ireland from his "home from home" in Mayo, it also insists on contemporary words ("bell-bottoms," "long-johns") taking their bearings from Longley's own voice. The title implies that the poems that follow are Longley's own songs, however much Homer and Odysseus speak through them. In other words, they show how the poet converts classical allusion and literary memory into his own currency.

Poems with classical referents such as "Sea Shanty" pave the way for the more obviously public intentions of "Ceasefire" and "The Butchers."[38] In a 1997 interview, Longley makes an explicit connection between the landscapes of the West of Ireland and ancient Greece:

> …we were in Mayo, in this very remote cottage which we go…and the insight I had was that Ithaca must have looked very like this little secret part of Mayo where we go, which is sandy and remote. And the little smallholdings, the outhouses…it seemed to me that Odysseus would feel perfectly at home there…I've often thought that that part of Ireland…looks like Greece. Or Greece looks like a dust-bowl version of Ireland.[39]

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[38] Speaking about Northern Irish poets more generally, Clair Wills notes their need to "root public statement in personal experience, from which it derives its authenticity and hence the authority to speak of more communal concerns." Clair Wills, *Improprieties: Politics and Sexuality in Northern Irish Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 37. See also: Michael Allen, "Longley's Long Line," 138.

[39] Longley, "Interview with Michael Longley by Sarah Broom."

As Heaney wrote of *Sweeney Astray*, Longley states that the most direct connections between himself and his classical material are geographical and personal.[40] The poems immediately succeeding "Sea Shanty" further the dialogue between Greece and Ireland. The four-line poem "Phosphorescence" continues the grafting of landscapes through words like "duach" (which Longley explains means "sandbanks or dunes…in my part of Mayo" [*GF*, 52]) and the mention of "the Pleiades," invoked repeatedly in Homer, carries over from the previous poem.[41] The following poem "Insomnia" repeats the phrase "stepping stones" from "Phosphorescence" to string along a growing list of associations, while the next few poems plunge deeper into Longley's "home from home" in the West of Ireland.[42] As Chris Agee argues convincingly, the free translations of Homer in *Gorse Fires* "create a highly satisfying interplay between antiquity and modernity, translation and original, the classical universal and the homely parish."[43]

"Sea Shanty" is a fitting way to start a volume that is very much about home and homecomings, as Longley returns "home" to poetry after a decade long absence. In order to work his way back, *Gorse Fires* seems to assert, he must freshly encounter issues of both private and public memory, from the personal losses of his parents, as well as events of large-scale suffering, from the Troubles in Northern Ireland to the Holocaust in Central Europe. Poignantly, "Remembering Carrigskeewaun," with its understanding of "Home" as a "hollow between the waves," occurs immediately before (and facing) "Homecoming," the first of the free translations from *The Odyssey*, thus juxtaposing Odysseus' long-awaited return to Ithaca with his own attachment to Mayo. As "Remembering Carrigskeewaun" asserts the Mayo landscape as Longley's literary base, where "the animals come back to me / From the townland of Carrigskeewaun, / From a page lit by the Milky Way" (*GF*, 12), "Homecoming" portrays the long-suffering Odysseus, after a tumultuous sea journey from Calypso's island, finally set down on home ground: "they lifted Odysseus out of his hollow / Just as he was, linen sheet and glossy rug and all, / And put him to bed on the sand, still lost in sleep" (*GF*, 13). As in "Sea Shanty," Longley

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[40] Heaney, "Introduction," in *SA*.
[41] The Pleiades are a "close group of small stars in the constellation Taurus, commonly spoken of as seven, though only six are visible to the average naked eye," and "according to Greek Mythology, the Pleiades were the seven daughters of Atlas and Pleione…." *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. C.T. Onions (1933; repr., Oxford: Clarendon, 1939), 1523.
[42] See: Longley, "Migrations" (*GF*, 3).
[43] Agee, "Chinese Whispers, Epic Recensions": 72.

subtly makes a connection to Ireland by describing the cave as "Full of bullauns, basins hollowed out of stone."[44] Furthermore, Longley repeats the word "hollow," from "Remembering Carrigskeewaun," and thus links his own sense of safety in Mayo to Odysseus' final journey back to Ithaca.

"Homecoming" supplies a wonderful evocation of Ithaca's harbor as "Headlands huddling together as breakwater, windbreak, / Haven where complicated vessels float free of moorings / In their actual mooring-places." This characterization has important implications for his understanding of home and place, and suggests the way that he uses the classics more generally in his poetry. The classical scholar Robert Fagles translates the same Homeric lines as "so within the harbor ships can ride unmoored / whenever they come in mooring range of shore."[45] In contrast, Longley's version emphasizes his own location of a creative "home" in Homer; "a home where the self comes to rest without the entanglement" of "self-definition," and where "the poet's self, like Odysseus's boat, can float free and be itself."[46] The classics offer Longley a distanced (in both time and space) place to locate his poetry where his primary themes can "float free" of the sometimes encumbering fact of proximity, creating new routes to explore issues of home, family, love and violence out of well-established material. Crucially, Longley intends his classically inspired poems, whether from Homer, Ovid, or others, to operate as "complicated vessels." They spring from a classical source, but Longley explicitly claims the Homeric material as "free translation," with "differing proportions and with varying degrees of high-handedness but always, I hope, with reverence" (*GF*, 52).[47]

In a 1997 interview, Longley described his initial engagement with Homer as developing out of a very personal need:

> …various shocking things happened in my life: my mother's painful death in 1979, which reminded me of my father's death when I was young and unprepared…a sense of betrayal in my job, in my professional life, and all of the time for thirty years the poison of the Troubles…re-acquaintance with the *Odyssey* in my late forties allowed me to give expression to sorrows. The

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[44] Longley defines *bullaun* as an Irish word meaning "a square or cylindrical block of stone into which a deep hole has been cut to make a roughly shaped stone basin." (*GF*, 52).
[45] Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), bk. 13, lines 113-14.
[46] Jonathan Huftstader, *Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones: Northern Irish Poetry and Social Violence* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1999), 101-2.
[47] Longley has explained, "I don't put 'after Homer,' because they're my own." Longley, "Interview with Michael Longley by Sarah Broom." It is important to note that even translations that seem straightforward bear the distinct imprint of the translator, as will be more obvious when discussing Heaney's work. Longley does use the 'after' indicator in "Peace" (*EG*), after Tibullus, and in "After Horace" to indicate a more direct translation.

> great grace was realising I could make poetry out of my own impurities. Moments in the *Odyssey* chimed with emotions that I would have found almost impossible to deal with otherwise: heartbreak, paranoia, bitterness, hatred, fear. Homer gave me a new emotional and psychological vocabulary.[48]

Longley makes this connection between his own life and Homeric translation repeatedly through the placing of poems in *Gorse Fires*. For example, "The Balloon" about Longley's own mother faces "Anticleia" on the opposite page, which concerns Odysseus' meeting of his mother during his journey into Hades, where he learns the painful lesson that in the underworld it is no longer possible to "comfort each other in a shuddering embrace" (*GF*, 35). Longley's use of the conditional form in "Anticleia" ("If at a rock where the resonant rivers meet"), and the rhyme in the last two lines in an otherwise unrhymed poem, enforce a sense of his personal emotions being woven into Homer's story. Longley, like Odysseus, works to cope with the loss of a parent. Odysseus' question is also implicitly Longley's:

> Will she explain that the sinews no longer bind her flesh
> And bones, that the irresistible fire has demolished these,
> That the soul takes flight like a dream and flutters in the sky,
> That this is what happens to human beings when they die?
> (*GF*, 35)[49]

The son's continued questioning of the lost parent and appeal for advice is enhanced by Longley's hopeful dream about his mother in "The Balloon" that in death she can return to her child-self and be seen "smiling and waving and running without a limp... As though there were neither malformation nor pain" (*GF*, 34).

The question posed in "Anticleia" has implications throughout the volume, where Longley consistently uses poetry to probe "what happens to human beings when they die." This is especially clear in the series of haunting Holocaust poems, most notably "Ghetto," which begins by acknowledging that "Because you will suffer soon and die, your choices / Are neither right nor wrong…," for "With so little time for inventory or leavetaking, / You are packing now for the rest of your life" (*GF*, 40). In *The Odyssey*, Anticleia responds to the question, but the uncertainty in

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[48] Longley, "Au Revoir, Oeuvre: An Interview with Michael Longley by Peter McDonald" (c. 1997), Box 43, Folder 5, Emory.

[49] In *The Odyssey*, Anticleia answers her son's question by explaining that "This is no deception sent by Queen Persephone, / this is just the way of mortals when we die. / Sinews no longer bind the flesh and bones together- / the fire in all its fury burns the body down to ashes / once life slips from the white bones, and the spirit, / rustling, flitters away…flown like a dream." Homer, *The Odyssey*, bk. 11, lines, 248-253.

Longley's poem shows that while such questions still need to be asked, the answers remain opaque. In "The Butchers," the final poem of the volume, Longley deliberately combines the purging of the suitors at the end of *The Odyssey* with the later retrieval by Hermes of their souls, showing he continues to think about "what happens to human beings when they die" even in a poem where the majority of lines refuse to shirk from descriptions of the violent scene. The highly inter-textual quality of *Gorse Fires* ensures that the classically inspired poems are not read in isolation, but that their lyric moments are enhanced by the overall interests of a volume set in the contemporary world.[50] Though in 1985 Longley admitted to not warming to Heaney's *Station Island* as a result of what he felt to be the volume's overly prescriptive feel, he positively describes *Gorse Fires* as "a big patchwork":

> I wanted any given poem to draw resonances from other poems ten or twenty pages in front or behind. I was aiming for a deep cohesiveness. In more confident moments the book looks to me like one big poem… As a result, there are fewer showpieces, anthology pieces, if I may be so bold.[51]

Without making a direct comparison between Heaney's practice in *Station Island* and *Gorse Fires*, or labelling either book as "programmatic," Longley's recent books place a much greater emphasis on overall design and dialogue (or "resonances") between poems.

In contrast to the Homeric reworkings of *Gorse Fires*, Longley admits that the poems based on *The Odyssey* in *No Continuing City* (1969) owe more to Joyce than to Homer. As a university student at Trinity, he confesses that he "didn't work very hard as a classicist," instead spending his "time exploring Dublin and James Joyce. I was inhaling *Ulysses* and got some early sense of Homer from him and from Bloom's wanderings. That was the heady brew that generated my early Homeric poems…."[52] In "En Route," for example, the title of which he changed to "Odyssey" for *Poems: 1963-1983*, Longley uses Homer's story to explore a catalogue of previous lovers, as the poet imagines them as "last resorts" before his official marriage, "Your faces favourite landmarks always, / Your bodies comprising the long way home" (*NCC*, 24). Joyce and Bloom are recognizable in small details such

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[50] See, for example, "Argos" (*GF*, 45). "Argos," about Odysseus' faithful and long-abandoned dog, must be read in conjunction with the preceding poems concerning the Holocaust, in order to appreciate Longley's abhorrence over the senseless loss and waste of life – of humans and animals.
[51] Longley, "Interview with Michael Longley by Peter McDonald." For Longley's comments on *SI* see: Longley, "The Longley Tapes," 26.
[52] Longley, "Interview with Michael Longley by Peter McDonald."

as the "coy advertisements" and "professional virgins" that recall Bloom's beachside encounter with Gerty McDowell as well as his journey into Night-town. Stylistically, the poem is very much in accordance with Longley's early work, which is often marked by a rigid structure. Similarly, in "Circe," Longley details Circe's line of lovers from the female point of view as the goddess remembers how "Out of the night husband after husband / - Eyes wide as oysters, arms full of driftwood - / Wades ashore and puts in at my island" (*NCC*, 30). Rather than seeing her activity in the conventional way as a trap for the men, Longley's Circe constructs herself as one who "helped so many sailors off the sea," who, she says, made "my arms and my thighs last rooms / For the irretrievable and capsized -."[53] Longley's personal odyssey in *Gorse Fires* is the journey of a middle-aged and seasoned poet looking to "give expression to sorrows," as his own mediator, but the earlier Homer-Joyce inspired efforts continue to echo, as he remains primarily concerned with the nexus of love, life and death.

The Homeric poems of *Gorse Fires* are notable for their evocation of lyric moments, plucked from the much larger narrative of *The Odyssey* (a technique that is pushed to extremes in several poems from *The Ghost Orchid* [1995] where entire scenes from *The Iliad* are condensed into a few lines of verse). Longley's personal presence varies, often through the juxtaposition of blatantly personal material as with "Anticleia," and most directly in "Eurycleia" where Longley completely departs from Homer into autobiographical territory in the second stanza. The first stanza captures the moment when Odysseus' childhood nurse recognizes him by his scar, excitedly exclaiming with "Such pain and happiness" that "'You are my baby boy for sure and I didn't know you / Until I had fondled my master's body all over'" (*GF*, 31). Longley voices the shorter second stanza himself as he acknowledges that "I began like Odysseus by loving the wrong woman," a line he also uses to start his autobiographical essay, "Tuppenny Stung: Growing up in Belfast." In the essay Longley explains that the poem refers to his childhood nurse Lena, his primary caretaker as an infant since his mother looked after his twin brother, "the slightly

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[53] Of the six-line *aabbcc* poem "Nausicaa," Longley acknowledges the subject as "really Gerty McDowell." Ibid. Furthermore, in "Narcissus," domestic objects "Submerge in mind and pool like treasure-trove. / My face as sole survivor floats above" (*NCC*, 35). "Circe" was also included in *Ten Poems* (1965), Longley's first publication of multiple poems, while "Nausicaa," "Persephone," and "Narcissus" were included in the pamphlet *Secret Marriages* (1968), also published before *No Continuing City*, confirming the classically inspired poems as some of his earliest composed poetry.

more difficult child."[54] Longley credits Lena with being "a natural and devoted surrogate mother," and admits that as his "love for Lena deepened, my relationship with my mother grew more tense and complicated."[55] In "Eurycleia," Longley compares Lena to Odysseus' nurse as the only person who symbolically "remembers the coppice, dense and overgrown" of the scars of childhood.[56] Longley rarely positions himself so directly in the free translations that correlate to specific scenes in Homer, and, significantly, even this obvious departure from the original is formally distinct from the Homeric story told in the first stanza.[57] Crucially, the acknowledgement in "Eurycleia" of Longley's personal markings, the emotional and physical scars symbolized by the "bristling spine and fire-red eyes and white tusks," resting just under the surface, provides a template for how to read Longley's other classically inspired poems.

In general, Longley crafts compact lyric poems from the later books of *The Odyssey*, which concern Odysseus' homecoming encounters. Therefore, it is interesting to reflect on what he deliberately omits. In Homer, for example, Eurycleia's recognition of Odysseus precedes a brutal threat from Odysseus, who warns the nurse that if she let anyone know about his true identity he "will not spare you – my old nurse that you are - / when I kill the other women in my house."[58] Longley expects readers to be familiar with what is directly outside the window of his poems. This is especially true in "Ceasefire" where he curbs the hopefulness of forgiveness with an understanding that many readers will recognize in the story of the Trojan War that the ceasefire is only temporary.

Though Longley doesn't include any obviously autobiographical material in "Laertes," from *Gorse Fires*, readers of Longley's poetry cannot help but be aware of

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[54] Longley, "Tuppenny Stung: Growing up in Belfast," in *Tuppenny Stung*, 15.
[55] Ibid., 15-16. Again, this understanding is furthered in *Gorse Fires* by its inter-textual connections: the placement of "Eurycleia" on a page facing "The Man of Two Sorrows" enhances the sense of Longley's perceived loss of the original maternal bond, which was transferred to his nurse instead.
[56] Eurycleia resurfaces in the one-sentence poem "The Dry Cleaners" (*GO*, 32). Again, she appears as a familiar face encountered by the poet and his father in Ireland where they "bought her tea and watched her smooth the table- / Cloth and make her plate and doily concentric circles," with the poet acknowledging that she "Took care of me." Eurycleia seems to represent various working class women (Lena certainly, but perhaps others as well) that helped to care for the young Longley, who he asserts are made of more "than jugs and basins, hot water / And cold...."
[57] Longley does not deviate greatly from specific Homeric episodes, but other poems use Homer as reference points to explore intersections of the personal and domestic. For example, "In the Iliad" (*WJ*, 14) compares how his first child "turned in the small hours her hungry face / To my diddy and tried to suck that button," with the nipples that "In the *Iliad* spears go through." Further, "Heartsease" (*WJ*, 13) sees Helen "destroyer of cities" transported to Donegal, administering "Heartsease" to calm the men.
[58] Homer, *The Odyssey*, bk. 19, lines 543-44 and 553-54.

the prominent presence of Longley's own father when reading the poem about Odysseus' reunion with his elderly father.[59] Similarly, "Tree-House," about Penelope's testing of Odysseus' identity by getting him to reveal the secret of their bed, must be set against a background of Longley's love poetry.[60] The marital bed is symbolic of lasting love, an endurance which Longley's love poetry frequently establishes. Again, this is further emphasized by the placement of "Glass Flowers" on the facing page, where the poet acknowledges his memorial desire to "bring glass flowers to the broken marriages" (*GF*, 24). Further, Longley describes Odysseus in "Tree House" in artistic terms that make him an idealized image of Longley as poet; he is a "master-craftsman" who "tangled like a child in the imaginary branches / Of the tree-house he had built, love poet, carpenter" (*GF*, 25), a celebration of both creativity and intimacy.[61]

In "Laertes," a touching account of the father-son reunion, Odysseus is understandably emotional upon catching sight of his father, but decides he must reveal himself slowly so as not to startle the old man:

> …all he wanted then and there
> Was to kiss him and hug him and blurt out the whole story,
> But the whole story is one catalogue and then another,
> So he waited for images from that formal garden,
> Evidence of a childhood spent traipsing after his father
> …
> Until Laertes recognised his son and, weak at the knees,
> Dizzy, flung his arms around the neck of great Odysseus
> Who drew the old man fainting to his breast and held him there
> And cradled like driftwood the bones of his dwindling father.
> (*GF*, 33).[62]

The reference to the story as "one catalogue and then another" mirrors Longley as a poet of lists. And, it is a very Longleyesque Odysseus who finally reveals his true

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[59] In an interview, Longley has openly acknowledged "Laertes" as "also a lament for my father." He recalls how while in Italy he "looked down to the bottom of the village and there was this octogenarian tending his flowers...I really felt I had gone back into Homeric times, and I was part of a timeless Mediterranean scene...the translation's quite free. Bits of it are me, and bits of it are Homer." Longley, "Interview with Michael Longley by Sarah Broom."

[60] Many of Longley's love poems were discussed in connection to the West of Ireland in Chapter 3.

[61] "Tree House" anticipates the more intimate and personal "Snow-Hole" (discussed in Chapter 3) where the "big double-bed" and the couple "catch fire," allowing smoke to "escape up the glass chimney into the bedroom" (*GO*, 34).

[62] Compare Longley's lines with Homer's, where Odysseus goes from pretending to be "from Roamer-Town, my home's a famous place, / my father's Unsparing, son of old King Pain," to quickly revealing himself "Father -I am your son – myself , the man you're seeking." Only after Laertes asks for further proof of his son's identity does Odysseus show him the childhood scar and then acknowledge that he can "tell you the trees you gave me years ago, / here on this well-worked plot...." Homer, *The Odyssey*, bk. 24, lines 340-41, 359-63 and 375-77.

identity by using "Evidence of a childhood spent traipsing after his father," reciting the exact contents of the orchard, "the thirteen pear-trees, / Ten apple-trees, forty fig-trees, the fifty rows of vines" (*GF*, 33). Indeed, Longley claims the use of lists as one of his primary classical inheritances, a technique used so effectively in poems such as "The Ice-Cream Man" where the flavours of ice-cream and the flower names function as linguistic bouquets.[63] In "Laertes" the precise listing of the orchard's contents reveals both Odysseus' identity and the depth of his love for his father. Incidentally, "Laertes" and "Tree House" represent two of many examples of poems from *Gorse Fires* that Longley composed as a single extended sentence. The long Homeric line provides Longley with greater poetic versatility, and is, as Corcoran notes, "a measure of his classicism."[64]

In addition to Homer, Longley also engages in an extended exploration of Ovid in *The Ghost Orchid*, and the Latin poet's distinct brand of humor permeates much of the classical material included in *The Weather in Japan* (2000).[65] As far back as 1985, Longley stated his interest in "having a go at Ovid," but it wasn't until an invitation by Michael Hoffmann and James Lasdun to write "Baucis & Philemon" for the *After Ovid* collection that he actively immersed himself in the work of the Latin poet.[66] Though called one of the "Ulster Ovids" by critic John Kerrigan, Longley's adaptation of Ovid must be qualified.[67] Like Longley's Homer, his Ovid is profoundly Longleyean. Longley emphasizes domestic continuity, rather than abrupt change, in his rather unorthodox approach to Ovid.[68] As Longley explains, though people remember Ovid best for the "miraculous metamorphoses," he is drawn to the "daily metamorphoses" (using examples from "Baucis & Philemon"):

> …right the way through [the *Metamorphoses*] Ovid has all these other little metamorphoses, the daily metamorphoses of ashes being blown into a fire, of raw meat made into a meal…The old couple put down a grotty old cloth on a rickety bench and that becomes a throne for the gods. And that, you see, is

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[63] Longley explains that "catalogues which release the power of names simply by stringing them together to make rhythmic sense are at the heart of poetry and go all the way back to the catalogue of ships in Homer's *Iliad*." Longley, "A Tongue at Play: How Poets Work," Box 37, Folder 1, Emory.
[64] Neil Corcoran, "Ovid in Ulster," review of *GO*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 July 1995, 13. Michael Allen notes that the long line helps Longley to positively introduce "a wider range of voices" into his poetry. Allen, "Longley's Long Line," 122.
[65] The Ovid poems in *The Ghost Orchid* are also those included in the *After Ovid* compilation.
[66] Longley, "The Longley Tapes," 17.
[67] John Kerrigan, "Ulster Ovids," in *The Chosen Ground: Essays on the Contemporary Poetry of Northern Ireland*, ed. Neil Corcoran (Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan: Seren, 1992), 237-69.
[68] This is true not only for the Ovidian poems in *The Ghost Orchid*, but also for the earlier "Metamorphoses" (*EG*, 41) discussed in Chapter 3. In the poem, the process of change is captured in distinct phases, indicated by formal stanza breaks headed by roman numerals.

> what I think the art I love the most does – it transforms the everyday and shows the divine, something divine in everyday ordinary objects.[69]

Thus, the "transfiguration of the everyday" is "running parallel to the more obvious, spectacular movements of the story."[70] The tone of several of the Ovid poems differ noticeably from Longley's Homeric explorations, as would be appropriate considering the different period, style and concerns between the Greek and Latin poet.[71] However, Longley uses the technique of freeze-framed moments to capture the Ovidian material in much the same way that he focuses on lyric moments in *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*.

Longley's Ovid poems have been well received by most critics of *The Ghost Orchid* and *After Ovid*. In a highly complimentary review of *The Ghost Orchid*, Corcoran notes that despite Homer's prominent role "it is Ovid who predominates...."[72] In contrast, John Lyon argues that Longley "seems imaginatively to resist rather than accord" with the *Metamorphoses*, as he ultimately "celebrates endurance rather than change."[73] However, I agree with Corcoran that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* "both underwrit[es] and suppl[ies] a context for Longley's own preoccupation with metamorphosis and mutability."[74] Longley's Ovid may be "tempered," as Lyon argues,[75] but Longley's alert gaze (as he watches the petals of a flower bruised by a mere touch [*GO*, 52], or concentrates on the invasion of the domestic space when, while "preparing an Ulster fry for breakfast," someone "walked into the kitchen and shot him" leaving "Only a bullet hole in the cutlery drawer" [*EG*, 12]) reveals him as a poet intensely concerned with the way that seemingly small things or single actions can be utterly *transforming*.

Longley's longest and most touching rendering of Ovid is "Baucis & Philemon," from *The Ghost Orchid*, which concentrates on the minute and domestic aspects of the tale, as the couple's love for each other mirrors the care they offer their unexpected divine guests. A story of enduring love, Longley positions the quiet fortitude of the couple's life at the center of the story rather than any rapid metamorphoses, a fact emphasised by their eventual transformation into trees.

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[69] Longley, "Interview with Michael Longley by Sarah Broom."
[70] Ibid.
[71] See: McDonald, "Lapsed Classics," 40.
[72] Lyne, "Ovid in English Translation," 260; Corcoran, "Ovid in Ulster," 13.
[73] Lyon, "Michael Longley's Lists": 228-29.
[74] Corcoran, "Ovid in Ulster," 13.
[75] Lyon, "Michael Longley's Lists": 229.

"Living on their memories" at the end of a long life they grow "leafy" and "called in unison / 'Goodbye, my dear.' Then the bark knitted and hit their lips" (*GO*, 25). Longley's final stanza opens up the poem to a more general significance (as Ovid's does) by turning Baucis and Philemon into exemplary instances of human "caretakers":

> Two trees are grafted together where their two bodies stood.
> I add my flowers to bouquets in the branches by saying
> 'Treat those whom God loves as your local gods – a blackthorn
> Or a standing stone. Take care of caretakers and watch
> Over the nightwatchman and the nightwatchman's wife.'[76]

Contrary to many stories in the *Metamorphoses* where the major transformation is fast-paced, Ovid's original story also records the slow change of the married couple into trees. The gods' transformation of Baucis and Philemon is a slow and peaceful process, making this story a natural choice for Longley to translate.[77] There may be a muted allusion to Northern Irish events in Longley's choice to celebrate the "nightwatchman" – as in the political "The Fishing Party" where Longley credits Christ as loving "off-duty policemen and their murderers" (*GO*, 42) - but the allusion is not allowed to dominate. The natural and tender qualities that Longley attributes to the couple and their domestic space again hark back to his many personal love poems, especially those set in the West of Ireland, a landscape that resonates for him as a place of marriage and togetherness.

In "Phoenix," another Ovidian poem, Longley conjures up the bird who "renews and re-begets itself" and turns it into a symbol of the way Ovid's tale "re-begets" itself in Longley's Ireland.[78] Longley's phoenix is "Inside my head," figured as "six duck eggs Orla Murphy gave me / In a beechwood bowl Ted O'Driscoll turned, a nest / Jiggling eggs from Baltimore to Belfast…" where the lifecycle of his son from birth to "his father's coffin" (*GO*, 30) circles back to the original duck eggs. The poem, Lyon explains, "is a *tour de force* of circularity and closure, a single

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[76] The original lines read: "I saw myself / Wreaths on the boughs and hung a fresh one there, / And said: 'They now are gods, who served the Gods; / To them who worship gave is worship given.'" Ovid, "Philemon and Baucis," in *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville (1986; repr., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), bk. 7, 193.

[77] *The Ghost Orchid* contains poems that play on the Ovidian theme of metamorphosis, but are not classical in context: for instance, the humorous transformation of the poet's eye color in "Sitting for Eddie" (*GF*, 4); or the five-line poem "Mr. 10 ½" where Longley alters the brash exhibitionism of Robert Mapplethorpe's photograph of the same title by substituting "for his two plums / Plum-blossom, for his cucumber a yellowy flower" (*GF*, 16).

[78] Ovid, "The Doctrines of Pythagoras," *Metamorphoses*, bk. 15, 363.

sentence containing seventeen lines of naming, listing and celebration."[79] Longley leaves his distinct style on Ovid's story by domesticating and acclimatizing the Phoenix into an Irish context. Ovid, too, was a master of the detailed list, and Longley capitalizes on this aspect of his classical inheritance. His reworkings of Ovid's verse, including "Phoenix," also benefit from his interpretation of Ovid's own practice of creatively merging the work of others with his own material, which Longley takes as a mandate to add new elements to the Latin poet's stories. For example, in Longley's version of the Arachne story, "Spiderwoman," Arachne becomes a sexualised force in the poet's imagination, as she starts "with Ovid and finishes with me" (*GO*, 13). Similarly, Longley is attracted to Ovid's explanation of origins, though in his own characteristic way. For instance, in "Perdix," the story of the partridge, in which Daedalus jealously pushed his apprentice "headlong off the Acropolis," Longley explores the origin of the behavior of certain animal species. His version of the story stresses the origin myth that "Thanks to that tumble" the partridge forever lost "its head for heights" (*GO*, 7).

Classically-inspired poems in Longley's recent volumes also represent some of his most public and political verse. Yet, characteristically, he rarely approaches public issues directly. "The Camp-Fires," for instance, like "Sea Shanty," blends ancient Greek and modern Irish terrains. Describing the Achaean camps of soldiers on the banks of Troy from *The Iliad*, the poet consciously incorporates modern clichés for war, as the men "dozed in no man's land and the killing fields" (*GO*, 37). Western Irish place-names ("Points like Tonakeera and Allaran where the tide / Turns into Killary, where the salmon run from the sea,") generate a sense of peacefulness, which becomes ironic when we realize that the "fifty men relaxing in the fire-light" are only waiting until "sunrise" to re-enter into the violent world of war. The ominousness that settles over Longley's western landscape indicates that war and violence can creep into even the most serene of locations, as the poet demonstrates that all places (even his beloved Mayo) are implicated and shadowed by the violence of our age, both in Northern Ireland and more generally.

"The Camp-Fires" leads directly to two short poems derived from *The Iliad*, "The Helmet" and "The Parting," which together set the reader up for the startling forgiveness expressed in "Ceasefire," placed on the facing page.[80] In "The Helmet"

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[79] Lyon, "Michael Longley's Lists": 231.
[80] See Section IV for an extended discussion of "Ceasefire" in relation to Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*.

Hector's invocation that "his son might grow up bloodier than him" and the baby's fear of his father in uniform, "the flashing bronze / And the nightmarish nodding of the horse-hair crest" (*GO*, 38), is validated by the reader's knowledge of Hector's fate. Though "His daddy laughed, his mammy laughed," the reader realizes that the intimacy of the familial scene will very soon turn "nightmarish," as Hector is preparing to meet Achilles and his death. Jonathan Hufstader reads a specific Northern Irish connection into the poem, finding the language to replicate "scenes from the home life of an Ulster hard man," with his hope that his son follows him as a 'warrior' taken down from the royal context in *The Iliad* to reveal the inheritance of violence from the older generation in Northern Ireland.[81] The two-line poem "The Parting," emphasizes the quickness and finality of death in war, as Longley condenses into a couplet the long final exchange between Andromache and Hector in which she tries to convince him not to fight:

> He: 'Leave it to the big boys, Andromache.'
> 'Hector, my darling husband, och, och,' she.
> (*GO*, 38)

Speaking later of his decision to title *The Weather in Japan* after the two-line poem of the same name, Longley suggests that by such "brevity I might be making a point about scale and importance."[82] The same might be true of "The Parting." The poem's use of "och, och" as Andromache's final farewell explicitly makes a Northern Irish linguistic connection, as it is an Ulster expression which, Longley explains, conveys both a "sense of sorrow and impatience."[83]

"The Butchers," the last poem of *Gorse Fires*, is in many ways Longley's most politically resonant free translation of Homer, though made from a characteristically oblique angle.[84] The title is the only obvious indication of a Northern Irish context for the scene of Odysseus' purging of the suitors, as "The Butchers" blatantly refers to the notorious Protestant murder gang the Shankill Butchers. Indeed, drafts of the poem show that Longley considered giving the poem the even more overt title "Shankill Butchers."[85] Lucy McDiarmid argues that, "Coming just after these occasional poems, 'The Butchers' expresses the outrage

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[81] Hufstader, *Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones*, 105.
[82] Longley, "Interview with Michael Longley by Peter McDonald."
[83] Ibid. Heaney uses "och" repeatedly in *The Cure at Troy* in Philoctetes' exclamations of pain and betrayal (*CT*, 16-17).
[84] See: Lyon, "Michael Longley's Lists": 232-33.
[85] Longley, "Draft of 'The Butchers,'" Box 22, Folder 21, Emory.

avoided by the poems with modern political subjects. Odysseus' 'white wash and disinfectant' offer a drastic cleansing for all violated houses."[86] It is helpful to recall Longley's account of Homer as giving him "a new emotional and psychological vocabulary," which allowed him to express "emotions that I would have found almost impossible to deal with otherwise...."[87] The scene of violent purging doesn't have any obvious parallel to other poems by Longley, and thus serves in part as a personal cleansing of feelings of frustration and hatred toward the components of violence in Northern Ireland. Longley assumes (if only briefly) the persona of Odysseus to vent pent-up emotions, much as Heaney looks to Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* in "Mycenae Lookout" to find expression for his anger and frustration.[88]

Hufstader harshly criticizes Longley for what he perceives as the poet's refusal to implicate himself (as Heaney does) in the recent history of Ulster, but does acknowledge that Longley's recent work on "Greek mythology" develops "new ideas and feelings about social violence."[89] However, Hufstader ultimately dismisses even Longley's recent work as apolitical, arguing that, "Like Fleance fleeing from the senseless carnage which is soon to include him, Longley accepts a position of irrelevance, hiding under the stage and coming out again only when the crowd has gone home."[90] Against this reading, I think that the temporal and geographical distance of the classical material offers a productive and revealing lens to view contemporary situations. As Peter McDonald writes, if Homer acts as a way to approach "the most painful, private, and tender things elsewhere in the volume, here at the book's conclusion [Homer] is a means of bringing into focus the most appalling things, without commentary or overt interpretation."[91] "The Butchers" does not tone down the violence of the scene in Homer: the household women are graphically described as "hanged... So none touched the ground with her toes" with "Their heads bobbing in a row, their feet twitching but not for long" (*GF*, 51). Similarly, Melanthios's body is brought out and desecrated: his "nose and ears and cock and balls" cut off to make "a dog's dinner." The implicit parallel to Northern Ireland, suggested in the title, adds contemporary significance to the classical episode, but does not overpower the original scene with a surplus of modern

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[86] Lucy McDiarmid, review of *GF*, *New York Times*, 2 August 1992.
[87] Longley, "Interview with Michael Longley by Peter McDonald."
[88] See Section V for an extended analysis.
[89] Hufstader, *Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones*, 88.
[90] Ibid., 89. For my discussion of "Fleance" please refer to Chapter 2.
[91] Peter McDonald, "Lapsed Classics," 43.

references. The brutality of Odysseus' actions and Longley's language in the poem cast doubt on the efficacy of "whitewash and disinfectant." However, the symbol of Hermes (as "deliverer") leading the souls of the murdered suitors and housemaids through a distinctly Irish landscape ("Along the clammy sheughs, then past the oceanic streams" until finally coming to "a bog-meadow full of bog-asphodels") allows a refreshing, if transitory, moment of tranquillity after the horrific bloodshed.[92] Longley's free translations of the classics consistently interweave literary memory with the poet's home world in Ireland, and map each against the other.

III. LONGLEY'S *ARS POETICA*: ON POETS AND POETRY

> The poet may be dead and gone, but her/his
> Poetry is like Homer's octopus
> Yanked out of its hidey-hole, suckers
> Full of tiny stones, except that the stones
> Are precious stones or semi-precious stones.
>
> Michael Longley, "Homer's Octopus" (*GO*, 45)

In the final section of Chapter 3, I considered the way that the landscape of the West of Ireland functioned as a place, especially in *The Weather in Japan*, for Longley to meditate on the weighty issues of aging and poetic legacy. Throughout his career, the classics have also offered a particularly fruitful launch-pad for often humorous discussions of poets and poetry. In the five-line "Homer's Octopus," Longley appropriates lines from *The Odyssey* where Homer likens Odysseus' clinging for his life on an ocean rock to the way that an octopus, when "dragged from its lair," brings with it "pebbles stuck in [its] suckers."[93] In Longley's poem it becomes a symbol for the enduring quality of individual poems, which persist even after the poet is "dead and gone." Similarly, in the sonnet "Remembering the Poets" from *The Weather in Japan*, Longley speaks as an established poet, and speculates on how his influences will be remembered:

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[92] Longley defines "sheugh" as "a trench or ditch – from the Irish" (*GF*, 52).
[93] Homer, *The Odyssey*, bk. 5, lines 476-77.

As a teenage poet I idolised the poets, doddery
Macer trying out his *Ornithogonia* on me,
And the other one about herbal cures for snake bites,
Propertius, my soul mate, love's polysyllabic
Pyrotechnical laureate reciting reams by heart,
Ponticus straining to write The Long Poem, Bassus
(Sorry for dropping names) iambic to a fault,
Horace hypnotising me with songs on the guitar,
Virgil, our homespun internationalist, sighted
At some government reception, and then Albius
Tibullus strolling in the woods a little while
With me before he died, his two slim volumes
An echo from the past, a melodious complaint
That reaches me here, the last of the singing line.
(*WJ*, 61)

Cleverly, the list echoes the attributes of several of Longley's Northern Irish contemporaries, as well as offering a more straightforward celebration of the poets that, as a Classics student at Trinity, Longley would have first looked to.[94] Pursuing the contemporary allusions, Longley only faintly disguises Heaney as Virgil, "our homespun internationalist;" Tibullus may represent Derek Mahon, as Longley has frequently credited Mahon with being the master of the "singing line;"[95] James Simmons seems to be behind the reference to Horace, "hypnotising me with songs on the guitar;" while Propertius may be the alter-ego of Longley himself, as "love's polysyllabic." This logic can certainly be taken farther, which Longley most likely intended given the poem's light-hearted and conversational style "(Sorry for dropping names)." However, the classical poets referred to most obviously represent themselves, and reveal a more subtle artistic line between the Latin poets and Longley and his contemporaries, as the "echo from the past" reverberates in the work of the present. The poet's account of listening to the "last of the singing line" shows his need (however playful) to commemorate his generation of poets, now in their sixties, as Longley himself "as a teenage poet" looked to Latin and Greek poets.[97]

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[94] Longley shows how immersed he was in the classics, especially prior to arriving at Trinity, joking in an *Honest Ulsterman* interview that "There was an enormous gap in my reading between Lucretius and W.H. Auden." Longley, "The Longley Tapes," 20.
[95] On the back cover of Mahon's *Collected Poems*, Longley praises Mahon as "A gloriously gifted poet, our bravest and most stylish wielder of the singing line."
[97] There is also an echo to Longley's earlier "Alibis" where he humorously claims that his "one remaining ambition is to be / The last poet in Europe to find a rhyme" (*EV*, 58).

In "River & Fountain" from *The Ghost Orchid*, written to commemorate the quarter-centenary of Trinity College Dublin, Longley looks back to his years at Trinity with respect to how they prepared him for his career as a poet. According to Lyon, the poem shows Longley's conception "of his own life and biography as inventory rather than story."[98] Longley wonders "Was Trinity a Trojan Horse? Were we Greeks at all?" charting a personal as well as a shared historical path, remembering how the students of his generation thought about joining the "Civil Service and talked of Civil Rights" (*GO*, 56).[99] The poem lists various coming of age experiences while at university, as well as memorable comments by friends, including the praise of his earliest and "best" review from "Adam the scholar" with a stammer, "I like these-I-I" (*GO*, 56). The crucial last stanza brings his poem full circle and argues that while he started by walking "backwards into the future like a Greek," the compilation of important memories has made it possible to go "forwards into the past." The ultimate realization and lesson from his trip back into his college years concerns the location of home and identity:

> Walking forwards into the past with more of an idea
> I want to say to my friends of thirty years ago
> And to daughters and a son that Belfast is our home,
> Prose a river still – the Liffey, the Lagan – and poetry
> A fountain that plays in an imaginary Front Square.
> When snow falls it is feathers from the wings of Icarus.
> (*GO*, 57)

The years of imitation and accidental wisdom, when "poetry's townland" was diverse and unsettled, have turned into a more solid location of identification. The distinctly Greek set of referents in the poem emphasize the uncertainty of his destiny at various points (we "Flapped our wings together and were melted in the sun"), his ultimate appreciation for the continuing moments of inspiration (the "feathers from the wings of Icarus" representing his continuing apprenticeship to art), and his appreciation of Trinity's role in his development (as its literary magazine, *Icarus*, which he edited, was a forum for Longley, Mahon, Brendan Kennelly, and other poets of his generation at Trinity).

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[98] Lyon, "Michael Longley's Lists," 237.

[99] Compare Longley's style in "River & Fountain" with "Working Holiday" from his first volume, where the poet's Greek lessons, though "now locked in the past tense," foster his inventory of people and events, as he recalls how his "classics master - 'very eccentric' - " would enter into his dreams on vacation to remind him that he was on a "working holiday" (*NCC*, 48-49). The reference to the Trojan Horse in "River & Fountain" could be an allusion to Trinity's foundation by Elizabeth I.

The classics have an important role in sponsoring Longley's characteristic association between the creativity of the poetic process and sexual intercourse. Where Longley describes poems as "precious stones or semi-precious stones," after Homer in "Homer's Octopus," he has often likened his poems to children and the process of writing to a distinctly sexual activity. He has described composing poems as an "erotic" experience, and in "Spiderwoman," Longley explicitly connects the artistic and sexual realms, as Arachne "starts with Ovid and finishes with me" (*GO*, 13). The blatant and dangerous sexuality symbolized by Arachne infiltrates Longley's mind, "Enticing the eight eyes of my imagination" and therefore becomes a symbol for creativity. Longley modifies the classical tale so that after "mak[ing] love on her lethal doily" Arachne proceeds to wear "our babies like brooches on her abdomen."[100] It is helpful to remember that in the second stanza of the dedicatory poem to his wife in *No Continuing City*, Longley writes:

> My children and my dead
> Coming of age
> In the turn of your head
> As you turn a page.
> (*NCC*, 5)

Thus, Longley links his wife's primary role both in bearing their physical children, as well as helping him to give birth to the "children" collected in the pages of *No Continuing City*. In the same volume, the poem "To Derek Mahon" (later appropriately retitled "Birthmarks") credits his fellow poet as the only one who knew about the poems discarded from the published book, figured as "Idiot children in the dark" (*NCC*, 55).[101] In "A Flowering," another Ovidian poem from *The Ghost Orchid*, Longley looks at the relationship between sexual, physical and creative energy from his stance as a middle-aged man, whose "body grows woman-like" (*GO*, 14). Suggesting a correlation between the short life-cycle of flowers and his own body, the poet hides "Among Ovid's lovely casualties" whose blood changes into an array of different flora, none of which will "last long," but nonetheless find a more enduring form of flowering through poetry.

Classical poetry has been the explicit or implicit measuring rod for subsequent European verse and Longley has often used classical motifs as a way to

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[100] The violent sexuality of the tale is further enhanced by its placement next to "Sheela-na-gig" who "pulls her vulva apart for everyone to look at..." (*GO*, 12).
[101] Further, in "The Adulterer," poems are figured as "adulteries" put "Beneath the floorboards" - his "other women" (*EV*, 21).

turn a self-depreciating glance towards his own practice and poetic vocation, as well as to ponder the possible directions his art could take. In "Altera Cithera," from *An Exploded View* (1973), Longley turns lines from Propertius into a question, asking whether poetry recycles the "same old songs / That are out of key, / Unwashed by epic oceans / And dipped by love / In lyric waters only?" (*EV*, 56).[102] This is a crucial question for Longley, a self-described lyric poet, and the poem demonstrates the perennial struggle between the love lyric and the epic. Similarly, in an unpublished poem titled "Ars Poetica," Longley questions epic poetry, worrying whether the emotion of such verse is real, as "Virgilian pathos" means "only blots of ink" that "concede / Death or black-out in what we read?"[103] Not surprisingly, in "Altera Cithera," the lyric genre triumphs, as the poem envisions Propertius "Bringing to the ground / Like lovers Caesar, / Soldiers, politicians / And all the dreary / Epics of the muscle-bound" (*EV*, 56). As a self-aware justification of his own artistic practice, "Altera Cithera" argues that the "lyric waters" fight not only against the "Epics of the muscle-bound," but also against "history" in order to create an art that is timeless.[104] In "Alibis," Longley's "*Apologia Pro Vita Mea*" (*EV*, 59) is both farcical and self-reflexive. Constructing himself ironically as a poet in exile, like Ovid at Tomis, the far-fetched positions Longley imagines for himself parody his poetic personality as well as the solitary nature of poets more generally. Longley pushes the stereotype of the self-centered poet to the extreme, planning the pages of his "*Apologia*" to be a "lengthy meditation / With myself as the central character," though he dreams about giving up his life of poetic solitude to join "Honeymoon couples and football supporters" on an "express train" (*EV*, 59). He plays on the idea of "being in two places at the one time" by an allusion to Ovid, as Longley humorously adds himself to a tradition of exiled poets, while being aware of the contrast between Ovid's forced exile and his own self-imposed and metaphorical kind.[105]

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[102] Longley also wrote a version of Cornelia after Propertius for Derek Mahon, which was never published (Box 30, Folder 4, Emory).
[103] Longley, "Ars Poetica," Box 29, Folder 14, Emory. Longley titled another poem "Ars Poetica" (*MLW*, in *P*, 138-39), which I discuss in the next paragraph.
[104] Lyon connects this sentiment to Longley's poetic conservativeness, thus making his classicism and conservativism one and the same. Lyon, "Michael Longley's Lists": 236.
[105] Further, in "Options" (*EV*, 60-61) Longley uses classical referents to again parody his artistic options, "juxtaposing" the "Wise-cracks by Groucho or Mae West / And the hushed hexameters / Of the right pastoral poet / From the Silver Age – Bacchylides / For instance...."

As the Horatian title indicates, "Ars Poetica" from *Man Lying on a Wall* (1976), like "Alibis" and "Options," offers a playful poetics, using humorous sarcasm to reveal the vast discrepancy between the world of his poetic imagination and the reality of his situation. The title's signal of 'professional skill' emphasizes the difficulty of combining a day job (working as Combined Arts Director for the Arts Council of Northern Ireland) with his vocation as a poet. To write a poem, Longley faced the difficult choice of sneaking a moment at "the office desk," or limiting his time with family:

> I am writing a poem at the office desk
> Or else I am forging business letters –
> What I am really up to, I suspect,
> Is seducing the boss's secretary
> Among the ashtrays on the boardroom table
> Before absconding with the petty-cash box
> And a one-way ticket to Katmandu.
>
> (*MLW*, in *P*, 138-39)

The poem owes something to Mahon's "Lives," and in the last stanza he claims a "general release" through the creative exercise, as after putting "myself in the shoes of all husbands" he successfully "annexed / To my territory gardens," the "desire – even at this late stage- / To go along with the world and his wife."[106] Mordantly, he claims an ability to live through the more exciting lives of others through the poetic medium.

"The Mad Poet," from *The Ghost Orchid*, builds on the parodic and self-reflexive technique of such poems as "Alibis" and "Ars Poetica." Here, Longley likens the poet's madness to being "afflicted with the itchy nirls / Or jaundice or religious fundamentalism" (*GO*, 6). Longley comically advises that when faced with such a poet "burping poems, doottering about" one should not "Swing him a life-line," but ignore him completely and "sling him a deafie instead." Longley's use of slang and informal style (with words like "pissed" and "shite" and descriptions of the poet such as "head-the-ball" and "horn-daft") draws heavily on Ulster Scots, anticipating "Phemios & Medon" later in the book. Directly following "The Mad Poet," "After Horace" emphasizes Longley willingness to turn a sardonic glance on the contemporary scene more generally. "After Horace," a free translation from Horace's *Ars Poetica*, lampoons postmodernism, as Longley mocks that as "our

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[106] See: Mahon, "Lives," in *Collected Poems*, 44-46

fertile imaginations cannot make head / Or tail of anything," we "May have a vase in mind when we start, or a wine-jug, / But, look, as the wheel goes round, it ends up as a po" (*GO*, 5).[107] He characterizes postmodernists as settling for less due to lack of talent, generating a spirited attack on those critics who have dismissed the 'well made poem,' much as he had earlier argued for the superiority of the lyric over the epic in "Altera Cithera."[108] Reviewing *The Ghost Orchid*, Justin Quinn argues that "After Horace" initiates a "feisty vein of humour that runs through *The Ghost Orchid*, as the poem sees Longley moving away from descriptions of arcadia, asserted in the previous poems, by "wittily mocking those who would weave humanity and nature together in a timely guffaw."[109] The classical context established by the title's claim that the poem is "After Horace" suggests that literary debates and trends persist. He represents the debate between traditional and new artistic styles as one being waged in the contemporary period much as it had been in Horace's Rome.

Whereas "After Horace" pokes fun at certain types of artistic practice and modes of criticism, in "Ivory & Water" Longley satirizes the tendency of artists to become overly obsessed with their own creations. Longley shows his own creative initiative by metamorphosizing two separate stories from Ovid to make his poem: combining the story of Pygmalion, changed from a statue to a human through her creator's devotion, with that of Arethusa, a nymph who turned from a cloud into water because of her fear of rape.[110] As Ovid was himself a great grafter of previous stories, Longley's reworking offers a complicated compliment to the Latin poet. According to one critic Longley:

> …transforms Pygmalion into a figure for pity, humorous condescension, and (to some extent) for revulsion as the statue resembles a kind of pornography…In the *Metamorphoses* the misogynistic sculptor strikes an absurd pose as he lavishes gifts on a statue, and Longley resolves Ovid's delicate ambivalence into an ultimately thwarted bittersweetness: the dream of his statue melts into water.[111]

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[107] "Po" is a colloquial word for a pot.
[108] Longley claims that "We postmodernists can live with that human head / Stuck on a horse's neck," and bitingly notes that "If a retired sailor / Commissions a picture of the shipwreck he survived, / We give him a cypress-tree because we can draw that" (*GO*, 5).
[109] Justin Quinn, "Mayo Rhymes," review of *GO*, *P.N. Review* 22.3 (January-February 1996): 47.
[110] See: Ovid, "Aresthusa," in *Metamorphoses*, bk. 5, 116-18; and "Pygmalion," bk. 10, 232-34.
[111] Lyne, "Ovid in English translation," 260.

The "perfect specimen out of snow-white ivory" to whom the sculptor directs all of his adoration, "stroking, fondling, whispering, kissing," ultimately "breaks out in a cold sweat that trickles into pools" (*GO*, 15). Longley's version suggests we should not over-fetishize objects of personal creation, and it reveals his suspicions about the wish-fulfilment implicit in the Pygamalion story. In "According to Pythagoras" Longley shows his more general distrust of the idea of miraculous change by demonstrating how the understanding of the "fundamental interconnectedness of all things" can be stretched in many directions, as the poet signs off with the chatty note that "I could go on and on with these scientific facts. / If it wasn't so late I'd tell you a whole lot more" (*GO*, 8). Thus, the poem offers an extension of the logic applied to postmodernism in "After Horace."[112] In both "After Horace" and "According to Pythagoras" Longley uses a modern conversational style that emphasizes the classical stories' relevance for the present, and validates his own humor and wit by anchoring them in classical texts.

Longley's deliberate use of Ulster-Scots reveals his investment of classical landscapes with a distinctly Northern Irish flavor. In *The Ghost Orchid*, Longley uses dialect more boldly than his choice of themes and forms. In "Phemios & Medon," for example, Longley uses Ulster-Scots in order to give a new regional spin to a scene from Homer. Describing his linguistic departure, Longley revealingly uses a phrase, "The long way home," from his early poem "En Route" (*NCC*, 24). The phrase encapsulates his hope for his translation of the episode in Book 22 of *The Odyssey* where Phemios the poet and Medon the herald successfully beg Odysseus and Telemachus to spare them from the slaughter of the suitors and unfaithful servants and his approach to translating more generally:

> I had long wanted to make a self-contained lyric out of the scene in Book XXII of the *Odyssey*…by serendipity or subconscious design I was leafing through an Ulster Scots dictionary, and found that dialect from my region was making available to me the terror and comedy of this scene of Greek epic. Words such as banny, bam, gabble-blooter, keeking make fresh sounds and suggestions. Ulster Scots words are still part of everyday speech here and crop up elsewhere in *The Ghost Orchid*. Although I believe that they should be decipherable work on their own without a gloss, it pleases me to imagine a

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[112] Lyon notes that in the poems' suggestion of "a degree of nervousness about the extremes of transformation, Longley appears to align himself with a tradition of readers who do not take Pythagorean philosophy entirely seriously." Lyon, "Michael Longley's Lists": 231. See also: Corcoran, "Ovid in Ulster."

> reader somewhere far from Ulster discovering what these words mean by going back to Homer. The long way home.[113]

In contrast to the title characters, the narrator, Odysseus and Telemachus speak in Ulster-Scots. Phemios is characterized as "Still looking for a scoot-hole," and appeals to Odysseus "wi this highfalutin blether" with evidence of his lack of culpability, declaring that "Overwhelmed and out-Numbered, I gave poetry readings against my will'" (*GO*, 44). The poem takes a more humorous view of the irony of cleansing through bloodshed, as Longley explains "I wanted this to be frightening and funny, but not in a pantomimic way."[114] The poet and herald's high language contrast with the familiar terms exchanged between Odysseus and Telemachus, and reveal their great distance from the people they claim to represent in verse and song.[115] While Longley hopes that his utilization of regional dialect will cause a reader of his poetry to discover the expressive capabilities of Ulster-Scots by "going back to Homer," as "The long way home," Longley's own discovery of Ulster-Scots comes from an admittedly learned rather than instinctive source.[116] His own practices share something with those of Phemios, and Longley's introduction of a particularly Northern Irish context for the classical scene comes with a complicated part-confession of his own distance and exclusion from one of the primary vernaculars of his birthplace.

As *The Ghost Orchid* explored the practice of poetry and artistic trends with the help of various classical guides, with mostly comic effect, *The Weather in Japan*, published five years later, examines Longley's personal poetic practice in a more serious and meditative tone. In the sonnet "The Beech Tree" Longley imagines himself as a Virgilian character, an old poet still capable of pushing his art further, though now the subject concerns "snoozing under this beech tree's canopy." While "Leaning back like a lover against this beech tree's / Two-hundred-year-old pewter trunk" Longley meditates on the poetic canon, looking up:

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[113] Longley, "*The Ghost Orchid*: for Book Society Review" (n.d.), Box 35, Folder 21, Emory. Longley also discusses his choice of technique in "A Tongue at Play." He notes in regards to poetic technique: "We can further enrich the argot by turning to dialect, though as someone who speaks fairly standard English I would only do so when the dialect of my region, Ulster Scots, sets free a concept or phrase or line which would otherwise not be accessible to me."

[114] Longley, "A Tongue at Play."

[115] See: Agee, "Chinese Whispers, Epic Recensions": 75.

[116] Heaney also writes about his linguistic distance from his roots. See my analysis of "Clearances: 4" in Chapter 4.

Through skylights into the leafy cumulus, and join
Everybody who has tettered where these huge roots
Spread far and wide our motionless mossy dance,
As though I'd begun my eclogues with a beech
As Virgil does, the brown envelopes unfolding
Like Fans their transparent downy leaves, tassels
And prickly cups, mast, a fall of vermilion
And copper and gold, then room in the branches
For the full moon and her dusty lakes, winter
And the poet who recollects his younger self
And improvises a last line for the georgics
About snoozing under this beech tree's canopy.
(*WJ*, 62)

Longley aligns himself with a distinctly classical lineage through Virgil, and in doing so reveals the importance he places on an enduring artistic line. He believes that he will add his own distinct contribution, as he "improvises a last line for the georgics," and thus boldly finishes Virgil's work. The "leafy cumulus" represents a historic source that maintains a record of "Everybody who has teetered" under the "huge roots."[117] This expresses both Longley's indebtedness to predecessors and his confident belief in his own place in poetry's annals. "Recollect[ing] his younger self," Longley seems to conclude that he has indeed made a mark and still has creative energy left. As Longley explains in "River & Fountain," the classics have helped him over the course of his career to find a route "forwards" by walking "into the past" (*GO*, 57). The tree in the poem has a "two-hundred-year-old pewter trunk," but its roots are classical and Virgilian, enabling the modern poet to "join everybody" else who has become part of the still evolving poetic tradition. The classics validate the poet and the poetry, and its concrete immediacies ("the brown envelopes" with their "transparent downy leaves") re-create the classical pastoral tradition of "eclogues" and "georgics."[118]

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[117] Longley continues the scene captured in "The Beech Tree" in "Overhead, (*SW*, 1) where Longley figures himself as an old master sitting under a beech with a "poem-cloud" hanging over his head.
[118] Heaney has similarly reclaimed classical forms in the appropriations of Virgil and Theocritus in *Electric Light*.

IV. HEANEY'S SOPHOCLES: *THE CURE AT TROY* AND *THE BURIAL AT THEBES*

> And that's the borderline that poetry
> Operates on too, always in between
> What you would like to happen and what will -
> Whether you like it or not.
>
> Seamus Heaney (*CT*, 2)

Heaney's "version" of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, his first foray into theatre, has direct implications for a "cure" in the context of the Troubles, as optimistically stated in the final speech by the Chorus where the audience is told that "…Once in a lifetime / The longed-for tidal wave / Of justice can rise up, / And hope and history rhyme" (*CT*, 77). Published and first performed in Derry's Guildhall in 1990 for Field Day, Heaney's adaptation of the Greek play coincided with heightened efforts to devise a lasting peace in Northern Ireland, and critics and audiences immediately recognized Heaney's "cure" as offering hopeful advice for the peace process. Influential players in the peace talks readily embraced *The Cure at Troy*'s ultimate vision that "a crippled trust might walk" (*CT*, 81), including Republic of Ireland President Mary Robinson upon being elected in 1990 and United States President Bill Clinton visiting Northern Ireland in 1995, revealing the strength of Heaney's cultural currency.[119]

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* shows the title character before his pivotal role in the siege of Troy, where he would eventually lead the Greeks to victory behind the force of Hercules' unfaltering bow. The original, like Heaney's translation, renders Philoctetes as a figure of long-suffering, deserted by his countrymen for a decade on the island of Lemnos after being bitten by a snake. The Greeks, led by Odysseus, only return to the island when they realize that Philoctetes (and his bow) must participate directly in the Trojan War in order to secure their long-awaited victory. Heaney uses this basic plot as a scaffold to explore the possibilities of reconciliation between Northern Ireland's warring factions. His title deliberately points to the future, turning attention beyond the events of the play to the eventual curing of Philoctetes' wound and the Greek impasse at Troy, as Neoptolemus prophesizes to

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[119] See also: Hugh Denard, "Seamus Heaney, Colonialism, and the Cure: Sophoclean Re-visions," *PAJ* 66 (2000): 2-3; Gerry Adams, *Hope and History: Making Peace in Ireland* (London and Dingle, Co. Kerry: Brandon, 2003); Bill Clinton, *Between Hope and History: Meeting America's Challenges for the 21st Century* (New York: Random House, 1997); and Nadine Gordimer, *Living in Hope and History* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

Philoctetes, "It'll be talked about for ever and you're to be / The hero that was healed and then went on / To heal the wound of the Trojan war itself" (*CT*, 73).

Heaney fashioned *The Cure at Troy* as a resolutely public and hopeful statement on the situation in Northern Ireland. In this respect, it compares interestingly with "Ceasefire," Michael Longley's most public and hopeful poem about the Troubles. Longley has noted that while usually a "poem makes its own occasion in private," "'Ceasefire' [was] an exception."[120] He explains that "Because at the time we were praying for an IRA ceasefire, I called my sonnet 'Ceasefire.' Hoping to make my own minute contribution, I sent it to the *Irish Times*. It was the poem's good luck to be published two days after the IRA's [August 1994] declaration."[121] Critics have heralded Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* as the literary source of the peace talks (Denard argues that "there are surely few dramatic texts which can claim to have acquired such prominence in the political affairs of modern times"[122]), but Longley's poem made an equally visible poetic statement during the immediate aftermath of the ceasefire. According to Hufstader, "Ceasefire" may, "if both the aftermath to Good Friday, 1998, and literary history prove kind, serve to nominate its author as the poet laureate of this possible late moment of the Troubles.")[123] Heaney's play and Longley's poem hope optimistically for an end to the decades of violence, and are particularly aware of the immediate circumstances of their historical moment. The classical precedent in each case offers a springboard for the poets to make a political intervention.

"Ceasefire" is a free translation of the scene in *The Iliad* where Priam begs Achilles for the body of his slain son Hector, which Longley condenses into a sonnet. One of his most touching poems, "Ceasefire" concentrates on the miraculous shift of power from Achilles the great warrior, to Priam, the old and grieving king. The figure of the mourning father, disregarding his personal danger in the Achaeans' camp, moves Achilles who is "Put in mind of his own father and moved to tears" (*GO*, 39). Further, after deciding to return the body to Priam so that the king could perform the proper funeral rites for his son, Achilles becomes an improbable caretaker of the body, making "sure it was washed and, for the old king's sake, / Laid out in uniform." Longley effectively captures the incredible exchange of respect

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[120] Longley, "American Ireland Fund Literary Award" (19 June 1996), Box 35, Folder 1, Emory.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Denard, "Seamus Heaney, Colonialism, and the Cure": 2.
[123] Hufstader, *Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones*, 105.

between the two men on opposite sides of the battle lines and during the most difficult of circumstances (as Achilles is still grieving for his best friend and cousin Patroclus who died at the hand of Hector). Honoring Priam's request, Achilles returns Hector's body "wrapped like a present home to Troy at daybreak" (*GO*, 39). These events prepare for the startling power of Longley's couplet, which recalls Priam's original determination to do whatever necessary in order to recover his son: "'I get down on my knees and do what must be done / And kiss Achilles' hand, the killer of my son.'"[124] Though Longley doesn't use local dialect to draw parallels between the classical context and Ireland as he does elsewhere (and as Heaney does in *The Cure at Troy*), the poem's overt title signifies its relevance to Northern Irish politics. Longley's basically faithful version of Homer's scene gains power through its very faithfulness, as the classical story serves as an example of how the most unlikely reconciliations can be made. Symbolically, the murderer and aggrieved come together to decide to lay down arms and settle their differences because it "must be done." As Heaney does in appropriating Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, Longley appropriates the Homeric scene to express a hope for Northern Ireland, anchoring the fragile contemporary opportunity in the deeply rooted classical tradition with its built-in sense of authenticity.

"Ceasefire" offers a positive symbol for the Northern Irish peace process. Yet, Longley also recognizes that our knowledge of the fates of Achilles and Priam complicates the poem's overall message of reconciliation. As he notes, "the truce [in *The Iliad*] is only temporary, that after the ceasefire the Trojan War is resumed and Achilles himself is killed."[125] Indeed, Longley worried his poem might have pressured "those who had been bereaved or maimed to forgive before they were ready to forgive? Was I in my presumption suggesting that widows, orphans might kiss the hands (as it were) of self-appointed murderers and torturers?"[126] However, while expressing these qualms, Longley has also spoken with great satisfaction of receiving supportive letters from victims' families after the publication of

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[124] Fagles translates the relevant lines: "The majestic king of Troy.../ kneeling down beside Achilles, clasped his knees, / and kissed his hands, those terrible, man-killing hands / that had slaughtered Priam's many sons in battle." Homer, *The Odyssey*, bk. 24, lines 559-652.

[125] Longley, "American Ireland Fund Literary Award." *The Iliad* ends basically where Longley's poem does, with the Trojans burying Hector. However, Achilles' fate as well as the fate of Troy has been forecasted throughout the story, and the events after the death of Hector are also explained in *The Odyssey*.

[126] Longley, "American Ireland Fund Literary Award."

"Ceasefire," avowing that they "matter more to me than any amount of criticism I might receive in literary journals or attention in the public."[127]

Heaney's choice of the classical *Philoctetes* to express the possibility of hope in *The Cure at Troy* also has built-in limitations. As Hugh Denard argues, "in the context of the then intense military conflict in Northern Ireland, the image of Troy sacked seems an ill-conceived vehicle for a mode of cultural politics which purports to be reaching towards some kind of shared cultural ground within Ireland."[128] Pushed to its logical conclusion, the classical story suggests the cure must be violent. In order for Heaney's 'cure' to remain benign the reader must concentrate on the positive bond created by Philoctetes and Neoptolemus within the course of the play's action. Further, Heaney's choice to have poetry take the role of mediator and mouthpiece for peace (acting as the "borderline between / The you and the me and the it of it" (*CT*, 2)[129]) seems at first uncharacteristic in light of Heaney's repeated expressions of frustration in both poetry and prose about the prescriptive demands of politics on art, and evocation of the need for the artist to have creative space. Does the use of the classical dramatic source free Heaney to fashion an overtly political allegory? Was the historical timing just right? Did Heaney find in the Sophoclean original a challenge for the poet to become an ambassador for peace? Whatever Heaney's personal reasons, *Philoctetes* offered Heaney a way to speak more directly about the ongoing violence in Northern Ireland as well as his hopes for peace than elsewhere in his work. Heaney admits the dangers of such an approach, but ultimately justifies the hopeful message: "I was and am inclined to 'suspect too much sweet talk' as the final chorus says; and yet, as that chorus also says, one must 'never close one's mind' to the possibility of good as well as bad developments."[130] Thus, as with Longley's "Ceasefire," the classical source offers a way to translate old and established symbolism to explore contemporary problems, shining new light, but also carrying along the limitations inherent in the original.

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[127] Longley, "Interview with Michael Longley by Peter McDonald."
[128] Denard, "Seamus Heaney, Colonialism, and the Cure": 15.
[129] Interestingly, this mirrors Heaney's representation of poetry in "The Government of the Tongue" where he locates "what gives poetry its governing power" 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, "The Government of the Tongue," in *The Government of the Tongue: 1986 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 108.
[130] Heaney, "*The Cure at Troy*: Production Notes in No Particular Order," 176.

Heaney labels *The Cure at Troy* as a "version" of Sophocles' play, which highlights the fact that Heaney did not intend it as a strict translation of the Sophoclean original.[131] Though Heaney does maintain the main plot elements, he takes many liberties, specifically introducing innovations that work to produce a distinctly Irish provenance and message.[132] For example, *The Cure at Troy* includes a number of long speeches by the Chorus not found in the original, including the triumphant speech of reconciliation voiced at the end of the play. Further, while Sophocles' play only had male characters, Heaney makes the Chorus female, thus offering a greater contrast to the three main male characters, as the Chorus assumes the role of mediator and ultimate reconciler (along with the voice of Hercules).[133] Most obviously, Heaney shows his intended significance for Northern Ireland through vocabulary and dialect, with Philoctetes, like Andromache in Longley's "The Parting," crying "och" when frustrated or in pain (*CT*, 16).[134] The Chorus consistently reminds the audience of the Northern Irish context from their first speech, where they talk of "People so staunch and true, they're fixated, / Shining with self-regard like polished stones" (*CT*, 1), to the conclusion that cites people in mourning on opposite sides of the confessional divide: the "police widow in veils" and "hunger-striker's father" (*CT*, 77).[135] By situating the Chorus, like poetry, on the "borderline," they also mediate between the Greek and Irish contexts, and provide

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[131] Almost fifty years before Heaney's version of *Philoctetes*, Edmund Wilson noted that "The *Philoctetes* of Sophocles is far from being his most popular play." This essay gave the play a new currency, and clearly influenced Derek Walcott's *Omeros* and Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*, which were both published in 1990. Edmund Wilson, "*Philoctetes*: The Wound and the Bow," in *The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature*, rev. ed. (London: Methuen, 1961), 244.

[132] While politicians like Gerry Adams, Robinson and Clinton did not hesitate in exploiting the political message of the play, not all critics approved of Heaney's decision to impose Irish significance upon Sophocles' original. For instance, Colin Meir feels that the strategy of using "obtrusively overt references to contemporary events in Northern Ireland" creates "an artistic imbalance which is both untoward and unnecessary." Meir, "Irish Poetic Drama: Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*," in *Studies on the Contemporary Irish Theatre: Actes du Colloque de Caen*, eds. Jacqueline Genet and Elisabeth Hell gouarc'h (Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen, 1991), 71.

[133] Heaney has explained that his choice to make the Chorus female was made "in order to give a sense that the action was being invigilated by the three Fates, the Weird Sisters or whoever – this was the mythical dimension to the decision. There was also a gender-politics aspect, insofar as the militaristic, male-bonding world of the Greek army is challenged by the anima (shall we call it?) impulse in Neoptolemus." Heaney, *The Cure at Troy*: Production Notes in No Particular Order," 172. In Heaney's version, Hercules' speech is voiced by the leader of the Chorus.

[134] Richard Wall lists *astray*, *away* (meaning crazy), *dangerman*, *hagged*, *shake-down*, and *throughother* as Hiberno-English words that Heaney uses in *The Cure at Troy*. Wall, "A Dialect Glossary for Seamus Heaney's Works," in "A Dialect Glossary for Seamus Heaney's Works," *Irish University Review* 28.1 (1998): 68-86.

[135] On Heaney's use of "och," see also "The Settle Bed," from *Seeing Things* (written at the same time that he was working on his translation of *Philoctetes*), where he hears "an old somber tide awash in the headboard: / Unpathetic *och ochs* and *och hohs*, the long bedtime / Anthems of Ulster, unwilling, unbeaten" (*ST*, 30).

the explicit bridge between Sophocles' plot and Northern Ireland.[136] The Irish classical scholar David Grene, in an introduction to his own translation writes that *Philoctetes* is "perhaps the most modern in feeling of Sophocles' tragedies."[137] Heaney's version capitalizes on this potential by using language that has a particularly modern resonance in order to convey a hopeful prophecy that the divided population of Northern Ireland can, like the characters in the play, establish a "trust" (though "crippled") as the foundation for new understanding.

From the beginning, Heaney constructs Philoctetes as a character whose actions have both individual and collective meaning. Colin Meir explains that from the Chorus' first introduction of Philoctetes, the audience becomes aware that his wound "and the disease metaphor of the play implicates all mankind."[138] Philoctetes challenges Neoptolemus not to "treat me / Like an untouchable," and explains that "What I am / Is what I was made into by the traitors" (*CT*, 15). By revealing the wound as collective, Heaney implies that the cure must also be. The Chorus instructs that only through the willingness to incorporate and recognize past suffering through the creation of renewed bonds can new "channels" open:

> Human beings suffer,
> They torture one another,
> They get hurt and get hard.
> No poem or play or song
> Can fully right a wrong
> Inflicted and endured.
> (*CT*, 77)

Though the poem cannot "fully right a wrong," or change history, the Chorus declares that there comes a time to stop the "cruel stalemate of our war" in order to "sail at last / Out of the bad dream of your past" (*CT*, 79).[139]

Heaney foreshadows the optimistic ending by using the character of Philoctetes to question the positions of victor and victim, colonist and colonized. He refrains from actually assigning Catholic or Protestant labels to the main characters, instead showing that all sides are implicated in the negative cycle, with the Chorus' opening speech claiming that the characters are: "All throwing shapes, everyone of

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[136] In Phyllis Carey's analysis, poetry exists also at the "border between the past and the present, between exile and community, and between space and time...." Carey, "Heaney and Havel," 140.
[137] David Grene, "Introduction to *Philoctetes*," in *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Sophocles II*, eds. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (1957; repr., Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), 396.
[138] Meir, "Irish Poetic Drama: Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*," 69.
[139] This line recalls Joyce's expression (voiced through Stephen Dedalus) that "history…is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." Joyce, *Ulysses*, 2.377, 28.

them / Convinced he's in the right, all of them glad / To repeat themselves and their every last mistake, / No matter what" (*CT*, 1). Philoctetes' wound is not clear-cut. Even though Heaney initially characterizes Philoctetes as "savage," his humanity shines through as his affliction compares ultimately with the guilt of Neoptolemus, who suffers a psychological affliction when he wrongfully takes the bow. By following the bad advice of Odysseus, Neoptolemus realizes "I'm an affliction to myself, that's all I am" (*CT*, 49). However, while Heaney's translation demonstrates the intensity of Philoctetes' wound and the extent of the original wrong committed against him, it also challenges the audience to gauge Philoctetes' personal responsibility for his continuing victim status, as Neoptolemus councils: "you're like a brute / That can only foam at the mouth…/ You're a wounded man in terrible need of healing" (*CT*, 72). Ultimately, instead of repeating "themselves and their every last mistake" (*CT*, 1), as the Chorus warns, the two main characters eventually band together with a sense of their common victimhood and personal responsibility to break the cycle, with only Odysseus playing the role of a typical antagonist. Thus, the bow becomes for both Neoptolemus and Philoctetes a symbol of trust, friendship and a future, figured in distinctly human terms, while Odysseus alone continues to see Hercules' great bow as a means to an end – the physical weapon that will win the war against the Trojans.

Ultimately, poetry functions in *The Cure at Troy* as a therapeutic intermediary between the reality of suffering and the promise of the future. Through the Chorus, Heaney urges the audience, as well as the characters, to believe in the "half-true rhyme" of "hope and history" (*CT*, 81):

> History says, Don't hope
> On this side of the grave.
> But then, once in a lifetime
> The longed-for tidal wave
> Of justice can rise up
> And hope and history rhyme.
>
> So hope for a great sea-change
> On the far side of revenge.
> Believe that a further shore
> Is reachable from here.
> Believe in miracles
> And cures and healing wells.
>
> (CT, 77)

In bringing the mythic proportions of Sophocles' story to Northern Ireland, juxtaposing the suffering on both sides of the sectarian divide, the "police widow in veils" grieving alongside the "hunger-striker's father" (*CT*, 77), Heaney uses the power of poetry (the "rhyme" in the middle of "hope and history") to open the channels of communication.[140] As Bernard McKenna explains, "If the violent and disruptive particulars can be acknowledged but then set aside, the remaining half truth of common suffering can supplant the divisive masks of identity that prevent communal interaction."[141] With the forces of the classical story and poetry behind him, Heaney shows how the possibility for change can be realized when, collectively, the community acknowledges history (and its tradition of divided memories) as the basis for new bonds of commonality. The "rhyme" of "hope and history," explained by the poetic voice of reason is openly only half the rhyme (as "rhyme" actually rhymes with "lifetime"), and Heaney leaves it up to individuals to be responsible for taking the awareness of their shared historical wound to make way for future possibilities for renewal.

Heaney's second translation from Sophocles, *The Burial at Thebes* (2004), a version of *Antigone*, has a much less overt Irish agenda, but was also intended to resonate with a current political situation like *The Cure at Troy*.[142] As one reviewer commented, *The Burial at Thebes* is not a "companion piece" to "the other two Theban plays of Sophocles…but to Heaney's own version of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*…."[143] Regarding *The Burial at Thebes*, Heaney has spoken of his personal association between President Bush and Creon (with the Iraq War and its consequences in the background) as an important factor in the preparation of his translation. Again, as in *The Cure at Troy*, Heaney communicates the present-day implications to the audience through his use of contemporary phrases within the

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[140] The play literally rhymes in this speech by the Chorus: "The innocent in gaols" with "The police widow in veils."

[141] Bernard McKenna, "The Other World: Green Fire into the Frozen Branch," in *The Supernatural and the Fantastic in Irish Literature and its Contexts*, ed. Bruce Stewart (Monaco: Princess Grace Irish Library, 1998), 108.

[142] Michael Billington, reviewing *The Burial at Thebes*, draws a connection between Heaney's techniques in the two Sophoclean plays, noting, "Heaney, as we know from his version of *Philoctetes* called *The Cure at Troy*, is a magnificent translator of Sophocles, and his version of *Antigone* not only has his customary power and precision but also subtly varies the verse-form for different characters." Billington, review of *BT*, 26.

[143] Thomas Kilroy, "A young girl before the king," review of *BT*, *Irish Times*, 10 April 2004.

verse.[144] Creon, for instance, comes across very clearly in his first speech as a modern head of state, using terms like "test of office" and "exercise of power" (*BT*, 9), while announcing his resolve to overcome "subversives" (*BT*, 11). Further, Creon understands the psychology of traitors and "subversives" in a modern capitalist sense, as he acknowledges that someone might be willing to disobey his orders, even at the penalty of death, if offered the prospect of financial gain: "But you never know. / There's always money lurking and I never / Underestimate the lure of money" (*BT*, 12).

While less clearly connected to Northern Ireland than *The Cure at Troy*, Heaney's translation benefits from the well-established tradition of Irish versions of *Antigone*.[145] The overt links to Ireland made by Brendan Kennelly, Aidan Carl Mathews and Tom Paulin in their versions meant that Heaney could afford to be more subtle in his use of specific Irish features, as his originally envisioned Dublin audience at the Abbey Theatre would already be attuned to possible Irish parallels. Additionally, the Irish writer Conall Morrison wrote a version in 2003 (performed in Cork, Galway, Wicklow and Dublin) that he set in Middle East, while Yeats stands behind all Irish *Antigone* versions as the translator of Sophocles' two other Theban plays. When recently asked why so many of his fellow Irish writers have turned to the classics, Heaney offered a compelling answer:

> Because of a situation in this country over the past few decades we have all been driven back to first principles: the relationship between men and women, the problem of justice for the victims, the problem of establishing a commonly agreed system of government. All these fundamental issues are plied with total clear-sightedness for the first time in the Greek classics. But that does not mean that the last word has been spoken.[146]

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[144] Billington, review of *BT*. Further, in an article for the *Guardian*, Billington discusses the connection between the increase in productions of Greek tragedy (speaking specifically of the London stage) as a "direct response to the Iraq war." He explains that "It is the escalating horrors of the 20th century that explain the passionate renewal of interest in Greek drama," and "the current rash of Greek drama is directly attributable to the unfolding tragedy in the Middle East" as "these plays seem shockingly relevant to our own divided world." Billington, "Terror of modern times sets the stage for Greek tragedy," *Guardian*, 19 June 2004.

[145] Writing of Kennelly's version and Ireland, Terence Brown notes that "The conflict which this play dramatizes, between real-politik and unyielding principle, between the social requirement that order be maintained and the absolute demands of ancestral piety is a conflict made painfully real in many of the crises that have challenged this nation in the recent past." Brown, "An Uncompromising Female Spirit," reprinted from the Peacock Theatre programme for *Antigone* in Kennelly, *Sophocles' Antigone*, 52.

[146] Heaney quoted in Eileen Battersby, "A Greek tragedy for out times," review of *BT*, *Irish Times*, 3 April 2004.

As Neil Corcoran notes, *Antigone*'s "enduring strength is its susceptibility to allegorical interpretation," and fittingly the play has been used repeatedly as a political vehicle for recent Irish writers.[147] As already mentioned, Heaney's version continues the tradition of having the play throw light on contemporary events. Yet, while Heaney may have interpreted *Antigone* partly in light of Bush and Blair's decision to invade Iraq, the play's exploration of the dialectic between private and public wills surely has specific connotations for Ireland. For example, echoing many of the sentiments in *The Cure at Troy*, Tiresias counsels that "All men make mistakes. / But mistakes don't have to be forever. / They can be admitted and atoned for" (*BT*, 44). Yet, Heaney doesn't allow his language to become particular to the point of blurring a general significance, as perhaps critics could argue that he did in *The Cure at Troy*, which allow the lines to resonate equally with circumstances in the United States, Britain, Ireland and elsewhere.[148]

Like *The Cure at Troy*, Heaney composed *The Burial at Thebes* in a pared down and direct idiom.[149] Heaney alters the speaking style of the main characters to suggest differences in personality. Creon mostly speaks in standard English, his lines falling usually into iambic pentameter, while Antigone speaks in "suitably impulsive three-beat lines."[150] Further, as with *The Cure at Troy*, Heaney again gives his version of *Antigone* his own title, emphasizing in this case not only the decision by Antigone to disobey the king in order to honor her dead brother with a proper burial, but also the ultimate understanding by Creon of his horrific mistake. Creon eventually wishes that he had given Polyneices a proper burial so as to have averted his great personal tragedy and loss of power.[151] As Heaney explained of his two titles: "*The Cure at Troy*, *The Burial at Thebes*, there's a nice balance there, in the shape of the phrases. I think 'cure' and 'burial' both retain a sacral resonance, and in that way they remind a modern audience, subliminally, of the sacred element in Greek Tragedy."[152]

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[147] See: Neil Corcoran, "The state we're in," review of *BT*, *Guardian*, 1 May 2004.
[148] Heaney uses some Irish idioms in *The Burial at Thebes* (as in "You have me scared," and "there was only one thing for it," with the Guard speaking in a particularly Irish dialect), but not as overtly as *The Cure at Troy*. *The Burial at Thebes* is a much more faithful translation than Heaney's earlier Sophoclean effort. See: Neil Corcoran, "The state we're in," review of *BT*.
[149] See: Helen Meany, review of *BT*, *Irish Times*, 7 April 2004.
[150] Billington, review of *BT*.
[151] See: Kilroy, "A young girl before the king," review of *BT*.
[152] Heaney quoted in Battersby, "A Greek tragedy for out times," review of *BT*.

Heaney's rendering of Antigone's justification for her actions offers a particularly convincing manifesto for individual choice against an unfair and unfeeling government:

> The proclamation had your force behind it
> But it was a mortal force, and I, also a mortal,
> I chose to disregard it. I abide
> By statutes utter and immutable –
> Unwritten, original, god-given laws.
>
> (*BT*, 21)

The reasoned, yet passionate, explanation by Antigone of the "original, god-given laws," corresponds with the abstract notion of human rights in contemporary politics, and contrasts sharply with the violent outburst from Creon where he condemns Antigone and Ismene together: "You bloodsucker. You two-faced parasite. / The pair of you at me like a pair of leeches! / Two vipers spitting venom at the throne" (*BT*, 24). Yet, Heaney also seems aware of the dangers in Antigone's unbending stance, with probable nods to the situation in Northern Ireland (made so blatantly from different sides by Tom Paulin and Conor Cruise O'Brien). Antigone's fatalistic treatment of Ismene ("Too late, my sister. You chose a safe line first. / The dead and Hades know who did this deed" [*BT*, 25]) subtly compares with the inflexible position of Creon who decides "I won't be making / A liar of myself in front of the city" after rejecting the sound advice of his son Haemon and the great seer Tiresias to reconsider his position. Yet, despite Antigone's own unrelenting position, Creon's unwillingness to see the link between public decisions and private consequences ultimately resonates at the play's center.

Heaney's treatment of the conclusion, where Creon ultimately recognizes the error of his ways and apologizes, provides a literary projection of what so rarely happens in contemporary politics. The three suicides that occur in the short frame of the play leave Creon dethroned, alone, and utterly repentant:

> Make way for your king of wrong.
> Wrong-headed on the throne,
> Wrong-headed in the home,
> Wrong-footed by the heavens.
>
> (*BT*, 53)

Heaney's play goes back to the "first principles" learned in Sophocles' tragic play, and challenges the audience to question the injustices committed by governments and leaders, as well as delivering a version of the story that, in Corcoran's praise, finds a

"fitting place for itself in the canon of Antigones...."[153] One of the impressive aspects of Heaney's translation, in sharp contrast to Paulin's *Riot Act*, is its realization that "the tragedy is as much Creon's as Antigone's," and that admitting a wrong (however late) can have an educational value for the future.[154] Though Creon cannot escape his decisions, and must live with the realization that "Everything I've touched / I have destroyed. I've nobody to turn to, / Nowhere I can go...," the Chorus instructs the audience hopefully that "The future is cloth waiting to be cut" (*BT*, 55-56).[155]

V. "I SWIM IN HOMER": THE CLASSICAL IN HEANEY'S POETRY

> And then this ladder of our own that ran
> deep into a well-shaft being sunk
> in broad daylight, men puddling at the source
>
> through tawny mud, then coming back up
> deeper in themselves for having been there,
> like discharged soldiers testing the safe ground,
>
> finders, keepers, seers of fresh water
> in the bountiful round mouths of iron pumps
> and gushing taps.
>
> Seamus Heaney, "Mycenae Lookout: V, His Reverie of Water" (*SL*, 37)

Translation aside, classical points of reference have always been important to Heaney's poetry, as Chapter 4 demonstrated through a discussion of the significance of Greek concepts such as *helicon* and *omphalos* in framing the purposes and domain of his homeground.[156] Critics have frequently spoken of Heaney's contribution to

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[153] Ibid.; and Corcoran, "The state we're in," review of *BT*.
[154] Billington, review of *BT*.
[155] Compared with Sophocles' original, Heaney's Creon directly puts the blame on himself, whereas David Grene translates the lines as "Everything in my hands is crosses. A most unwelcome fate has leaped upon me." According to Grene, fate rather than personal choice led to Creon's downfall. Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. David Grene, *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Sophocles I*, eds. Grene and Lattimore (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), 212.
[156] See: Heaney, "Personal Helicon" (*DN*, 46); and "Mossbawn: Omphalos," in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), 17-21.

poetry in distinctly classical terms. For example, John Wilson Foster praises Heaney for turning poetry back to its "honorific and essentialist sense."[157] However, except for a few examples from his early poetry (especially the two Antaeus poems in *North* discussed in Chapter 1), Heaney's heavy use of classical allusions began with *The Haw Lantern* (1987), and developed further in *Seeing Things* (1991), *The Spirit Level* (1996), and *Electric Light* (2001).[158] Heaney's increased public status and acceptance of his position as a representative poet may account for his explosion of interest in the classics since *The Haw Lantern* and *The Cure at Troy* (1990). However, of course, Heaney's poetry prior to this point was perhaps equally, though less explicitly, invested with scholarly allusions.[159]

The last section argued that, however different they are, Heaney's two Sophoclean translations are designed to illuminate contemporary political situations. Heaney has also turned to the classics to explore political subjects in several poems, most notably in "Mycenae Lookout." In a recent article, Heaney noted the relevance of the classics to current events by looking at his thought processes while translating one of Horace's *Odes*. Before discussing his own translation, he sets the scene by telling of how, in the days immediately after September 11th, he talked to "two American friends who chanced to be on holiday in Florence at the time," and made a decision that:

> …the best way to deal with the desolation in America was to keep doing the things they had come to Italy to do…to seek out and look hard at pictures and sculptures that kept standing their ground, as it were, in spite of the shaken state of the world around them. This was not a case of trying to forget atrocity by escaping into the reverie that art works can induce. On the contrary, these were two people out to put art to the test rather than retreat into it.[160]

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[157] John Wilson Foster, *The Achievement of Seamus Heaney* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1995), 56.
[158] Heaney's most recent published book of poetry, *Electric Light*, continues this trend, including poems such as "Bann Valley Eclogue," "Virgil: Eclogue IV," "Glanmore Eclogue," and the lengthy "Sonnets from Hellas."
[159] Heaney's early poetry is often deceptively straightforward, but as many critics have shown the poetry has a host of allusions and influences lurking in the background. Corcoran notes of *Seeing Things*, for instance, that while Heaney has always been "a very allusive poet who embeds quotation and reference in his work...this volume lucidly and explicitly engages with the work and reputations of other artists." Of the earlier *The Haw Lantern*, Corcoran notes Heaney's new "willingness to appear a *doctus poeta*, a learned poet in the classical sense." Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 164-65 and 137.
[160] Heaney, "Reality and Justice: On Translating Horace," *Irish Pages* 1.2 (Autumn/Winter 2002-03): 50.

Working on Horace's ode 34, where Jupiter rode his "chariot across a clear blue sky" without giving his usual warning of heavy clouds, Heaney realized that "any translation from the classics was going to be read as a response to the contemporary situation." Thus, Heaney's challenge was, he says, remembering Yeats' lines from *A Vision*, "to hold in a single expression truth to reality in the present while doing justice to the original poem."[161] Heaney reads the original as a poem of "religious awe rather than any kind of political comment or coded response to events," and yet his translation proves a durable and effective response to the atmosphere after the events of September 11th:

> Anything can happen. You know how Jupiter
> Will mostly wait for clouds to gather head
> Before he hurls the lightning? Well, just now
> He galloped his thunder-cart and his horses
>
> Across a clear blue sky. It shook the earth
> And clogged underearth, the River Styx,
> The winding streams, the Atlantic shore itself.
> Anything can happen, the tallest things
>
> Be overturned, those in high places daunted,
> Those overlooked regarded….[162]

Heaney adds a final stanza, not in the original, where Atlas' load is momentarily displaced, and when it comes back down "nothing resettles right."[163] The process of translation, as Heaney explains it, tries to find a balance between "reality and justice," and he ends his commentary by noting that "I believe the poem still does justice to the sense and emotional import of the original while being true enough to what has happened in our time," in this case specifically to be true to the "reality of the world in the autumn of 2001."[164]

"Mycenae Lookout" is the most striking poem of *The Spirit Level* (1996) because of its uncharacteristically violent style and the explicit emotion of its language.[165] Heaney divides the poem, the longest of the volume, into five sections, which begins like Aeschylus' play with the watchman of Mycenae waiting for the

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[161] Ibid.: 51.
[162] Heaney, "Horace and the Thunder," *Irish Pages* 1.2 (Autumn/Winter 2002-03): 54.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Heaney, "Reality and Justice": 53.
[165] In interesting ways "Mycenae Lookout" returns to the bubbling violence of *North*, but though the later poem also "views the world…from the perspective of mythological or historically remote characters" ("Place and Displacement," 118) the emotion is more immediate.

long-awaited signal of Agamemnon's victory at Troy. With the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus as his foundation, Heaney uses the violent history of the house of Atreus to explore his frustrations about the recent violence of Northern Ireland, as the Trojan War becomes symbolically linked with the Troubles.[166] In Heaney's poem, Agamemnon's murder at the hands of his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus upon his return from Troy, relates to Agamemnon's earlier sacrifice of his virgin daughter Iphigenia in order to secure an Argive victory. The poem's significance also lies in the readers' knowledge that Agamemnon's son Orestes eventually kills his mother and her lover to avenge the murder of his father. Helen Vendler notes that in his poetry before *The Spirit Level* Heaney "refrained from matching the violence of much Irish political sentiment with violence of poetic language," but in "Mycenae Lookout" he uses the classical source to fuel a level of "unprecedented linguistic violence."[167] Heaney has addressed his sense of personal anger in the poem as a direct response to the events after the ceasefire, explaining that "instead of being able just to bask in the turn of [cease-fire] events, I found myself getting angrier and angrier at the waste of lives and friendships and possibilities in the years that had preceded it…."[168]

Adopting the persona of the watchman, given the task of waiting for the sign of victory during Agamemnon's many years away from his homeland, the poet-narrator describes his ability to foresee the "killing-fest, the life-warp and world-wrong" of both the Trojan War and his king's eventual return.[169] The pressure of the watchman's "honour-bound" position is great, as he dreams of "blood in bright webs in a ford, / Of bodies raining down like tattered meat / On top of me asleep…," with his tongue "Trampled and rattled" (*SL*, I.29). Following on the prefatory quote from Aeschylus that "The ox is on my tongue" (*SL*, I.29), this alludes to Heaney's own decision to hold his tongue in check over the many years of violence in Northern Ireland. Finally, the horrible pressure of the watchman's office becomes itself "a home to go to," as he would 'die' by night but "Day in, day out, I'd come alive again,…balanced between destiny and dread" (*SL*, I.29-30).

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[166] As Corcoran notes, the classical story has "manifest, if tangential, relevance to the history of Northern Ireland since 1969." Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 191. In this classical tradition Heaney also harks back to Yeats' explorations of Helen's culpability and impact in "No Second Troy" and "Leda and the Swan."

[167] Helen Vendler, "Seamus Heaney and the *Oresteia*," 181.

[168] Heaney, quoted in Vendler, "Seamus Heaney and the *Oresteia*," 181.

[169] It is interesting to remember that Longley's "Baucis and Philemon" positioned 'watchmen' as people who should be protected, which implies that they often are blamed for what they see.

The visionary horror of the watchman gives way to Cassandra's foreknowledge, and the awful understanding that there is "No such thing / as innocent / bystanding"(*SL*, II.30). As in *The Cure at Troy*, where Heaney declares his personal part in the bad historical cycle of victimhood, "I hate it, I always hated it, and I am / A part of it myself" (*CT*, 2), in "Mycenae Lookout" he angrily shows how everyone in society gets caught up in the pattern of violence. His Cassandra is "camp-fucked / and simple" (*SL*, II.31), transformed into a Northern Irish teenager with her "punk head," but still viewed ironically as "half-calculating" in her "bewilderment. / No such thing as innocent." The poem's characterization of Cassandra rewrites Heaney's 'voyeuristic' stance from "Punishment" in *North*. This time the doomed girl speaks for herself, and the narrator's tone has shifted from observant to angry. Louis MacNeice's theatrical translation of *Agamemnon* sides decidedly with the warrior king, blaming Clytemnestra for the horrible treachery, but Heaney uses Cassandra to reveal the excessive violence of Agamemnon as a tyrant whom he describes as "Old King Cock- / of the Walk," and "King Kill- / the-Child- / and Take- / What-Comes" (*SL*, II.31-32). Cassandra, Priam's youngest daughter, whose madness and position as prophetess are entwined, illustrates the detrimental effect of growing up in a war-torn land. Taken from Troy as Agamemnon's prize, she is destined to be killed along with her captor upon reaching the king's palace, and Heaney describes the violence committed against her as nothing less than rape. The silent acceptance of the audience in "Punishment" now becomes a more direct participation, with the Argives feeling a "shock desire" to "do it to her / there and then" as she becomes a "cunt of their guilt" before her life is so easily "blanked out" (*SL*, II.32).[170]

"Remembered Columns," from the same volume, should be kept in mind when reading "Mycenae Lookout." The poem reminds the reader that the act of translation functions both as a displacement from the present and an immersion in it. Relating a memory about the Virgin's house, Heaney lifts his "eyes in a light-headed credo, / Discovering what survives translation true" (*SL*, 45). Therefore, he evaluates the "remembered columns" in the story by looking at the reality of his location in the present and his own translation of the event to assess "what survives." In "His Dawn

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[170] In the opening sequence the similarity of the charge evoked by violence and sexual activity is also realized by the Watchman as the loud shouts of Clytemnestra's love-making merge with visions of the agony at Troy and the violence to come upon Agamemnon's return (*SL*, I.29-30). See Chapter 1 for my discussion of "Punishment."

Vision," the third part of "Mycenae Lookout," Heaney gives the watchman a revelation not present in Aeschylus' original, as he sees far-reaching events of violence. He witnesses, for example, "in a hilly, ominous place" how Romulus killed Remus (*SL*, III.34), thus anticipating the founding of the eternal city in a moment of greed and violence. As Vendler explains, at the center of the poem is a "fear that the primal cultural text is in danger of being forgotten, and that the poet, in consequence, has a responsibility to bear it out of the ever-threatening fire of oblivion."[171] The poet becomes an agent fighting for the truthful preservation of cultural memory.[172] Heaney asserts that alongside the optimistic movement towards peace in Northern Ireland comes a tendency to write a history that forgets the many years of violence and destruction.[173] The watchman's conflicting loyalties, as confidante for Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as well as a servant of the king, extends further in the fourth part "The Nights," as he colloquially says "it was sexual overload / every time they did it" for "from the beginning…their real life was the bed" (*SL*, IV.34). The sexual habits of the palace make him think of Troy, where the Argive soldiers release their sexual tension by raping "Troy's mothers," reducing the outlying areas of the city to a "bloodied cot and bed" (*SL*, IV.35-36). The poem's realization of the inseparability of sex and violence prepares for the watchman's confession of his guilt: "…hills broke into flame / the queen wailed on and came, / it was the king I sold" (*SL*, IV.36). Though he doesn't have an active role in Agamemnon's murder, the watchman claims part of the blame because of his speechlessness, a charge that implicitly also offers a self-rebuke for Heaney's reticence during the violence of the Troubles.

Finally, in the fifth and final part of the poem, "His Reverie of Water," Heaney brings the classical story of bloodbath explicitly back to his homeground in Northern Ireland, in an effort to make some sense of both his anger and the years of violence. The voice of the watchman blends seamlessly into Heaney's own.[174]

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[171] Vendler, "Seamus Heaney and the *Oresteia*," 186.

[172] As I discussed in the Introduction, in Ireland (and especially in Northern Ireland) memory is often a contested ground, and Heaney here enters the debate by showing that artists do have a responsibility to remember as well as to forge a path for the future.

[173] Michael Longley echoes this fear in his article "Memory and Acknowledgement." He explains that "Concepts such as 'a clean slate' or 'drawing a line' are offensive... Amnesty does not mean amnesia." Longley, "Memory and Acknowledgment," *Irish Review* 17-18 (Winter 1995): 158.

[174] Similarly, in both "Damson," from *The Spirit Level*, and poem "xvi" from "Squarings" in *Seeing Things*, memories of his childhood at Mossbawn seem to hint at the violence to come in Northern Ireland. In "Damson," Heaney remembers how a bricklayer cut his hand, producing a "damson stain" on the "mortared wall," which leads him to make a link to Odysseus meeting so many known faces in

Despite all the bloodshed, with Agamemnon ironically brought down by his own wife in a bath, rather than on the battlefields at Troy, Heaney admits that, like the "uncut cloth" at the end of *The Burial at Thebes*, there still exists a possibility of "fresh water," a "filled bath, still unentered / and unstained…" (*SL*, V.36). Heaney decides against the Greek example of vengeance, and turns to the model of the Trojan War where the "secret staircase the defenders knew / and the invaders found" leads all the way not only to "this ladder of our own" but also to the "ladder of the future" (*SL*, V.37). As Longley ends the purging in "The Butchers" with a reconciling image of Hermes coming to collect the souls of those killed, Heaney's version of the *Agamemnon* finds a poetic catharsis which fosters an optimistic resolution. The final conclusion sums up Heaney's understanding that, while recognizing the bloodbath and the cyclical patterns of history, it is up to individuals to make changes. The "ladder of our own" becomes Heaney's familiar *omphalos*; the "well-shaft" of Mossbawn "puddling at the source" that he introduced in *Death of a Naturalist*. His angry journey in the poem has made him "deeper" for "having been there, / like discharged soldiers testing the safe ground." He can afterwards find, once again, the redeeming qualities of his homeground and his role as poet, this time positioning himself as a seer of "fresh water," able to rejoice in the "bountiful round mouths of iron pumps / and gushing taps" (*SL*, V.37). The memory bank of Mossbawn consolidates the world of Homeric allusion, refreshing and recreating both in terms of the other.

Like Michael Longley, Heaney also uses classical allusions to add a further level of significance to poems about family and close friends.[175] In *Seeing Things* (1991), Heaney uses his translation of a scene from Virgil's *Aeneid* to deepen and prepare the way for the personal poems that follow. In "The Golden Bough," Heaney translates the scene from Book VI of the *Aeneid* where Aeneas justifies why he should be allowed to travel to the Underworld to visit his father. Heaney placed

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Hades. Heaney imagines the bricklayer like Odysseus encountering the people who died in the course of the Troubles, "Ghosts with their tongues out for a lick of blood" (*SL*, 15-16). However, the poem characteristically negates the classical and violent image in favor of a true vision from his childhood, where the stain on the bricklayer's hand merges with the "smell of damsons simmering in a pot, / Jam ladled thick and steaming down the sunlight." In "Squarings," Heaney ironically describes "Rat-poison the colour of blood pudding" that was used on the farm as a substance that "Brought everything to life – like news of murder / Or the sight of a parked car occupied by lovers / On a side road, or stories of bull victims" (*ST*, XVI.70). Heaney compares the color and symbolism of the rat-poison to the "anger of Achilles" as the poison's "rancid shine" reeks of the violence to come.

[175] See also my analysis of "The Stone Verdict," from *The Haw Lantern*, in Chapter 4.

the poem before the beginning of Part I, making it a classical prelude to the volume's many remembrances of Heaney's own father as well as elegies for literary friends Philip Larkin and Richard Ellmann. For example, Aeneas' heartfelt plea that he be allowed to have a final meeting with his father Anchises, "one look, one face-to-face meeting with my dear father," as his father was with him through so many dangerous days ("I carried him on these shoulders through flames / And thousands of enemy spears…" [*ST*, 3]), presages Heaney's observations of his own deceased father in later poems such as "Man and Boy," "Seeing Things," "The Ash Plant," "I.I.87," and "The Pitchfork."[176] Further, the wisdom passed on by the Sibyl to Aeneas, that if he successfully enters and returns from the Underworld he must make sure to pluck the "bough made of gold" that is "sacred to underworld Juno" (*ST*, 5), serves symbolically to allow Heaney like Aeneas to enter into a visionary realm where (like Longley's "homespun internationalist" [*WJ*, 61]) with heightened perception, he encounters events and people from his past.[177]

Fittingly, Heaney concludes *Seeing Things* with a translation from Dante's *Inferno*, which recognizes the epic pretexts of Homer and Virgil for Dante's project. In "The Crossing," the scene where Virgil helps Dante navigate by the "demon Charon" (*ST*, 105) to "reach a different shore and pass over" (*ST*, 106) verifies the area transversed by *Seeing Things* in between Heaney's translations from Virgil and Dante. Through his Dantean translation Heaney also subtly questions if the journey has already happened or if it is beginning again, as Virgil counsels that "'No good spirits ever pass this way / And therefore, if Charon objects to you, / You should understand well what his words imply'" (*ST*, 107). The two translations, with Virgil and Dante as guiding spirits that sandwich the other poems in the volume, show as Neil Corcoran's argues, "from their classical and Christian perspectives, that, if a

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[176] As Aeneas tells of the safety he felt with his father by his side, in the haiku "I.I.87," Heaney recalls his different outlook now that his father has died: "Dangerous pavements. / But I face the ice this year / With my father's stick" (*ST*, 22). In "The Pitchfork" his father becomes like an Achilles figure when holding a pitchfork. His father's comfortableness with the tool makes it feel "like a javelin, accurate and light" (*ST*, 25). Importantly, the "perfection" and seamless blending of man and tool is "Not in the aiming but the opening hand."

[177] In "Squarings: Crossings," Heaney recalls Yeats' statement that "*To those who see spirits, human skin / For a long time afterwards appears most coarse*" (*ST*, XXXIV.88). As evidence of the symbolic entry to the Underworld he receives with Aeneas, the first poem of Part I, "The Journey Back," reveals its significance through its title with its first line proclaiming that "Larkin's shade surprised me. He quoted Dante" (*ST*, 9).

relationship with the dead induces anxiety, nevertheless poetry is the place where it becomes possible…."[178]

As Longley has domesticated the classics in his poetry, so in the "Glanmore Revisited" sequence, a set of seven sonnets in *Seeing Things*, Heaney uses allusions to classical scenes and ideas to add depth and help reveal the strength of his memories of his wife and children at their cottage in Wicklow. In "The Cot" the Latin phrase "*locus amoenus*" serves to bridge the poet's memories of his young children in the cottage with the current reality of Heaney and his wife as "Tenants no longer, but in full possession / Of an emptied house and whatever keeps between us" (*ST*, II.34). They find themselves in the same "delightful place," but in significantly altered circumstances, thus the "old activity starts up again / But starts differently." The next poem in the sequence, "Scene Shifts," recalls how Heaney "was flailing round the house like a man berserk / And maybe overdoing it…" after his kids stripped off the bark and imprint of a friend's name cut into an ash tree. Heaney describes how the tree "shone like bone exposed" but is "healed up now" with its bark "thick-eared and welted with a scar" to "the hero's in a recognition scene." Both the memory of his anger towards his children and the injury they gave to the tree have been distanced by time, so that he sees the scene like a Hollywood set piece, taking his example from *The Odyssey*, "In which old nurse sees old wound, then clasps brow / (Astonished at what all this starts to mean) / And tears surprise the veteran of the war" (*ST*, III.35). Longley's version of the Homeric scene in "Eurycleia" captures a poignant lyric moment that emphasizes familiarity and how memories make physical and emotional scars. In Heaney's poem, though the 'wound' has been healed, the memory of his behavior can still, even with its predictable and clichéd tenors, evoke emotion.

Two other poems from the sequence harvest images from Homer to suggest the intimacy between husband and wife and the solidity of their relationship as, with children grown up, they are left with "whatever keeps between us." The Homeric scene where Odysseus shares the secret of the marital bed, which Longley depicted in "The Tree House" from *Gorse Fires* (1991), was taken up by Heaney in "Lustral Sonnet" from *Seeing Things*, published in the same year as *Gorse Fires*. Heaney recalls how he once had to break into the cottage "with an instruction / To saw up the

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[178] Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 163

old bed-frame, since the stair / Was much too narrow for it" (*ST*, V.37). Heaney considers the dismantling of the original bed, with direct allusions to Odysseus' careful crafting of his marriage bed, "A bad action, / So Greek with consequence." However, he puts his fears to rest in the following sonnet, "Bedside Reading," where the bedroom appears "airier" with "Big summer trees / Stirring at eye level when we waken" (*ST*, VI.38). In this poem, just as Odysseus and Penelope revelled in the secret of their bed and each other, Heaney acknowledges that "I swim in Homer," and like Odysseus and Penelope whose bedpost "Is the living truck of an old olive tree," his own marital bed could be "ivy, / Evergreen, atremble and unsaid."[179] The classical allusions serve to set the depth of his emotions into an established tradition.

I ended my discussion of Longley's classical engagements with a section on the way that he has used classical references and figures to give voice to views on both poets and poetry, and Heaney unsurprisingly plays the same game. Heaney also contributed two poems to the *After Ovid* collection on the myth of Orpheus.[180] Unlike many of the volume's versions from Ovid (including some by Longley), which creatively metamorphosize Ovid's tales even further, Heaney's intends his poems as faithful translations, which reveal his own respect for Ovid, but more importantly the reverence he feels towards the vocation of poetry, with Orpheus mythically representing the first bard.[181] In *The Midnight Verdict* (1993), Heaney published his two translations from Ovid alongside a translation from the Irish of Brian Merriman's "The Midnight Court," allowing the Ovid poems to frame the Irish. This hybrid translation strategy is used to illuminate both the Irish and Roman text, as well as to show the doubleness of the act of translation. "Orpheus and Eurydice" tells the story of Orpheus' almost successful attempt to bring his bride back from the underworld. However, Orpheus failed because he could not wait until they were safely out of Hades' land to see her face and "Turned his head to look and she was gone / Immediately, forever, back and down," and thus had to watch as "She

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[179] See also "Grotus and Coventina" where Heaney uses information taken from a Roman stone inscription ("Grotus dedicated an altar to Coventina" so "Anywhere Grotus looked at running water he felt at home" [*HL*, 40]) to compare his own situation when "our electric pump gave out" and how "Jubilation" was felt when the tap began to work again.

[180] See: *After Ovid*, 222-29.

[181] See: Peter Green, "Thou art translated," review of *After Ovid*, by Hoffmann and Lasdun, *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 December 1994. Green writes that "It can be no accident, either, that the best poets (Heaney, Hughes, Clampitt) show most respect for their author. Heaney's versions of two passages dealing with Orpheus are real translations, done in imaginative iambic couplets, notable for subtle rhythms, slant-rhyme...and assonance."

died again" (*MV*, 17-18). The story dramatizes a great love, with Eurydice unable to "complain," "as indeed how could she / Complain about being loved so totally?" (*MV*, 18). It also describes incredible agony, as the events leave Orpheus "disconsolate," and make him decide to forever rebuff the love of women. The second Orpheus poem describes his violent death at the hands of those women that he spurned after the death of his wife. The power of his poetry "held the woods entranced," but he could not escape the women's murderous purpose and "fled underneath the earth" to Hades, "Scouring the blessed fields for Eurydice" (*MV*, 39-41). Happily, Orpheus finally joins Eurydice, their "two forms / Of the one love, restored and mutual," but Bacchus refuses to let the murder of "his sacred poet" go unavenged and thus binds "the offeding women to the ground " (*MV*, 41-42) where they turn into a forest of tightly-wound trees.

Heaney's technique of sandwiching Merriman with Ovid gave "The Midnight Court," in his estimation, "a new resonance when read within the acoustic of the classical myth" (*MV*, 11). Thus, the classical poems heighten the reader's understanding of the Irish poem, acting as "acoustic" that bounces back on Merriman's poem, which he wrote in 1780 as a creative critique of conditions and issues in Ireland at the time, such as emigration. Merriman's "The Midnight Court" describes how, in a dream, the poet-narrator was dragged into the woods and tried before a female court for his refusal to procreate, but manages to wake up directly before the women perform his sentence of death by flaying, thus re-contextualizing Orpheus in Ireland. When paired with the Ovid poems, "Orpheus and Eurydice" acts as a justification on one hand for why men reject sex with women, not because they are uncaring but because (as with Orpheus) he loved *one* so greatly, while "The Death of Orpheus" sees "Merry-man's" sentence actually carried out, as the women condemn Orpheus as a "misogynist" and flay him to death. Heaney's translation strategy may offer a subtle response to contemporary feminist critics, for the sexual frustrations of the women, in both the classical and Irish story, are here ultimately disregarded as the stories uphold the poets' (Merriman, Ovid, Orpheus and Heaney) creative space. The juxtaposition of Irish and Roman s ories serves to hibernicize Ovid but also to imaginatively stretch the Irish frame of reference.

In an earlier example of Heaney's use of the classics to elucidate the poetic vocation, "A Daylight Art," from *The Haw Lantern*, recounts how just before his death Socrates took to versifying Aesop's fables for fear that he incorrectly

interpreted the recurring dream that had advised him to "*Practise the art*" (*HL*, 9).[182] Socrates always took "art" to mean philosophy, but he came to fear that he had chosen incorrectly. The poem's final sentiment shows Heaney's playfulness towards his vocation, asserting that "Happy the man, therefore with a natural gift / for practising the right one from the start- / poetry, say, or fishing…" (*HL*, 9). The argument that, unlike philosophy, fishing and poetry are daylight arts, not prone to making their practitioners worry in dreams, lends a witty and deliberately learned atmosphere to the volume, as Heaney humorously claims that unlike Socrates he chose his proper art from the beginning, leaving his sleeping hours as peaceful as a fisherman.

Finally, in "The Poet's Chair," titled after the sculpture of a bronze chair by Carolyn Mulholland to whom he dedicates the poem, Heaney follows the chair through different locations and moods. Comically, the first section sees the chair become a resting place for a host of interesting characters, "Every flibbertigibbet in the town, / Old birds and boozers, late-night pissers, kissers, / All have a go at sitting on it some time" (*SL*, 46). However the jovial night-town feel in the first stanza gives way to the starkness of the second stanza where Heaney pictures the chair "in a white prison / With Socrates sitting on it, bald as a coot, / Discoursing in bright sunlight with his friends" on the eve of his trial. The description of Socrates' stoic death, as he took the poison without "tears," creates a feeling of "numbness" due to the incongruity of killing the man who "Has proved the soul immortal" (*SL*, 47). Finally, in the third stanza, Heaney imagines the chair in his own homeground at Mossbawn. Heaney himself sits in the "poet's chair," and watches with "all-seeing" eyes his father "ploughing one, two, three, four sides / Of the lea ground…." Back on intimate territory, Heaney is "all foreknowledge. / Of the poem as a ploughshare that turns time / Up and over." The poem shows Heaney's celebration of a striking mobility in relation to translation and allusion as well as to place.

Vendler uses the poem to make a point about Heaney's practice in *The Spirit Level* more generally, arguing that with the approach of old age, "Heaney's imagination must now somehow find room…for a three-phase scenario showing, in turn, ordinary life, its violation by some event and its restoration by 'keeping going'

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[182] See also "The Stone Grinder" where, using the image from *The Odyssey* of Penelope's practice of unweaving her work at night for a productive purpose, the cyclical aspect of the Stonegrinder's vocation is unfulfilling: "the same stones for fifty years..." (*HL*, 8).

afterwards."[183] However, despite the eventual restoration of the chair to Mossbawn, the disturbing classical scene from the second stanza haunts the poem, just as Cassandra's statements cannot be drowned by the final resolution of "Mycenae Lookout," or Philoctetes' years of anguish be completely erased by the ending of *The Cure at Troy*. Socrates' fate offers an evocative vision of how artists or people in general can become bogged down by the violence and hatred of others. Heaney's identification with the murdered classical philosopher shows his continuing need to connect with a tradition, even if it is a negative one, and characteristically he finds himself turning for validation to his first home of Mossbawn, the continuing homeground of his poetry. Heaney legitimizes the "poet's chair" through specifically classical allusions in much the same way that Longley's "The Beech Tree" (*WJ*, 62) shows his need to locate himself in a long and lasting tradition of poetry stretching from the poets of ancient Greece and Rome. Heaney's "all-seeing" position from the "poet's chair" reminds him of the enduring and positive aspects of art. He recognizes that Socrates' wisdom, his own homeground, and the chair itself will continue to be placed differently by succeeding generations. Classical literature, for Heaney as for Longley, seems to promise a sacred place of historical and literary validation, and at times redemption. Welding personal memory to literary allusion, the classical past offers a mnemonic resource within the Irish present, signifying another place and other possibilities, concealed perhaps in native ground.

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[183] Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (Hammersmith: Fontana, 1999), 168.

CONCLUSION

SNOW WATER and *ELECTRIC LIGHT*

Old poets regurgitate
Pellets of chewed-up paper
Packed with shrew tails, frog bones,
Beetle wings, wisdom.

Michael Longley, "Old Poets" (*SW*, 28)

A cursory look through the most recent volumes published by Heaney and Longley reveals an extensive continuation of the major themes and primary places that have made up their respective imaginative landscapes throughout their careers. Heaney's *Electric Light* (2001) and Longley's *Snow Water* (2004) each contain poems that directly relate to the themes and places analyzed in the chapters of this thesis. Thus, the books provide a fitting way to conclude by bringing my argument up-to-date, while also offering an opportunity to comment briefly on the poetic trajectories of the two poets. Furthermore, there are interesting intersections between Heaney and Longley's last volumes: both overtly engage the pastoral mode;[1] both include a handful of elegies (including several each to artist friends, revealing an interesting return to their evocations of an artistic community in *An Exploded View* and *Wintering Out*); and both show an acute concern for the process of memory and memorializing.[2] Significantly, their latest books also strive towards a heightened resonance between poems as phrases and ideas repeat and deepen from poem to poem.[3]

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[1] Chris Agee notes that *Snow Water* confirms Longley's status as a "modern master of a revitalised pastoral, simultaneously cutting-edge and traditional, realist and arcadian…" Agee, "Of peace and nature," review of *SW*, *Irish Times*, 17 April 2004. Heaney overtly enters the genre in *Electric Light*, which opens a dialogue with Virgil's *Eclogues*.

[2] For example, Longley's latest effort sees him fortify his reputation as a love and nature poet, but as Rachel Campbell-Johnston notes, it is "an elegiac volume. Life and death are interlaced." Similarly, Helen Vendler argues that Heaney's strength in *Electric Light* is his balance between celebration and mourning, with "neither blood nor summer shimmer win[ning] the day…." Campbell-Johnston, "The Weight of Years," review of *SW*, *Times*, 27 March 2004; and Vendler, "Heaney, the survivor," review of *EL*, *Irish Times*, 24 March 2001.

[3] This process of inter-volume reverberations has been a notable part of Longley's poetics since *Gorse Fires*, and is furthered in his latest offering. Of Heaney's *Electric Light*, Campbell-Johnston

Heaney's *omphalos*, both in terms of his characteristic "word hoard" and his childhood home of Mossbawn, reappears in large quantities in *Electric Light*. Chapter 4 analyzed Heaney's developing relationship to his homeground from the well-known early descriptions of the Mossbawn area to his mapping of the landscape of childhood in *The Spirit Level* (1996). It is interesting, though not surprising, to find that his latest collection of poetry is every bit as interested and immersed in the Derry landscape as his first book, published thirty-five years earlier.[4] I opened with Longley's poem "Old Poets," which humorously addresses the tendency of older poets to return to established themes, and Heaney has explained his current phase in similar terms in a recent interview with Mike Murphy:

> I'm at the cud-chewing stage, or you could put it more stylishly and say that it's a ruminant stage where you begin to get a new perspective. You see what has happened to yourself and you try to put some shape on it. I think I'm going back to the very beginnings of consciousness, almost, in my writing.[5]

Electric Light offers a "new perspective" by revealingly going back to the mode of Virgil's Georgics, as well as his own earliest memories.[6] Heaney's uninterrupted interest in the contours of his childhood landscape again place it at the center of his poetic vision, pulling the poet in *Electric Light* between the "erotics of the future" and the compelling shapes and images from the past (*EL*, 5).[7] This thesis has considered Heaney and Longley's understanding of place and memory in several prominent poetic contexts, and Heaney has declared the centrality of this intersection in his latest collection, noting that "incidents from childhood and adolescence and the

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comments that the "poems work together, pour one into the next with what Heaney himself might describe as a Heraclitean flux." Agee credits *Snow Water* with impressive "touches of inter-textuality…Suites of interrelated poems open quietly one on to the other like sliding doors…." Campbell-Johnston, "Danger: high voltage poetry"; Agee, "Of peace and nature."

[4] For more recent discussions of the Mossbawn area in Heaney's prose, see: Heaney, "Something to Write Home About" (1998), in *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 48-58; and "Through -Other Places, Through-Other Times: The Irish Poet and Britain" (2001), in *Finders Keepers*, 364-82.

[5] Heaney, "Interview with Seamus Heaney," by Mike Murphy, in *Reading the Future: Irish Writers in Conversation with Mike Murphy*, ed. Cliodhna Ni Anluain (Dublin: Lilliput, 2000), 82.

[6] See: "Bann Valley Eclogue" (11-12); "Virgil: Eclogue IX" (31-34); as well as "Glanmore Eclogue" (35-37). Through Virgil, Heaney also claims his debt to Dante.

[7] The book jacket to *Electric Light* claims that the book is "about origins…and oracles: the places where things start from, the ground of understanding – whether in Arcadia or Anahorish, the sanctuary at Epidaurus or the Bann valley in County Derry." Though Heaney no longer recovers bodies from the bog, as he did in *North* (1975), his poetry continues to focus on the nexus of ground (origins), tradition and culture.

recent past swim up into memory: moments that were radiant or distressful at the time come back in the light of a more distanced and more informed consciousness."[8]

The West of Ireland dominates the pages of Michael Longley's *Snow Water*, and Heaney's *Electric Light* similarly opens and closes with a series of Bellaghy related poems. However, while *Electric Light* arguably returns to Heaney's childhood landscape with as much force as his early collections, it is also his most obviously erudite book of poetry, a fact that split his reviewers.[9] Heaney has recently characterized the process of creating a poem, in terms similar to his earlier explanation from "Feeling into Words" (1974), by remaining rooted to Mossbawn through its function as the navel of his experience:

> …there's usually a line being cast from the circumference of your whole understanding towards intuitions and images down there in the memory pool. If you're lucky, you feel life moving at the other end of the line; the remembered thing starts off a chain reaction of words and associations, and at that point what you need is the whole of your acquired knowledge and understanding, your cultural memory and literary awareness.[10]

This interplay, between "cultural memory and literary awareness," demonstrates Heaney's seasoned ability to mix a host of varied characters, from those reminiscent of the faces in *Death of a Naturalist*, to intellectuals, artists and mythic characters (managing in one poem to transfigure characters from Dante to the 1960s Gaeltacht).[11] In poems such as "Out of the Bag," "The Loose Box" and "The Real Names," Heaney positions Mossbawn as only one place (though a crucial one) in his

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[8] Heaney, "Lux perpetua: Seamus Heaney on the making of his recent collection, *Electric Light*," *Guardian*, 16 June 2001.

[9] In an unenthusiastic review, Robert Potts argues that the "presence of the pantheon has become more observable in Heaney's corpus…They become emblems of instant authority," while John Carey observes that it is Heaney's "most literary collection to date – which may disconcert his admirers" as the book "teems with recondite literary allusions…." Further, Campbell-Johnston notes that on her first reading she felt that the volume "spilled its overstuffed allusions" with "Shakespeare, Auden, Hopkins, Hughes…mentioned in the same breath as one Bob Cushley with his jennet, as Doctor Kerlin with his bag." Potts, "The view from Olympia," review of *EL*, *Guardian*, 7 April 2001; Carey, "Going back to his roots," review of *EL*, *Sunday Times*, 1 April 2001; Campbell-Johnston, "Danger: high voltage poetry."

[10] Heaney, "Lux perpetua."

[11] See: "The Gaeltacht" (*EL*, 44). Another *Electric Light* poem, "Montana," helps demonstrate Heaney's evolving technique. The poem describes a childhood figure called "John Dologhan, the best milker ever / to come about the place," who had "worked in Montana once," and seems to return to the vivid portraits of the talk and business of local characters captured in such early poems as "Thatcher," "The Outlaw," and "The Diviner." However, in recalling the stories Dologhan told to him as a boy, Heaney doesn't craft them into obvious artistic lessons as he did in his early books, admitting that he still doesn't quite understand the purpose of these memories: "a bright path / Opened between us like a recognition / That made no sense, like my memory of him standing / Behind the half door, holding up the winkers." Now a middle-aged poet, Heaney seems more at ease with detailing the jagged nature of his memories, and in *Electric Light* shows himself ready to celebrate moments of "recognition," even when it is not always clear what has been recognized (*EL*, 13).

imaginative landscape.[12] The poems of *Electric Light* encounter many different strands of memory, which allow Heaney to embrace not only his pivotal early years, but also his existence as an international man of letters.[13]

"At Toomebridge," the first poem of *Electric Light*, immediately places the reader in Heaney's most familiar landscape and reveals the tenor of the volume through a meditation on the conflated and multiple memories and associations that surround a particular site. Toomebridge, located near Bellaghy at the entry of the Bann River into Lough Neagh from Lough Beg, has been the subject of earlier poems, alerting the reader to other registers.[14] Though very localized, the poem ranges over much of Heaney's poetic territory, as it deals with boundaries (describing the overspill of water "As if it had reached an edge of the flat earth") and history ("the checkpoint…/ Where the rebel boy was hanged in '98"). Again, the poet reveals his central anxiety about creating art from violence and division, this time in a declaratory style, claiming that the "negative ions" circulating in the air of his homeground, the embedded and often violent history of the place are "poetry to me." Directly following "At Toomebridge," "Perch" is also set in Heaney's homeground, and the poem explores another primary tension in his work between the universal and the particular. Picking up the technique of "Fodder," from *Wintering Out* (1972), Heaney clarifies local usage at the beginning, writing, "Perch we called 'grunts.'" However, the poem eventually opens up, like the Bann River emptying into the larger waters of Lough Neagh, into a more universal space, "That is water, on carpets of Bann stream, on hold / In the everything flows and steady go of the world" (*EL*, 4). The particular river in County Derry functions as a metaphor for the way we all must (at times) struggle against the current. The perch, "runty and

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[12] Heaney notes that the fun in writing poems such as "The Loose Box," "Known World," "The Real Names," and "Electric Light" was that "it was not a single shape that was thrown, but several. Different sections of the poems represent the different casts made. The pleasure of doing it that way was in following each new impulse, finding and trusting approaches that allowed both oneself and the subject to stretch their wings." Heaney, "Lux perpetua."

[13] In "Out of the Bag," for example, Heaney starts and ends with his memory of the doctor coming to the family farmhouse to deliver a baby, and his own overactive imagination that pictured "little, pendent, teat-hued infant parts" being brought in the doctor's bag to create the baby. In the middle, however, the poet recalls Doctor Kerlin in different contexts, as Heaney remembers how he thought of his childhood memory in Lourdes when he was feeling faint, and then later when thinking about a friend in chemotherapy. The "room I came from and the rest of us all came from / Stays pure reality where I stand alone, / Standing the passage of time…" (*EL*, 9).

[14] For example, Heaney mentions Toomebridge in "A Lough Neagh Sequence" (*DD*, 26-33) as an eel passageway; in "Toome" (*WO*, 26) it is characterized by its "alluvial mud," bogwater and tributaries," and finally in "The Toome Road" (*FW*, 15) Heaney recalls the morning he "met armoured cars / In convoy," and "headphoned soldiers standing up in turrets."

ready," work to "hold the pass" by "Guzzling the current, against it, all muscle and slur."

In "Bann Valley Eclogue," written after Virgil's Eclogue IV, Heaney returns to the landscape of his homeground (and, showing the close relationship between the pastoral mode and political expression) reveals his hope for peace. Again, the poet harnesses classical allusion to contemporary political realities. The poem posits the idea that in Northern Ireland, "Whatever stains you, you rubbed it in yourselves," but positively Virgil prophesies that when the "waters break" the:

> Bann's stream will overflow, the old markings
> Will avail no more to keep east bank from west.
> The valley will be washed like the new baby.
> (*EL*, 11)

With direct implications for the Troubles (and perhaps a united Ireland), Virgil counsels Heaney (as a Dante figure) on his responsibility not to let children being born in his homeground "hear close gunfire or explosions," and instead to "sing / Better times for her and her generation" (*EL*, 11-12), taking Heaney back to "Gifts of Rain" from *Wintering Out*. The book concludes with the title poem, "Electric Light," which indirectly reasserts Heaney's persistent location in his homeground. Written about a childhood memory of his grandmother, when "Electric light shone over us," the poem's final striking image recalls her frightening and resilient thumb-nail, "the dirt-tracked flint and fissure of her nail, / So plectrum-hard, glit-glittery, it must still keep / Among beads and vertebrae in the Derry ground" (*EL*, 81). Heaney invests his grandmother's nail as a symbol of family memory, which represents an important part of his inheritance; a resilient affiliation to the landscape of his childhood that remains despite his choice to live most of his adult life outside the borders of Northern Ireland.

Michael Longley's *Snow Water* begins with a long sequence of poems set in the West of Ireland, which reassert the landscape's primary significance in his poetry. The dedicatory poem, written to David Cabot (the ornithologist that owns the Carrigskeewaun cottage of Longley's many visits), clearly indicates the book's emphasis on his elective Mayo homeground. The poem argues that the cottage itself blends into the environment, becoming "just another erratic boulder" for the hare and other wildlife to circumvent. Carrigskeewaun (mentioned directly in nine different poems) and the surrounding area again function as a personal site of memory for

Longley and his wife, but the new volume also describes Mayo as a landscape of friendship. In elegies for Gaelic poet Michael Hartnett and American dramatist Kenneth Koch, as well as poems dedicated to critic Michael Allen and writer and fellow Mayo transplant Michael Viney, Longley uses the sharing of his "home from home" to figure his involvement in a larger artistic community.[15] Building on his concentration on aging and legacy in *The Weather in Japan* (2000), in *Snow Water*, Longley dwells acutely on the passing of time, which finds both elegiac as well as celebratory expression. In the final poem, "Leaves," Longley asks "Is this my final phase?" (*SW*, 62). Indeed, the volume has an autumnal flair (with the month of October directly referenced in four poems), while other poems have a discernable mood of harvest and seasonal change. There is also a series of burial related poems, and in "Aschy" he admits that his body is "Growing stranger and more vulnerable" (*SW*, 17).

The poignant poem "Above Dooaghtry," a serious sequel to "Detour," offers a very personal meditation on Longley's vision of his final resting place. The poem seals the West as the ultimate place of memory for Longley, as it reveals his wish that Mayo will serve as his final resting place, near the cottage of his many visits. In the touching last stanza he expresses the hope that, should his wife choose "to join me," they can continue their adventures together in the landscape that provided them with so many memories. In the poem, Longley explicitly states that his ashes should be buried "just beyond the cottage's / Higgledy perimeter fence-posts / At Carrigskeewaun...":

> For the burial mount at Templedoomore
> Has been erased by wind and sea, the same
> Old stone-age sea that came as far inland
> As Cloonaghmanagh and chose the place
> That I choose as a promontory, a fort:
>
> Let boulders at the top encircle me,
> Neither a drystone wall nor a cairn, space
> For the otter to die and the mountain hare
> To lick snow stains from her underside,
> A table for the peregrine and ravens,
>
> A prickly double-bed as well, nettles
> And carline-thistles, a sheeps' wool pillow,
> So that, should she decide to join me there,

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[15] For instance, in "Heron," the elegy for Koch, Longley imagines heaven as a "townland / That encloses Carrigskeewaun and Central Park" (*SW*, 61).

Our sandy dander to Allaran Point
Or Tonakeera will take for ever.
(*SW*, 5)

In other poems grounded in the West, Longley has persistently lamented the limitations that come with his bodily form, as the animals he waits for always arrive just after he stops looking.[16] In "Above Dooaghtry," he imagines finally gaining in death full integration with the place, with the peregrine using him as a "table," and the otter (the subject of many recent poems) finding in the poet's built-up burial ground a place to die in privacy. Finally, the affecting image from "Autumn Lady's Tresses," of the waves pushing "You and me along the strand like young lovers" (*GO*, 2), gains a permanency as the couple embrace the Mayo landscape as a final resting place, and thus cement their memories and sense of togetherness so "Our sandy dander to Allaran Point Or Tonakeera" can go on "for ever."

Longley has included poems about World War I in every collection, and *Snow Water* contains a suite of seven poems about the Great War that then merge with several other poems inspired by Homer's *Iliad*, which confront issues of war, violence and burial, thus drawing on the other *lieux de mémoire* that I considered in Chapters 2 and 5.[17] "Sycamore" concerns the incongruous sound of war, as the "notes of music" played by "the unknown soldier before the Somme / (Fritz Kreisler playing Dvořák's 'Humoresque')" is "carried to all corners of the battlefield" (*SW*, 36). Several poems later, "Harmonica" continues this musical connection, depicting Longley's father finding a "harmonica in No Man's Land" and playing a tune that "lasts until the end of time" (SW, 39). Like Heaney's *Electric Light*, Longley here plays on the relationship between the particular and the universal, claiming that in his father's harmonica "His breath contains the world." However, "The Front," the most interesting of the *Snow Water* World War I poems, complicates and extends Longley's war poetry.[18] The seven-line poem explores war as a pan-generational

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[16] See: "Peregrine" (*GF*, 9); "The Comber" (*WJ*, 3); and "The Hare" (*WJ*, 54).
[17] See especially "Interview" where through a conversation between Achilles and Odysseus in the underworld, Longley emphasizes that no matter how heroic, death is final. Though Odysseus claims that "'No one has ever lived a luckier life than you, / Achilles, nor ever will," Achilles rebuffs him and declares that he would "'far rather clean out ditches on starvation / Wages for some nonentity of a smallholder / Than lord it over the debilitated dead'" (*SW*, 43).
[18] See also "The Painters," where Longley rewrites his burying of his father captured in such poems as "In Memoriam," "Wounds," and "Wreaths." The poem continues the slight irreverence of "The Choughs" (*WJ*, 25), as he notes that when he "shouldered my father's coffin his body / Shifted slyly and farted…" but also shows Longley's intention to not hide from the horrors of war, as he hones in

reality, implicating not only his father's generation of actual soldiers, but also his own and his son's generations in the nightmare of war:

> I dreamed I was marching up to the Front to die.
> There were thousands of us who were going to die.
> From the opposite direction, out of step, breathless,
> The dead and wounded came, all younger than my son,
> Among them my father who might have been my son.
> 'What is it like?' I shouted after the family face.
> 'It's cushy, mate! Cushy!' my father-son replied.
> (*SW*, 40)

The use of the colloquial "cushy" continues the ironic tone of "Edward Thomas's Poem" where the "nature poet turned into a war poet as if / He could cure death with the rub of a dock leaf" (*SW*, 35).[19] As Peter McDonald observes, in "The Front" "intimacy and catastrophe are as closely intertwined as ever…but the intimacy has become confused and confusing, and the catastrophe a surreal combination of terror and comfort."[20] The poem continues Longley's reflections on aging and death, with his anticipation of meeting his father, yet the location in the battlefields of the Great War and his awareness of the continuation of entrenched positions in his son's adulthood vacillates between a familial and a universal significance.

Longley's poem "The Group" extends his technique from "Remembering the Poets" (*WJ*, 61) by merging recognizable qualities of his contemporaries with the attributes of classical poets. In 2002, he argued that "The Group" might "help show how the Classics can still be relevant," explaining that:

> Greek literature is like a comet sweeping across our consciousness. The head of the comet is packed with all the great texts, but the fading tail of dust and ice particles can be fascinating too. There are writers in the tail who survive in only a fragment or two, or as a joke in a comedy by Aristophanes. I assemble seven of these wispy shades…to pay tribute to the enthusiasm and generous spirit of Philip Hobsbaum and to remember the creative writing group he had formed in Belfast in the sixties – now, in my opinion, somewhat mythologized. A lot that has been written about the Belfast Group is inaccurate. Rather than correct the myths, I chose on that night of celebration to add several more. I wanted my Greek poem to complicate the occasion.[21]

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on the odor of the trenches, recalling that the painter "William Orphen said you couldn't paint the smell" (*SW*, 38).

[19] Like "The War Poets" (*EG*, 34), these poems play on Longley's role as a war poet.

[20] Peter McDonald, "Cold comfort," review of *SW*, *Guardian*, 22 May 2004.

[21] Longley, "We are all Greeks: In the comet's tail," *Irish Pages* 1.2 (Autumn/Winter 2002/2003): 92-93.

"The Group," as he indicated, recognizes the faces of his contemporaries in the Greek circle (Heaney, for example, can be seen in "Ion of Chios, the prize-winning poet / Who specialises in astronomical phenomena / And the invention of compound adjectives" [*SW*, 58]). But, more importantly, he deliberately adds new "myths" to the standard view of Hobsbaum's Belfast Group. We meet "Lamprocles, the dithyrambic poet" who "Says the ethereal Pleiades share / The same nomenclature as wood-pigeons," and "Hypochondriacal Telesilla" who "For the sake of her health takes up singing / And playing the lyre and gets well enough / To volunteer and man the battlements…." We are driven to speculate which Irish poet Longley intends as "A certain person boozes and gorges / And says scandalous things about us all, / Punching the air, 'I've plenty of blows left….'" However, Longley's references are not exclusive, and in some cases perhaps relate entirely to the classical figures from "the tail [of the comet] who survive in only a fragment or two…." We only see Longley himself in small comical glimpses, "hang[ing] around for the sun's white-winged / Forerunner, the air-wandering dawn-star / (And for the splashing-out of good wine)."[22] The most important aspect of the poem is Longley's use of the classical tradition to "complicate" an Irish occasion. As I argued in Chapter 5, for the work of both Heaney and Longley, the classics have become a place where the poets can stretch the Irish literary tradition and historical context in revealing ways, locating themselves and their pivotal places against the classical maps inherited from antiquity.

Snow Water and *Electric Light* demonstrate that the memory-places that I have explored in this thesis remain central to the poets and their overall poetry. However, can these last books be seen as poetic departures for Heaney and Longley, or do their "cud-chewing" tendencies limit this possibility? I agree with McDonald's appraisal that in *Snow Water* "the genuinely original has not quite broken free from the overly mannered. For poets, all stylistic and formal breakthroughs can become repeatable tricks, and much of Longley's best writing has created a repertoire of subject and style that can seem, at times, a slightly predictable routine…."[23] Despite such reservations, McDonald ultimately argues that the newest volume "marks a decisive moment in Longley's poetic development – as decisive, perhaps, as that signaled by *Gorse Fires*." On this point I disagree with McDonald, as I find *Snow*

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[22] Ibid., 93.
[23] McDonald, "Cold comfort."

Water an obvious extension of the poetics practiced in *The Weather in Japan*, especially in those poems set in the West. Longley has produced a solid collection that will rightfully add to his reputation as a skilled and thoughtful poet; indeed several poems go in exciting new directions, even when they concern his oldest themes. Yet, as Stephen Knight observes, there is a "touch of complacency" evident in the volume.[24] Many of the poems are beautifully composed, but one gets the feeling that they are by now too easy for Longley to write. *Electric Light* elicited a more mixed and negative reception than *Snow Water*, largely due to the inevitable expectation surrounding any new Heaney volume. Yet, though Heaney also goes over much established territory, the volume more obviously pushes his techniques and themes in new directions. Still, both poets would do well to meditate on the criticism Derek Mahon offered of Longley's poetry in a 1971 letter, writing that "what I see is a man going back over familiar territory, picking out the flora and fauna which will reassure him he's not lost...."[25] Longley and Heaney undoubtedly recognize the need to strike a balance between deepening their main themes and 'regurgitating' (as "Old Poets" has it). They remain compelling poets because they have made their primary poetic locations recognizable and intimate, even if they sometimes take their readers through overly familiar ground.

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[24] Stephen Knight, "Sylvia Plath? Don't go there," review of the shortlist for the Forward Poetry Prize, *Independent on Sunday*, 3 October 2004: 30.
[25] Derek Mahon to Longley (December 1971), Box 1, Folder 2, Emory.

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This list provides reference information for the manuscript collections that I consulted at Emory University. I examined the entire range of Michael Longley's papers, and here I provide a brief description of the contents.

Longley, Michael. Manuscript Collection #744. Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. 81 boxes (c. 1960-2000).

> Contains extensive personal and literary papers, including: numerous drafts of poems from the 1960s through the *Weather in Japan* (2000); correspondence with many poets (such as Eavan Boland, Ciaran Carson, Peter Fallon, Brian Friel, Seamus Heaney, Philip Hobsbaum, Jennifer Johnston, Medbh McGuckian, Derek Mahon, John Montague, Paul Muldoon and James Simmons); worksheets from 'Belfast Group' sessions; prose; photographs; interviews; printed material; records relating to his post as Combined Arts Director of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland; and the papers of his wife, the critic, Edna Longley.

Fallon, Peter and Gallery Press. Manuscript Collection #817. Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. 190 boxes (c. 1969-1998).

Heaney, Seamus. Manuscript Collection #653. Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. 4 boxes (c. 1981-1991).

Hughes, Ted. Manuscript Collection #644. Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. 200 boxes (c. 1940-1997).

Mahon, Derek. Manuscript Collection #689. Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. 26 boxes (c. 1979-1994).

McGuckian, Medbh. Manuscript Collection #770. Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. 51 boxes (c. 1969-1994).

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