

The Poetics of Memory – The Public Role of Seamus Heaney after 1995

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I certify that this thesis is my original work. To the best of my knowledge, all sources have been acknowledged in the text. No part of it has been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Piavanini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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April 2017

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with what it means to be a ‘public’ poet in national and transnational contexts. Because Seamus Heaney’s ‘Irishness’ has shaped the critical response to his work, what has been effaced is detailed critical attention to the interplay between the national and transnational dimensions of his poetry. What is most evident in his later work is a type of border-crossing transcultural solidarity, and an openness to alternate views and other cultures becomes increasingly important. To speak of Heaney’s cosmopolitanism is not to dismiss the significance of the national, but to indicate multiple allegiances and identifications. In addition to considering Heaney as a cosmopolitan poet, this thesis uses approaches and concepts from memory studies to draw out the significance of Heaney’s work in a transnational literary space. While critics have long asserted the importance of memory in his poetry, it has most often been treated as a peripheral rather than central idea. While some criticism obliquely deals with collective or cultural memory in his work – for example by discussing the representation of myth or tradition in his bog poems – there has been little sustained attention to this aspect of his work. This project is focused on how public memory is shaped in collections and major translations published after 1995. Memory is a helpful lens to look at Heaney’s late work, in particular, because of the importance of the interplay of past, present and future in these works. In his later work the dynamic plays out in interesting ways: in the construction of a collective memory of the Troubles in works written in the 1990s; in the use of the elegy to commemorate the passing of important contemporary poets; in his writing on events with transnational significance, such as 9/11; and in the slippages between past and present in poems about his family. Another way that Heaney explores memory is through the literary afterlives of texts – specifically, his appropriation of canonical classical texts. His adaptations of Sophocles, Horace and Virgil collapse the distinctions between past, present and future. In his late work Heaney actively shapes collective memory through a pattern of reprising and revising imagery and ideas from his earlier work and through the translation and adaptation of texts from classical antiquity. The thesis concludes with a coda which examines the commemorative practices which have emerged since his death in 2013 and, particularly, how an individual can function as a site of memory.

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INTRODUCTION

‘Famous Seamus’¹

My thesis engages with what it means to be a ‘public’ poet in national and transnational contexts. In the late 1990s and early 2000s Seamus Heaney was perhaps the most popular poet in the English-speaking world. At around this time, an apocryphal statistic emerged: two thirds of all poetry collections sold in the United Kingdom were by Heaney. The source is probably an Arts Council report of 2000 which showed that he and Ted Hughes accounted for 60 percent of poetry sales in the previous year (in no small part due to the recent release of Hughes’s *Birthday Letters* to Sylvia Plath and Heaney’s *Beowulf*). This statistic re-emerged at the time of his 70th birthday, in 2009, and was repeated in obituaries after his death in 2013. The truth of this rather astonishing claim seemed beside the point.² It was recirculated across the globe through a range of media because it *seemed* plausible. When the statistic was first circulated, Heaney had recently won the Nobel Prize, followed by the Whitbread Book of the Year in 1997 and 2000. By the mid-1990s, and until his death, his work was ubiquitous on school curricula. The publication and recirculation of this statistic is an indication, more than anything, of Heaney’s public profile in the last twenty years of his life. My focus on his later work will show how this platform allowed him to contribute to public memory.

After Heaney’s death the Irish Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, delivered a speech to the Dail Eirann³ to pay tribute to the poet. He describes Heaney’s poetry encompassing a range of experience, from ‘peeling potatoes with our mother’ to becoming part of ‘a new family of Europeans.’ Kenny claims: ‘For him, it was only all and ever about memory and ‘the state of us.’⁴ I argue that the shaping of collective memory is one

¹ Coined ‘Seamus Feamus’ by Clive James in his 1974 poem, ‘Peregrine Prykke’s Progress through the London Literary World.’ The TLS Blog, *The Times Literary Supplement*, July 15, 2010, <http://timescolumns.typepad.com/stothard/2010/07/peregrine-prykke-revisiting.html>.

² The Arts Council report that ‘if only living poets are included and a more restrictive definition of “contemporary” is applied, Heaney emerges as taking nearly two-thirds of all bookshop sales within the period.’ Ann Bridgwood and John Hampson, ‘Executive Summary – Rhyme and Reason: Developing Contemporary Poetry,’ (London: Arts Council of England, 2000).

³ Lower House of Irish parliament.

⁴ ‘Speech by an Taoiseach, Mr. Enda Kenny T.D. Seamus Heaney Tribute in the Dail on the 24th September 2013 5:30pm,’ Department of the Taoiseach Website, Accessed 11

of Heaney's major contributions as a poet. Drawing on approaches and concepts from memory studies, I illuminate the ways in which Heaney chose to conduct himself as a public poet. This approach is valuable because it allows me to examine the different forms of memory in Heaney's work, with a particular focus on his late works.

In Heaney's final works, memory is multi-layered and complex. Astrid Erll describes cultural memory as 'broad spectrum' which ranges from 'individual acts of remembering in a social context to group memory (of family, friends, veterans, etc.) to national memory with its 'invented traditions,' and finally to the host of transnational *lieux de mémoire* such as the Holocaust and 9/11.⁵ Heaney's late work engages with memory across this spectrum: there are poems which deal with the memory of the Troubles in Northern Ireland; in his 9/11 sequence he considers the global repercussions of a terror attack; his elegies for poets are marked by transnational affiliations; and his final works commemorate his family in what can be understood as 'individual acts' of memory and as group memory.

Throughout his career Heaney has been called upon to both comment on and commemorate traumatic events. There are two important strands to Heaney's engagement with memory in his late work: a pattern of reprising and revising imagery and ideas from his earlier work, and the translation and adaptation of texts from classical antiquity. Both strategies function as a way of reshaping collective memory. Heaney often uses revisions of earlier poems to present new perspectives on earlier events. For example, from the mid-1990s his reprisal of the bog body sequence from the 1970s is an opportunity to present a changed perspective on the violence of the 'Troubles.' His adaptations and translations perform a similar function, in that they are often used to reframe understandings of traumatic events. Heaney has been charged with abdicating responsibility and distancing himself from trauma in the bog body poems and his translations. I argue, by contrast, that these poems should be understood as the way he has

November, 2016,

http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/News/Taoiseach's_Speeches/Speech_by_An_Taoiseach_Mr_Enda_Kenny_T_D_Seamus_Heaney_Tribute_in_the_Dail_on_the_24th_September_2013_5_30pm.html.

⁵ Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sara B. Young, *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Media and Cultural Memory (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), EBSCO ebook, 2.

chosen to make public comment on divisive issues. By considering events from a range of perspectives, and by using texts that have been traditionally associated with public speech (such as the choral ode), Heaney navigates a path between opposing views.

Heaney's fame came almost immediately after his first collection, *Death of a Naturalist*, was published in 1966. His early success in the international literary marketplace meant that he was regularly called upon to speak about the 'Irish Question.' At this time, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was formed to work towards reform of public housing and gerrymandering through non-violent protest. In 1968 he wrote for *The Listener* and for the Queen's University magazine on a series of protest marches in Derry in which protesters were injured by police. At that time he drew an analogy between the protests in Derry and the civil rights movement of the United States, observing that civil disobedience might be necessary in the fight for equality and writing that 'we were all afraid, and still are, of returning to the old Orange and Green polarisation of public life.'⁶ With the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland in 1969, Heaney had to decide how he would respond to an increasingly intractable civil conflict.

The Troubles

The period between 1969 and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 is commonly referred to as the 'Troubles.' A range of historical, political and economic factors led to this protracted civil conflict. Graham Dawson traces the roots of the conflict to the Norman invasion of Ireland in the twelfth century.⁷ Irish resistance to English rule has endured over several centuries, culminating in the Nationalist campaign for Home Rule in the early twentieth century. Richard English argues that modern Republicanism was born in the Easter Rising of 1916, when over a thousand rebels occupied the General Post Office in Dublin.⁸ They declared the end to British rule and proclaimed an Irish Republic. After they were

⁶ Seamus Heaney, 'Old Derry's Walls,' *The Listener* 80, no. 2065 (1968), 522.

⁷ Graham Dawson, *Making Peace with the Past: Memory, Trauma and the Irish Troubles* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 6.

⁸ Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Kindle Edition, Ch. 1.

defeated by British forces, the leaders of the insurrection were executed by the British Government. English identifies this seminal event as one that 'was as much about the battle between competing Irish political traditions [militant Irish separatism and constitutional Irish nationalism] as it was about Ireland's struggle against Britain.'⁹ In the 1918 United Kingdom general election, the Sinn Fein party won a majority of seats and established the Dail Eireann, the first Irish parliament. The Irish Republican Army was engaged in guerilla warfare against the British army until the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in 1921, leading to the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922. After partition, the North remained under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom. In the following years the Unionist majority maintained control of the national and local governments and had power over policing, housing, education, and social services.¹⁰ John Darby reports that there were IRA campaigns during the 1920s, 30s and 40s.¹¹ During this period the IRA was active in the Free State, in bombing campaigns in Britain, and in Northern Ireland. Richard English argues that these campaigns 'produced little progress.' The border campaign of the late 1950s aimed to reunite Ireland, but was scarcely more successful.

British troops were deployed to Northern Ireland in 1969, where they remained until 2007.¹² In the late 1960s and early 1970s the non-violent civil rights movement was engulfed by the new Provisional IRA, and for next thirty years the region was wracked by sectarian violence. In 1971 the British Government introduced a policy of internment without trial for people suspected of belonging to paramilitary groups. Internment continued until 1975, and the CAIN website (Conflict Archive on the Internet)¹³ reports that of the 1981 people detained, 1874 were Catholic/Republican. As well as members of Nationalist and

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John Darby, 'Conflict in Northern Ireland: A Background Essay,' in *Facets of the Conflict in Northern Ireland*, ed. Seamus Dunn (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1995). Reproduced with permission on the CAIN Project website, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/facets.htm>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Didier Bigo and Emmanuel-Pierre Guittet, 'Northern Ireland as Metaphor: Exception, Suspicion and Radicalization in The "War on Terror",' *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 6 (2011): 486, doi:10.1177/0967010611425532.

¹³ The CAIN Project (Conflict Archive on the Internet) is maintained by the University of Ulster and funded by the EU; the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK; and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It is a collection of source documents, maps, applications and databases associated with the 'Troubles.' <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/>.

Unionist paramilitary forces, the Troubles involved the British occupying forces and members of predominantly Protestant police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). During the course of the Troubles 3600 people were killed, more than 2000 of whom were civilians.¹⁴ The competing memory cultures of the Nationalist and Unionist communities have largely determined how the conflict has been shaped in public memory.

Heaney's response to the Troubles came to define his career, and there was never a time when he could escape the tension between art and politics. Heaney's work and his public interventions can be used to explore the poet's role in a situation of conflict. He used his celebrity to try to navigate a middle path rather than speak truth to power. As he observed in an essay on the Northern Irish poets, 'nothing needed to be exposed.'¹⁵ Because the conflict and division was out in the open, it needed to be 'outstripped.'¹⁶ In his attempt to move beyond the sectarian division, Heaney contributes to the shaping of the collective memory of the 'Troubles.'

The Public Role of Writers

Seamus Heaney has been identified by *Prospect Magazine*, *The Guardian* and *Oxford Bibliographies* as one of Britain's top public intellectuals, and yet the label seems imprecise.¹⁷ While he has certainly fulfilled a public role over the course of his career, the way that he has participated in the public sphere seems quite different to the traditional model of the public intellectual, one who represents the oppressed and 'speaks truth to power.' The modern secular public intellectual

¹⁴ David McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Co., 1999), 13.

¹⁵ Seamus Heaney, 'Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry from Northern Ireland,' in *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002), 127.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ John Naughton, 'Britain's Top 300 Intellectuals,' *The Guardian*, May 8, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2011/may/08/top-300-british-intellectuals>; 'Top Intellectuals – The Results', *Prospect Magazine*, August 21, 2004, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/topintellectualstheresults>; Eugene O'Brien, 'Seamus Heaney', *Oxford Bibliographies*, November 28, 2016, doi.10.1093/OBO/9780199846719-0028.

emerged from the rejection of religious authority during the Enlightenment. At this time, literary writers engaged in debate in the public sphere on matters of morality. This form of speaking truth to power had a national dimension. Voltaire and the *philosophes* (and, later, Zola during the Dreyfus affair) felt that their role was to speak for the honour of France.

By the end of the twentieth century the role of the literary writer had changed. Edward Said's influential work on writer intellectuals mapped significant shifts in the public domain during the 1990s. Changes to the traditional news media from the middle of the twentieth century altered the way that information circulated, and the widespread use of the internet transformed the nature of a constituency. Public figures could now speak to more people than ever before. Said's vision of an intellectual is of an oppositional outsider who speaks truth to power.¹⁸ He identifies Nadine Gordimer, Octavio Paz, Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott as typical of the modern writer intellectual. Heaney does not appear to conform to Said's model of a writer intellectual as an oppositional outsider. While Said saw 'a desire for articulation as opposed to silence' as the natural outcome of the quest for social justice, Seamus Heaney's reticence and circumspection represent a different way of responding to injustice.

Heaney has been criticised for the way that he managed his public role during the 1970s and 1980s. He has been accused by some of being an 'apologist'¹⁹ for the violence, and by others of being evasive about the political situation in the North, a 'smiling public man.'²⁰ While there has been much criticism of the positions he has taken, Camille Paglia's blunt declaration sums up one school of thought: 'That guy is a coward. He has never written a poem that addresses, passionately, or engages with, his own country's terrible political state, the cataclysms for centuries. People praise him as if he is a bold speaker? He's not a

¹⁸ Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

¹⁹ Ciaran Carson, 'Escaped from the Massacre?', *The Honest Ulsterman* no. 50 (1975);

²⁰ Dennis O'Driscoll, 'Heaney in Public,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Kindle edition, 59. O'Driscoll uses this quotation from Yeats to summarise the way that some critics have understood Heaney's public persona.

bold speaker.’²¹ While it is true that Heaney is not a ‘bold’ speaker, Paglia’s assessment shows little understanding of the context in which Heaney operated. The issue is not that he never spoke of the ‘Troubles,’ but that he did not speak for the nationalist paramilitaries or, conversely, to them. During this time, he did not make public statements supporting the hunger strikers, criticising Thatcher or denouncing the IRA even though, at times, these would have been the positions that he took. His position was that he was willing to speak for the Nationalist community when it was a civil rights protest, but after the paramilitaries began their campaign of violence he felt that to speak for the nationalists would be to endorse the violence of the IRA. During the prison protests of the late 1970s he was appalled by the position of the Thatcher government, but resisted pressure to become a spokesperson for the paramilitaries, whose strategies he deplored. Afterwards Heaney spoke at some length about his contempt for Thatcher, but also for the IRA.

Heaney’s public statements have always been guided by a sense of responsibility. While he has generally chosen not to speak at times of heightened tension, at other times he has been critical of actions taken by the British government. On the occasion of accepting an award in London in 1988 he spoke forcefully against ‘an inclination to view the British Army presence in Ulster once again as part of the solution rather than part of the problem.’²² In a speech at Oxford in 1993 he spoke about the constraints of British occupation and of the division and conflict caused by the ‘border in Ireland, a frontier which has entered the imagination definitively, north and south, and which continues to divide Britain’s Ireland from Ireland’s Ireland.’²³ By 1995, the cessation of violence meant that Heaney felt freer to speak about the atrocities of the previous 25 years. Many of his later public statements occurred as a result of commissions from newspapers and human rights groups. At times of trauma newspaper editors have looked to Heaney for commentary (the IRA ceasefire, the Omagh bombing, The Good Friday agreement, 9/11) and he has stated that he felt a responsibility to

²¹ Camille Paglia, ‘An Interview with Camille Paglia,’ by Daniel Nester, *Bookslut* April 2005, http://www.bookslut.com/features/2005_04_005030.php.

²² Seamus Heaney, “Anglo-Irish Occasions,” *London Review of Books* 10, no. 9 (1988).

²³ Seamus Heaney, ‘Frontiers of Writing,’ in *The Redress of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1995), Kindle edition, 188.

respond appropriately.²⁴ Dennis O'Driscoll claimed that Heaney strived for a balance between 'guarding private integrity and engaging subtly with public issues.'²⁵ He is recognised as someone who can perform a bardic function by writing atrocity into memory.

There is one area of common ground between Heaney's public interventions and Said's model. While holding that intellectuals have a 'special duty to address the constituted and authorized powers of one's own society'²⁶ Said extends the duty of the intellectual to do more than represent collective suffering – he feels that the intellectual must 'universalise the crisis' and 'associate that experience with the sufferings of others.'²⁷ Heaney's poetry, prose and public speech is engaged with this form of advocacy – while there have been times at which he has represented collective national suffering, his broader project has been marked by a cosmopolitan openness and willingness to recognise and identify with the suffering of others. Writing in 2002 Edward Said observed that 'many people still feel the need to look at the writer-intellectual as someone who ought to be listened to as a guide to the confusing present.'²⁸ He also outlines the ways that a changed media landscape has made the role of the intellectual more immediate than at any time in the past. The construction of a counter-memory is presented as integral to the writer's responsibility. As Said argues, the first role of the intellectual is to 'present alternative narratives and other perspectives on history than those provided by combatants on behalf of official memory and national identity.'²⁹ In this capacity, Heaney has been engaged in a decades-long project of reshaping memory.

Heaney's Public Commentary during the Troubles

During the Troubles Heaney was actively involved in cultural commentary about 'the Irish Question,' being a regular contributor to *The Crane Bag* and *The*

²⁴ Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), Kindle edition, 352.

²⁵ Dennis O'Driscoll, 'Heaney in Public,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Kindle edition, 59.

²⁶ Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 98.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁸ Edward Said, 'The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals,' in *The Public Intellectual*, ed. Helen Small (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), Kindle edition, 20.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

Listener and a director of the Field Day Theatre Group. He addressed a limited audience, the educated elites who made up the readership of these publications. As he wrote in the editorial for the first edition in 1977, the 'crane bag' was an Irish legend which describes the first alphabet, and 'the meaning of these letters was available only to those who knew the code.'³⁰ He goes on to write about the symbolism of the crane bag as 'a neutral ground where things can detach themselves from all partisan and prejudiced connection.'³¹ The mission of *The Crane Bag* was to create an imaginary 'fifth province' of the mind, one which could unify the four provinces of the North. The 'fifth province' was also a founding principle of the Field Day Group. Heaney served on the board of directors with Brian Friel, Stephen Rea, Tom Paulin and Seamus Deane. In the first collection of pamphlets, published in 1985, the directors wrote of their belief that Field Day should 'contribute to the solution of the present crisis by producing analyses of the established opinions, myths and stereotypes which had become both a symptom and a cause of the current situation.'³² What both enterprises sought to do was to interrogate Irish 'tradition.' This work counterbalanced the memory work of the earlier Irish Literary revival, when Yeats and others forged nationalist memory by glorifying Gaelic tradition and literature.

The lyric poem has been a particularly important genre for social commentary in Northern Ireland, particularly during the 'Troubles.' There has been a great deal of critical attention to what Heaney said and failed to say in his poetry, though the equal reticence of other Northern Irish poets is not always acknowledged. While Heaney is the most well-known of his generation, poets such as Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, James Simmons, Paul Muldoon and Eavan Boland have grappled with the same issues in their work. In a 1985 essay on the challenges facing the Northern Irish poet, Heaney makes the point that it is 'superficial' to read this work as 'evasions of the actual conditions.'³³ In the introduction to *A Rage For Order: Poetry of the Northern Ireland Troubles*, Frank Ormsby observes that the Northern poets continued 'to weigh and scrutinise the relationship between art

³⁰ Seamus Heaney, 'Preface,' *The Crane Bag* 1, no. 1 (1977).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Cited in Stephen Regan, 'Ireland's Field Day,' *History Workshop* 33 (1992): 28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4289137>.

³³ Heaney, 'Place and Displacement,' 129.

and politics and the nature of artistic responsibility.’³⁴ Of the more than 250 poems collected in the anthology, only a handful might be described as overtly political. In her essay ‘Northern Irish Poetry and the End of History,’ Edna Longley reports that after the IRA ceasefire of 1994, foreign journalists visiting Belfast would ask writers ‘What are you going to write about now?’³⁵ She observes that the poetry of Northern Irish poets had never been exclusively focused on the ‘Troubles,’ but had frequently alluded to other histories and other wars (Spanish Civil War, Korea, Holocaust) because ‘odds and ends of battles long ago are still active within communal mentalities.’³⁶ Heaney’s work can be seen as part of a broader project in which Northern Irish poets look beyond the borders of the province and into the past to find parallels for the sectarian violence.

Much of Heaney’s critical prose dealt with the responsibility of the poet in a time of conflict and engaged with the tension between ethics and aesthetics. By 1995, he had written extensively on the ‘adequacy’ of poetry in the ‘complex reality which surrounds it and out of which it is generated.’³⁷ In his study of Heaney’s prose, Michael Cavanagh identifies two main ‘defences’ of poetry: firstly, that poetry ‘serves reality’ (by illuminating or improving reality, or in its capacity to educate); and, conversely, that rather than serving reality it ‘offers sheer aesthetic pleasure ... it is a counterforce, a counterweight.’³⁸ In both instances, Heaney understands poetry as a way of reconciling opposition. In ‘Feeling into Words’ (1972) Heaney writes of poetry’s capacity to ‘encompass the perspectives of a humane reason and at the same time to grant the religious intensity of the violence its deplorable authenticity and complexity.’³⁹ In this essay he acknowledges the ancient divisions underlying the sectarian violence. By the time that he published ‘The Government of the Tongue’, in 1988, there had been nearly 20 years of civil conflict, and he writes of poetry as a space of hope and possibility:

³⁴ Frank Ormsby, *A Rage for Order: Poetry of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1992), xvii.

³⁵ Edna Longley, *Poetry and Posterity* (Highgreen: Bloodaxe Books, 2000), 281.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Redress of Poetry’ *The Redress of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1995), Kindle edition, 7.

³⁸ Michael Cavanagh, *Professing Poetry: Seamus Heaney’s Poetics* (Catholic University of America Press, 2009), Ebrary Edition, 47-8.

³⁹ Seamus Heaney, ‘Feeling into Words,’ in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1980), Kindle edition, 56.

In one sense the efficacy of poetry is nil – no lyric has ever stopped a tank. In another sense, it is unlimited ... in the rift between what is going to happen and whatever we wish to happen, poetry holds attention for a space, functions not as distraction but pure concentration, a focus where our power to concentrate is concentrated back on ourselves. This is what gives poetry its governing power. At its greatest moments it would attempt, in Yeats's phrase, to hold in a single thought reality and justice.⁴⁰

This potential to reconcile reality and justice became a touchstone for Heaney, one he returned to time and again. In the opening of *The Cure at Troy* the chorus describes poetry as 'the voice/Of reality and justice.'⁴¹ In his Nobel address he returns to reality and justice, arguing that before the Sunningdale conference of 1974 it was still possible 'to hold in a single thought reality and justice', but that 'a quarter century of life-waste and spirit- waste' eroded his capacity to believe. In this speech he explores the limitations of art, specifically poetry, in the face of violent conflict, but concludes that the adequacy of poetry has 'as much to do with the energy released by linguistic fission and fusion, with the buoyancy generated by cadence and tone and rhyme and stanza, as it has to do with the poem's concerns or the poet's truthfulness.'⁴² This appreciation of the aesthetic power of poetry is extended in 'The Redress of Poetry', in which Heaney presents a model of poetry as a counterweight which can 'hold its own and balance out against the historical situation.'⁴³ These understandings of the function of poetry define and shape his later works.

Heaney's Troubles Poetry

What conclusions can be drawn about the way that Heaney chose to use his public role? What factors influenced the decisions that he made about when to speak and when to remain silent? In the 1960s, before the violence of the

⁴⁰ Seamus Heaney, 'The Government of the Tongue,' in *The Government of the Tongue: Selected Prose 1978-1987* (London; New York: Faber and Faber, 1988), Kindle edition.

⁴¹ Seamus Heaney, *The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1991), 2.

⁴² Seamus Heaney, 'Nobel Lecture: Crediting Poetry,' Nobelprize.org, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1995/heaney-lecture.html.

⁴³ Heaney, 'The Redress of Poetry', 3.

'Troubles,' Heaney was engaged with the civil rights struggle in Northern Ireland. In his first collection he included poems which were unmistakably political: in 'Docker' he represents a prejudiced unionist whose 'fist would drop a hammer on a Catholic'; 'At a Potato Digging' draws the past into the present by recalling the potato famine of the nineteenth century and representing it as emblematic of Irish identity. In *Door into the Dark* (1969) he includes 'Requiem for the Croppies,' a sonnet commemorating the Easter Rising of 1916 by recalling the 1798 Rebellion. At the time, he saw this poem as an attempt to 'make a space ... for a nationalist, cultural political position. To make an intervention in the official public speech and discourse of Northern Ireland.'⁴⁴ In the late 1960s Heaney's primary frame of reference was Irish, and collective memory was filtered through a nationalist lens. It is possible that this would have remained his dominant frame if not for the violent conflict that began in the Bogside area of Derry in 1969 and continued for the next 25 years. Heaney explains in the 1980 essay 'Feeling into Words' that 'from that moment the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament.'⁴⁵

'Requiem for the Croppies' became a flashpoint for his own feelings about public advocacy. In 1971 it was appropriated by a paramilitary group in a recording of rebel songs. After the violence peaked in 1972, and particularly the bloodshed of Bloody Sunday, when 13 unarmed civilians were shot by police during a protest in the Bogside, and Bloody Friday, the IRA retaliation attack that killed 9 and injured 130, Heaney chose to cease reading the poem in public because he felt that 'at that stage ... [it] would have been taken as overt support for the Provisionals campaign.'⁴⁶ This signals the approach he was to take for the next 20 years, until the IRA cease fire in 1994. While he might have often wanted to 'speak truth to power' and criticise the British government, especially during the Thatcher years and the prison protests, he felt that to do so would be to express implicit support for the violent tactics of the nationalist paramilitaries. By the time that Heaney and his family left the North, in 1972, his public profile was such that

⁴⁴ Seamus Heaney and Karl Miller, *Seamus Heaney in Conversation with Karl Miller* (Between the Lines, 2000), 19.

⁴⁵ Seamus Heaney, 'Feeling into Words,' in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1980), Kindle edition, 56.

⁴⁶ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 118.

it made the front page of the Belfast newspapers. Michael Parker reports that Ian Paisley's *Protestant Telegraph* celebrated the departure of 'the well-known papist propagandist' while the *Irish Times* welcomed his arrival in the Republic.⁴⁷ He bore a great deal of criticism for leaving, even though many of his peers had done the same.⁴⁸

The Troubles were always present in Heaney's poetry through allusion, metaphor, and – from time to time – explicit commentary. The publication of *North*, in 1975, marks the most sustained poetic engagement with the conflict. The violence of the preceding years is represented in the symbolism of Ancient Nordic ritual and bog bodies. In 1972 he had introduced the bog body poems with 'The Tollund Man,' noting that his feelings were more engaged 'when contemplating a victim, strangely, from 2,000 years ago than they did from contemplating a man at the end of a road being swept up into a plastic bag – I mean the barman at the end of our road tried to carry out a bomb and it blew up.'⁴⁹ In *North* he included a new sequence of bog body poems that generated fierce critical debate amongst writers, some who felt that his use of the past to comment on the present aestheticised and justified the violence of the 'Troubles.' He describes 'The Grauballe Man' lying 'perfected in my memory' and uses the metaphor of a weight and counterweight to describe the 'beauty and atrocity,' concluding with the 'actual weight' of the 'hooded' victims of sectarian violence who have been 'slashed and dumped' (ll. 37-48). In 'Punishment' he describes the 'beautiful' and 'tar-black' face of an Iron Age victim punished for adultery, and in 'Strange Fruit' the 'leathery beauty' of a beheaded girl who lies in the peat bog 'outstaring axe / and beatification' (ll. 12-3). He describes the atavistic tribalism of an ancient feud, writing in 'North' of the Viking raiders, of 'memory incubating the spilled blood' (l. 28), and in 'Viking

⁴⁷ Michael Parker, *Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 120.

⁴⁸ *The New York Times* reports that Brian Friel, John Montague and Derek Mahon had left by 1972. Bernard Weinraub, 'Belfast: Terror in a Time of Troubles,' *The New York Times*, May 29, 1972, http://www.nytimes.com/1972/05/29/archives/belfast-terror-in-a-time-of-troubles.html?_r=0.

⁴⁹ It would not be until 2010, in the 'Route 110' sequence of *Human Chain*, that Heaney would be able to write about the death of Mr Lavery, asking 'what in the end was there left to bury/Of Mr Lavery, blown up in his own pub' (ll. 98-9) and contrasting this with the honours accorded to the volunteers who are laid 'in war graves with full honours' and 'fired over on anniversaries/By units drilled and spruce and unreconciled' (ll. 106-8). Seamus Heaney, *Human Chain* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).

Dublin: Trial Pieces' of 'neighbourly, scoretaking' (l. 69). In 'Kinship' he reflects on 'how we slaughter / for the common good.'

Widely praised in England and America, these poems were almost universally criticised by Irish writers and critics, most notably Edna Longley and Ciaran Carson,⁵⁰ for what was perceived as tribal loyalty. In 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' Heaney reflects on how the foreign media represented the violence in a place where 'bad news is no longer news' (l. 4). While despairing at the journalistic discourse, he acknowledges that he is 'incapable' of explaining it because of the 'famous // Northern reticence, the tight gag of place / and times' (ll. 60-2). *North* changed the way that Heaney participated in the public sphere. It is also a significant collection because he revisits and reprises these poems so often in his later work. While he used images from the deep past to shape a memory of the violence of the early 1970s, in his later work he reframes that memory by revisiting the bog body poems.

In *Field Work* (1979) he presented a different perspective on the troubles by including a series of elegies for victims of the Troubles who were known to him: a cousin, a college friend, an acquaintance. This elegiac writing was revised and reframed in 1984's 'Station Island.' In this poem he used Dante's *Purgatorio* as a model for how a poet should engage with the political reality of the times. In his poem sequence he encounters the shades of people he has known and friends who have been killed in the violence. In the final poem of the 'Station Island' sequence Heaney encounters the shade of James Joyce, another exile, who tells him 'The main thing is to write / for the joy of it' and advises him to 'let others wear the sackcloth and the ashes' (ll. 673-9). Donald Davie defends the position that Heaney has taken: 'as an Irishman writing in the first place for the Irish, his refusal to endorse unequivocally one or the other bigoted faction has been, not a shucking off of responsibility, but on the contrary (implausible as this must seem to the hard-

⁵⁰ Carson, 'Escaped from the Massacre?'; Edna Longley, 'North: "Inner Emigre" or "Artful Voyeur"?' in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. Tony Curtis (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1982; reprint, 1994).

liners on both sides) an admirably tenacious and costly assertion of just such responsibility.’⁵¹

Translations and adaptations became increasingly important in Heaney’s later work. The extraordinary range of texts he worked with can be partly attributed to the commissions he chose to accept, and partly to his passion for the classics and growing interest in the literature of Eastern Europe. He modified his approach according to his level of familiarity with the language of the source text. His first translation was *Sweeney Astray*, a translation of the old Irish poem *Buile Shuibne*, published in 1983. Rather than continue in this vein, which might be expected of a poet so closely associated with Ireland in the popular imagination, his subsequent translations cross a range of cultures and language traditions. His two plays, *The Cure at Troy* and *The Burial at Thebes*, are adaptations of Sophoclean tragedies. In 1995 Heaney collaborated with Stanislaw Baranczak to prepare a translation of the elegies of the 16th-century Polish poet, Jan Kochanowski. In 1999 he was commissioned by the English National Opera to write versions of poems for a performance of a song cycle by composer Leos Janacek based on the poems of Ozeif Kalda. 1999 also saw the publication of his translation of *Beowulf*, commissioned for Norton. His later translations include *The Testament of Cresseid*, from the Middle Scots, and his final, posthumously published translation of Virgil’s *Aeneid VI*. In a conversation with the translator, Robert Hass, Heaney described the process of translation as either a ‘raid’ (‘the Lowell method – and you raid Italian, you raid German, you raid Greek) or ‘settlement’ (‘you enter an oeuvre, colonize it, take it over – but you stay with it, and you change it, and it changes you a little bit.’).⁵² Heaney’s translations and adaptations cover the spectrum between settlement and raid.

Why Heaney’s later work?

By the time he won the Nobel Prize in 1995, Heaney had already been the recipient of a number of literary awards and honours. He had an established place

⁵¹ Donald Davie, ‘Responsibilities of Station Island,’ *Salmagundi*, 80 (1988): 64-5, <http://www.jstor.org.virtual.anu.edu.au/stable/40547982>.

⁵² Seamus Heaney, ‘Sounding Lines: The Art of Translating Poetry,’ in *Critical Views: Essays on the Humanities and the Arts*, ed. Theresa Stojkov (Berkley: The Townsend Centre for the Humanities, 2011), 302.

in the canon and the academy. He had served as the Professor of Poetry at Oxford and held the Boylston Chair at Harvard (later serving as an Emerson Poet in Residence). He had delivered the T.S. Eliot Memorial Lecture in 1986 and won the Lannan Literary Award in 1990. In 1993 he was made a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. These awards and honours helped to define his public profile as a 'major' poet. Richard English notes that 'it is almost as though winning a prize is the only truly newsworthy thing a cultural worker can do, the one thing that really counts in a lifetime of more or less nonassessable, indescribable, or at least unreportable cultural achievements.'⁵³ The Nobel was conferred when Heaney seemed to be at the peak of his career. Seamus Deane observes that some of his peers in Ireland believed that the win had 'finished' Heaney because it was 'too early.'⁵⁴ Against the expectations of some, Heaney continued to publish and some of his most important work was yet to come. My thesis deals with the collections and translations Heaney published after 1995.

While the Nobel Prize was a personal milestone, it was also contemporaneous with the end of the Troubles. The two circumstances combine to mark a clear distinction between Heaney's early work and later work. The transitions in his work after the Nobel Prize can be seen, in some ways, as parallel to developments in memory studies across the same period, which was advocating a shift from a predominantly national to a transnational perspective. In Heaney's work, the transnational turn had been emerging for many years beginning, perhaps, with the classical mythology and Viking imagery in *Wintering Out* and *North*, continuing with the homage to Dante and the Eastern European poets in the 1980s. At the end of 'Tollund,' a poem written to mark the IRA ceasefire of 1994, Heaney recalls being in Denmark when he hears the news and standing 'footloose, at home beyond the tribe' looking toward 'a new beginning.' This poem is symbolic of his relation to national borders in his late work. While much of *The Spirit Level* deals with travelling across and beyond national borders, by the time he writes *District and Circle* and *Human Chain* border crossing is less important than conveying a type of transnational solidarity. This is expressed during the year of his 70th-birthday celebrations, 2009, when he told the Human Rights Commission of

⁵³ James English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), Kindle edition, Ch. 1.

⁵⁴ Seamus Deane, 'The Famous Seamus,' *The New Yorker*, March 20, 2000, 54.

Ireland that the foundational texts of Western literature are 'fundamental to the evolution and maintenance of a more equitable and civilized world.'⁵⁵ I explore the shift towards the transnational in the following chapters.

Chapter Outlines

In the first chapter I explain why defining Heaney as an Irish poet is insufficient, and why he should be considered a cosmopolitan poet. I identify recent trends in Heaney criticism and draw these strands together to show that an approach informed by concepts from memory studies can provide a new way of reading Heaney's later works.

In the next chapter I examine Heaney's first post-Nobel collection, *The Spirit Level*, and his translation of *Beowulf* in terms of memory and complicity. I explore the ways in which he uses these poems to release anger pent up over 30 years of the Troubles and his reflection upon whether his own silence might have implicated him in the violence. In *The Spirit Level* he develops the technique of reprising his own earlier work, something that will be a pattern in his final collections. While these poems are sometimes just a circling back on images and preoccupations of earlier work, and particularly of some of the bog body poems of *North*, others are used to reverse an earlier position. I also consider the oscillation between national and transnational frames of reference, especially in the appropriation of classical texts to cross borders and time periods.

In the third chapter I analyse Heaney's adaptation of *Antigone*, *The Burial at Thebes*, in terms of the way that it constructs a memory of the 1981 IRA Hunger Strike and the 'war on terror' of the early 2000s. I reflect on the reconfiguration of the memory of 1981 and argue that Heaney's adaptation of a Greek tragedy brings a transnational dimension to a memory that is often seen in terms of national mythology and sacrifice.

In the fourth chapter I argue that the elegies Heaney wrote for other poets can be considered as a form of 'portable monument.'⁵⁶ In these poems his

⁵⁵ Seamus Heaney, 'Writer and Righter: Fourth IHRC Annual Human Rights Lecture,' ed. Irish Human Rights Commission (Dublin: Irish Human Rights Commission, 2009), 8.

cosmopolitan openness is foregrounded as he embraces different poetic and language traditions. The poems can be understood as a way of continuing a dialogue with friends, 'breaking bread with the dead,' as well as identifying with a group that is not defined along national or ethnic lines. In these elegies, Heaney also develops his thoughts about the responsibility of the poet and how to navigate a public role.

In the fifth chapter I consider how a transnational memory of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre is created in 'Anything Can Happen' and other poems in *District and Circle*. In the immediate aftermath, 9/11 was framed in the United States as predominantly a national rather than a transnational site of memory. A good deal of the immediate commemorative work took place in New York city, making the 'local' a crucial site of memory. By contrast, in this chapter I show how Heaney's processes of translation and adaptation bring a transnational dimension to 9/11. I also consider how he continues the project begun in *The Spirit Level* by using the poems in this collection to circle back to earlier poems, tropes and preoccupations.

In the final chapter I examine the creation of family memory in Heaney's final works, *Human Chain* and a translation of Virgil's *Aeneid VI*. I consider the oscillation of memory between local, global and national frames of memory. The return to rural Derry is particularly important in *Human Chain* and the family is the preeminent frame of reference, bringing him back nearly full circle to his first collection. I conclude by considering the poet himself as a site of memory by exploring the memorial culture that has emerged since his death.

Heaney's death in 2013, and the subsequent renewed critical interest in his work, make it timely to embark on a study of the representation of cultural memory in his poetry. Cultural memory is germane to Heaney's work because it is a field that encompasses a broad range of approaches, each of which can illuminate a different aspect of memory – local, global, national, familial – in Heaney's later works. Since his death there has been a proliferation of memorials. The

⁵⁶ Ann Rigney, 'Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans,' *Poetics Today* 25, no. 2 (2004), doi:10.1215/03335372-25-2-361.

commemorative practices range from the textual (elegies, eulogies and special journal editions) to the monumental (for instance, a purpose-built museum, Seamus Heaney HomePlace, in the village in which he was born). Between these poles are the permanent collections of his papers in the National Library of Ireland and at Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia. It remains to be seen how he will be remembered in the long term. As a poet he oscillated between different scales of memory, but it is possible that in the process of commemoration the transnational dimension will be subsumed within a dominant narrative of the Irish bard. Just as Heaney contributed to the shaping of public memories, now others will determine how he is remembered. There is a value in embarking on an analysis of cultural memory in his work at this point in time, before Seamus Heaney, who has been a 'carrier' of memory, transitions into a 'site' of memory.

CHAPTER 1: SEAMUS HEANEY AS A POET OF MEMORY – BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL

A central contention of my thesis is that Heaney should be considered in a transnational literary sphere. Because his 'Irishness' has shaped the critical response to his work, what has been effaced is detailed critical attention to the interplay between the national and transnational dimensions of his poetry. Little attention has been paid to the link between Heaney's cosmopolitanism and his public role. I argue that his openness to other cultures, language traditions and viewpoints affirms the value of literature in the fight to create a world which is fair and equitable for all people. In 2011 he claimed that literary works have been 'crucial in keeping alive conscience and the spirit of freedom not only within the individual psyche but also in the collective mind of nations and peoples.'¹ Heaney's late poetry, adaptations and translations establish his place as a citizen of the world.

As well as considering Heaney as a cosmopolitan poet, I use approaches from memory studies to illuminate certain aspects of his late work. I consider the way that Heaney is actively involved in the construction of collective memory, and also how he functions as a carrier of memory in his public role. While memory has been identified as a thematic concern in his work, approaches from memory studies have seldom been adopted in the analysis of these works. My contribution is to blend approaches from existing Heaney scholarship and from memory studies in order to develop an argument about the way that a poet can shape and mediate collective memory. By drawing on work by Michael Rothberg, Astrid Erll, Ann Rigney and others, I show how Heaney's poetry creates personal, familial, regional, national and global memories that 'travel' across and beyond borders and time periods. The poetry oscillates between these different frames of memory.

¹ Seamus Heaney, 'Writer and Righter: Fourth IHRC Annual Human Rights Lecture,' ed. Irish Human Rights Commission (Dublin: Irish Human Rights Commission, 2009), 8, https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/download/pdf/wrighter_and_righter.pdf.

A National, Transnational, Cosmopolitan Poet

Poetry is understood as a genre firmly anchored to national traditions. Heaney is often considered within the Irish poetic tradition, though this perspective imposes limits on how his work is read. Jahan Ramazani argues that contemporary poetry in English needs to be reconceptualised because it ‘exceeds the scope of national literary paradigms.’² He identifies Irish poetry as worthy of ‘special attention in an exploration of what a transnational disciplinary paradigm can reveal and that a national paradigm can make harder to see.’³ Ramazani is primarily concerned with the formal and generic features of poetry, though he also addresses thematic transnationalism. He observes that poetry is a ‘long-memored form’ which is bound up with ‘a complexly cross-national weave in its rhythms and tropes, stanza patterns and generic adaptations.’⁴ This formal transnationalism is a particular feature of Heaney’s final published works and I evaluate these texts in terms of what a transnational lens can reveal. Ramazani maintains that, compared to prose fiction and film, poetry is seen as an ‘improbable genre to consider within transnational contexts.’⁵ Nevertheless, he embarks on a mission to track the ‘transnational flows ... moving in multiple directions’ of poetry in the English language.⁶ While Ramazani’s focus is on poetry written in English, I draw on this approach to examine Heaney’s translations as well as his strategy of borrowing from other cultures and language traditions in his later work.

This transnational influence and preoccupation with other cultures can also be seen in earlier work. Heaney’s work has always demonstrated a cosmopolitan openness. In ‘Bogland’ (1969) he establishes a comparison between Ireland and the United States with the observation, ‘We have no prairies / to slice a big sun at evening’ (ll. 1-2). The premise of this poem is that Irish identity can be found by digging into the past, into the layers of the ‘bottomless’ bog. The bog functions as a

² Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), xi.

³ Ibid., 39.

⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶ Ibid., 10.

symbol for Irish identity in his work through the early- and mid-1970s, leading to the bog body poems of *North* (1975) which symbolise the violence of the 'Troubles.' During this period, he drew out parallels between Ireland and early Norse culture: 'He crossed my old home's music / With older strains of Norse' ('Belderg' ll. 28-9). In the 1980s allusion and adaptation became a defining feature of his work, most significantly in his appropriation of Dante's *Purgatorio* in 'Station Island,' a poem in which he explores the responsibility of the poet in a time of conflict. In this decade he also developed a strong interest in the Eastern European poets, and began to experiment with their parabolic style in *The Haw Lantern* (1987). By the late 1980s and 1990s he was looking to classical antiquity for parallels, seen in the adaptation of Sophocles in *The Cure at Troy* (1990) and allusion to Virgil in the elegies for his father in *Seeing Things* (1991). In later work Heaney revisits many of these earlier texts and continues to look for parallels across time and beyond the borders of the nation state.

The translations of Greek tragedy are particularly significant in the Irish context. While adaptations of Greek tragedy have been particularly influential in twentieth century Irish literature, the significance of the Greek playwrights can be seen much earlier. Lorna Hardwick argues that classical learning predates colonisation in Ireland, but later became 'an icon of subversion and resistance.'⁷ Marianne Macdonald reads this subversion in terms of disguise: 'The Irish could conceal the direct statement of their desires behind the mask of Greek tragedy.'⁸ Matt McGuire reads the turn to the Greek classics as a means of coming to terms with cultural trauma, arguing that Greek tragedy presents a world in which human suffering is determined by fate and the gods. He argues that this idea resonates with people who lived through the 'Troubles,' who often felt that 'their lives were prey to a political and historical fate that was none of their making and from which they

⁷ Lorna Hardwick, 'Classical Texts in Post-Colonial Literatures: Consolation, Redress and New Beginnings in the Work of Derek Walcott and Seamus Heaney,' *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 9, no. 2 (2002):248, doi:10.1007/BF02898436.

⁸ Marianne McDonald, 'The Irish and Greek Tragedy,' in *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy*, ed. J. Michael Walton and Marianne McDonald (London: Methuen Publishing, 2002), 38.

struggled to awaken.’⁹ Heaney draws upon these connotations in adaptations and appropriations of Greek tragedy.

The translations also foreground Heaney’s interest in other cultures and language traditions. The translations and adaptations allow him to extend and develop parallels between Northern Ireland and other historical situations of conflict. In his essay on the Eastern European poets, ‘The Impact of Translation,’ he considers the way that translation allows a fresh perspective on home: ‘I am reminded of Stephen Dedalus’s enigmatic declaration that the shortest way to Tara was via Holyhead, implying that departure from Ireland and inspection of the country from the outside was the surest way to get to the core of Irish experience.’¹⁰ Heaney’s own translations are sometimes used to examine the Troubles from a different standpoint, but more often to engage with the world in a way which celebrates the diversity of languages, traditions and attitudes, which can be revealed in literary texts.

Heaney’s interest in other perspectives can be seen as a consequence of growing up in a community divided by artificial boundaries. While his poetry demonstrates a recognition that boundaries are imaginary and can be transcended, his preoccupation with borders and boundaries can be dated to his childhood. In ‘Terminus,’ collected in *The Haw Lantern* (1987), he writes ‘Two buckets were easier carried than one. / I grew up in between’ (ll. 15-6). He notes that ‘Baronies, parishes met’ (l. 19) in the place where he was born and raised. In the essay ‘Something to Write Home About’ (1989) Heaney explains the origin of this line: the Heaney farm was located between what he describes as the ‘Protestant and loyalist village of Castledawson’ and the ‘Catholic and Nationalist district of Bellaghy.’¹¹ He recalls the deep impression made by the ‘invisible’ parish boundary that separated his home from the neighbouring house. He observes that crossing this boundary every day at a young age meant that he ‘never felt the certitude of belonging completely in one place.’ The essay concludes with a hope

⁹ Matt McGuire, ‘Tragedy and Transitional Justice in Seamus Heaney’s *The Cure at Troy*,’ in *Post-Conflict Literature: Human Rights, Peace, Justice*, ed. Chris Andrews and Matt McGuire (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 2016), Proquest ebook, 24.

¹⁰ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Impact of Translation,’ *The Government of the Tongue* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), Kindle edition.

¹¹ Seamus Heaney, ‘Something to Write Home About,’ *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002), 53.

that if 'you remove yourself from the hardness and fastness of your home ground' that this change in perspective may bring 'you alive to the open sky of possibility' within.¹² This recognition that boundaries are artificial influenced his later views on conflict and division within and between cultures.

What is most evident in his later work is a type of border-crossing transcultural solidarity. A cosmopolitan outlook and openness to alternate views and to other cultures becomes increasingly important in his late work. For a poet who has always experienced borders as a site of conflict, this type of cosmopolitanism has a political imperative. This predisposition to cross boundaries is demonstrated in a poem commissioned in 1985 by Amnesty International to draw attention to prisoners of conscience around the world.¹³ In 'From the Republic of Conscience' Heaney imagines a border crossing from an invented country, a place where he is officially recognised as a 'dual citizen' and implored to 'to speak on their behalf in my own tongue' (ll. 30-4). By the late 1980s it seemed as though this type of transnationalism might lead to the reconciliation of long standing conflicts. The Schengen agreement had been signed in 1985, leading to increased mobility between European States. The Cold War ground to a conclusion in the late 1980s, and the 1990s seemed to augur a new age. Nelson Mandela was released from prison and apartheid was officially dismantled, removing the artificial legal divisions that existed in South Africa. Two persistent civil conflicts were engaged in promising peace processes: the Oslo Accords aimed to finally bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, while the Northern Ireland Peace Process led to the ground-breaking IRA ceasefire in 1994. It began to seem possible that dialogue could be a more powerful force than violence. After 9/11 and the ensuing 'war on terror,' however, global politics shifted and national borders have re-emerged as sites of conflict.

Heaney has always been willing to engage with other cultures, traditions and perspectives. For this reason, I believe that his approach to his work and his public role is best described in terms of cosmopolitanism. The term has been the subject

¹² Heaney, 'Something to Write Home About,' 62.

¹³ In the twenty-first century the poem inspired the Amnesty Ambassador of Conscience Award, won by Vaclav Havel (2003), Nelson Mandela (2006), Aung San Suu Kyi (2009), Malala Yousafzai (2013) and Ai Weiwei (2015).

of some critical debate, as outlined by Bruce Robbins in his introduction to *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*. He acknowledges criticism that the cosmopolitan 'wallow[s] in a privileged and irresponsible detachment ... incapable of participating in the making of history, doomed to the mere aesthetic spectatorship that he or she is also held secretly to prefer.'¹⁴ This is relevant in terms of the reception of Heaney's work from the 1970s and 1980s, both in Ireland and abroad. Foreign critics have read him in terms of his Irishness, while Irish critics have deplored what they saw as a negative cosmopolitanism. He has been accused of being a spectator to the Troubles and at times of aestheticising the violence. Robbins contrasts an unbounded 'free-floating' universalism with a contemporary cosmopolitanism that is 'rooted' or 'vernacular.'¹⁵ He draws these strands together to suggest a 'located and embodied' cosmopolitanism¹⁶, one that can be understood in terms of 'a sense of positive if complex and multiple belonging.'¹⁷ This complex and multiple belonging is a feature of Heaney's poetry, and particularly of the works in which he explores his place in relation to the global literary sphere, the nation and the family.

Heaney is not just concerned with crossing borders, but with finding commonality across cultures. To speak of Heaney's cosmopolitanism is not to dismiss the significance of the national, but to indicate multiple allegiances and identifications. In *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Kwame Anthony Appiah identifies a strand common to different versions of cosmopolitanism – 'that no local loyalty can ever justify forgetting that each human being has responsibilities to every other.'¹⁸ This sense of obligation to others is an outcome of the openness to other cultures seen in Heaney's poetry. It is an acknowledgement of the importance of the reconciliation of opposition, and can be seen in Heaney's participation in Field Day's mission to establish a 'fifth province' of the mind, from which a more unified community could be forged. Heaney's 1990 adaptation of Sophocles's *Philoctetes*, *The Cure at Troy*, was his major contribution

¹⁴ Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 4.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2-3.

¹⁷ Ibid., 3.

¹⁸ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York; London: WW Norton, 2006), Kindle edition, Introduction.

to this project. For him, the play represents 'every intransigence, republican as well as unionist ... the wounded one whose identity has become dependent on the wound.'¹⁹ In this adaptation he chose to add an original choral ode, one that can be understood as a summary of his own position:

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

The innocent in gaols
Beat on their bars together.
A hunger-striker's father
Stands in the graveyard dumb.
The police widow in veils
Faints at the funeral home.

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.²⁰

The premise of the ode is that reconciliation is possible, even in seemingly intractable conflicts. Heaney suggests that while poetry may not 'fully right a wrong,' it does have a role to play: it can allow 'hope and history' to 'rhyme.' He considers this as a public form of poetry ('in the megaphone sense of the term').²¹ He saw this ode as a defence of 'the right of poetry / poetic drama to be something

¹⁹ Seamus Heaney, 'The Cure at Troy: Production Notes in No Particular Order,' in *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy*, ed. J. Michael Walton and Marianne McDonald (London: Methuen, 2002), 175.

²⁰ Seamus Heaney, *The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1991), 77.

²¹ Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), Kindle edition, 386.

other than “protest”.²² It can be read as a counter-balance, or even counter-memory, to the later poetry of *The Spirit Level*, in which he expresses a profound anger at the ‘spirit-waste’ of the long years of the ‘Troubles.’

This choral ode is an example of his engagement with self-consciously ‘public’ poetry. The ‘afterlife’ of this chorus illustrates the oscillation between the national and transnational dimensions of Heaney’s work and establishes a precedent for his later work. The former Irish president and later United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, used it in her inauguration speech in 1990,²³ but also to comment on famine in Africa in the early 1990s.²⁴ It was paraphrased by the President of the European Commission when he addressed the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin in 1995.²⁵ It has been used as the basis for a number of book titles, most notably Bill Clinton’s 1996 book, *Between Hope and History: Meeting America’s Challenges for the 21st Century*; Nadine Gordimer’s South African non-fiction book, *Living in Hope and History: Notes From Our Century*; and the former Sinn Féin leader, Gerry Adams’s, 2003 memoir on the peace process *Hope and History: Making Peace in Ireland*. After the Omagh bombing of 1998, Heaney dedicated the stanza beginning with ‘so hope for a great sea change’ to the victims, and allowed the lines to be used by the artist Carole Kane in a memorial composed of the floral tributes sent to Omagh. In the appropriation and reprisal of this choral ode, Heaney shows an awareness of the mnemonic function of public poetry, one that can be traced to later works including *The Burial at Thebes* and his translation of ‘Anything Can Happen’ to commemorate 9/11.

Heaney had a strong sense of his public role by the 1990s, both in Ireland and abroad. He was always conscious of how his poetry might be read and how his public statements might be received. In 1997 *The Paris Review* published an interview with Heaney which distils his opinion on his public role in the mid-1990s. The American poet, Henri Cole, asks if he considers himself an

²² Seamus Heaney, ‘Production Notes,’ 173.

²³ Hugh Denard, ‘Seamus Heaney, Colonialism, and the Cure: Sophoclean Re-Visions,’ *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 22, no. 3 (2000): 1, <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/25780>.

²⁴ Richard Rankin Russell, *Poetry and Peace: Michael Longley, Seamus Heaney, and Northern Ireland* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 304.

²⁵ Hugh Denard, ‘Colonialism,’ 2.

'autobiographical,' 'social,' 'pastoral' or 'political' poet. Heaney responds by drawing distinctions between 'political,' 'public' and 'civic' poets. He explains that he believes some poets, such as Adrienne Rich or Pablo Neruda, have a 'specifically political understanding of the world,' while others, such as Yeats, should be considered 'public' rather than political. The distinction, in his view, emerges when 'the whole effort of the imagining is towards inclusiveness.'²⁶ He later admitted that he aspired to be a 'public' rather than 'political' poet, but that it was for other people to make that determination.²⁷ My analysis of Heaney's public poetry is focused on the way that it creates and shapes public memory.

Significant Monographs and Emerging Trends in Heaney Scholarship

There is a vast body of scholarship on Heaney's poetry. In spite of the quality and range of this criticism, there are still aspects of Heaney's work, such as the place of memory, which have not been dealt with in depth. Heaney's first collection was published in 1966 and he quickly developed a readership in Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States. The first full-length study was published in 1975, the same year as *North*, one of his most important collections. Since then there have been more than 50 monographs and collections of essays, plus several hundred journal articles. Michael Durkan and Rand Brandes have made a project of attempting to document this body of scholarship. When Brandes first attempted an overview of the criticism in 1994, he observed that more critical attention had been paid to Heaney than 'any other contemporary Irish poet and perhaps any other poet in the English-speaking world outside of America in the last 30 years.' He declared that Heaney would have 'good reason' to feel 'buried alive' by the volume of critical attention.²⁸ Brandes identifies a 'diverse international response' to Heaney's poetry and suggests that Irish critics are often at odds with critics from the United States and England.²⁹ He acknowledges that the international interest in

²⁶ Henri Cole, 'Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry No. 75,' *The Paris Review* 144 (1997), <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1217/the-art-of-poetry-no-75-seamus-heaney>.

²⁷ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 386.

²⁸ Rand Brandes, 'Secondary Sources: A Gloss on the Critical Reception of Seamus Heaney 1965-1993,' *Colby Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (1994): 63-4,

<http://search.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/docview/1290048804?accountid=8330>

²⁹ Brandes, 'Secondary sources,' 65.

his work has been shaped by historical factors (that is, the Troubles), with critical attention corresponding to the height of the violence in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the period since the Brandes survey, the volume of criticism has grown exponentially, and it is beyond the scope of this project to summarise it all. I will not attempt an overview of the field of Heaney scholarship, but rather identify a few strands and recent trends which have informed my thesis: the most influential monographs; criticism that explores his public role; an emerging trend of critical analysis focused on Heaney as a European poet; scholarly criticism on Heaney's use of the classics; and, finally, the limited work on memory in Heaney.

The most important monographs on Heaney's early work have been formalist studies by Neil Corcoran and Helen Vendler. The analysis in these texts has had a profound influence on later scholarship. Corcoran first published *Seamus Heaney* in 1986 and revised it in 1998 to include 4 new chapters on the collections published in the intervening years. His stated aim was a combination of 'formalism and historicism' in order to maintain a focus on the text, deploring the type of literary criticism which 'ignore[s] the poem's nature as a critical entity.'³⁰ Vendler's focus is on work published from 1966 to 1996. She argues that much of the prior criticism has been thematic and political rather than aesthetic. She argues that 'to read lyric poems as if they were expository essays is a fundamental philosophical mistake.'³¹ While I have drawn on Vendler's readings of early poems, and I respect the underlying principle of her critical study, my analysis of the poems in terms of the representation of cultural memory is only possible by considering the social and historical context in which they were written and circulated. Vendler appends a 'second thoughts' section to each of her chapters. In these, she considers how Heaney has revised specific issues and images in later work. This project of revising and reprising earlier work is an important aspect of my thesis, and Vendler's argument that these shifts are 'fundamental to his development'³² is an idea that underlies the chapters in which I trace revisions of earlier work. Another important critical study of Heaney's early work is Michael Parker's *Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet*, a quasi-biographical study of the poetry published in the

³⁰ Neil Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), ix.

³¹ Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), Kindle edition, Introduction.

³² Vendler, *Seamus Heaney*.

period 1961-1991. This book presents a contextualised reading of all of the major poems from this period, mapping out the personal, social and historical context for each. My approach has been informed by these studies of his earlier work, particularly Parker's contextual approach, Neil Corcoran's blend of formalism and historicism, and Helen Vendler's readings of the earlier poems.

An emerging strand of Heaney scholarship is focused on his public role. A number of recent studies evaluate the balance between ethics and aesthetics in his poetry and prose. While some texts provide a contextualised reading of his work, others prioritise the ethical and aesthetic dimensions. Dennis O'Driscoll's 'Heaney in Public'³³ traces some of his political and social interventions, and his ambitious project *Stepping Stones*³⁴ comprises nearly 500 pages of interviews between the poet and the author. The result is a comprehensive account of Heaney's creative process and public interventions up until his penultimate collection, *District and Circle*. Richard Rankin Russell's *Poetry and Peace* is a comparative study of the public roles of Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley during the 'Troubles,' focusing upon how each was able to maintain 'imaginative integrity of their poetry' in the face of pressure for it to 'become propaganda or journalism.'³⁵ David Antoine Williams also embarks on a comparative study with *Defending Poetry: Art and Ethics in Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, and Geoffrey Hill*. Williams is primarily concerned with the moral and ethical dimension of poetry in the public sphere, and takes as his starting point Heaney's prose about the 'use of poetry.' Williams measures the lyric poetry against the idea, expressed by Heaney, that poetry should exercise pressure 'by distinctly linguistic means.'³⁶ *Professing Poetry: Seamus Heaney's Poetics*,³⁷ by Michael Cavanagh, and *Seamus Heaney and the Adequacy of Poetry*,³⁸ by John Dennison, are studies of Heaney's prose which focus particularly on the influence of other poets and what he wrote about the purpose of poetry. In *Seamus Heaney as Aesthetic Thinker: A Study of the Prose* Eugene

³³ O'Driscoll, 'Heaney in Public.'

³⁴ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*.

³⁵ Russell, *Poetry and Peace*, 3.

³⁶ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1995), Kindle edition, 5.

³⁷ Michael Cavanagh, *Professing Poetry: Seamus Heaney's Poetics* (Catholic University of America Press, 2009), Ebrary Edition.

³⁸ John Dennison, *Seamus Heaney and the Adequacy of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, , 2015), Oxford ebook.

O'Brien considers Heaney as an 'aesthetic thinker in the European intellectual tradition.'³⁹ Like Williams, O'Brien takes Heaney's own stated position as a jumping off point: 'how should a poet properly live and write?'⁴⁰ These texts have informed my examination of the role of Heaney as a public poet, though my interest in his public role is filtered through the lens of memory. I am also concerned with the tension between the life and the work, though I argue that Heaney's poetry should be read as a contribution to public memory rather than immediate commentary on the present.

O'Brien's work intersects with another emerging strand in Heaney criticism: Heaney as a European writer. In the early 2000s there was a range of critical work on his interest in Eastern European poets, most notably by Magdalena Kay,⁴¹ Jerzy Jarniewicz⁴² and Justin Quinn.⁴³ A recent, posthumous memorial edition of the *Journal of European Studies* is based on the premise that Heaney is a European writer, but that his Europe is a 'space of contradictions.'⁴⁴ In this collection the editors explore two 'incompatible visions of Europe' in his work. They identify a tension between Heaney's 'belief in the principle of the national and ethnic identity understood in essentialist terms' and 'a vision of the European tradition as multi-layered and devoid of clear outlines and a stable centre.'⁴⁵ The editors note that in his early work Heaney was acclaimed as 'an important Irish voice' but that he might now be considered 'a poet of Europe.'⁴⁶ They claim that Heaney is paradoxically concerned with the mainstream European tradition (particularly his interest in Dante and Virgil) and with the peripheries of European identity. I

³⁹ Eugene O'Brien, *Seamus Heaney as Aesthetic Thinker: A Study of the Prose* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2016), Project Muse ebook, 1.

⁴⁰ Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose, 1968-1978*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), Kindle edition, 11.

⁴¹ Magdalena Kay, 'Dialogues across the Continent: The Influence of Czeslaw Milosz on Seamus Heaney,' *Comparative Literature* 63, no. 2 (2011), doi:10.1215/00104124-1265465.

⁴² Jerzy Jarniewicz, 'The Way Via Warsaw: Seamus Heaney and Post-War Polish Poets,' in *Seamus Heaney: Poet, Critic, Translator*, ed. Ashby Bland Crowder and Jason David Hall (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁴³ Justin Quinn, 'Heaney and Eastern Europe,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, ed. Bernard O'Donoghue, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Kindle edition.

⁴⁴ Jacek Gutorow and David Kennedy, 'Introduction: Seamus Heaney's Europe,' *Journal of European Studies* 46, no. 1 (2016): 1, doi:10.1177/0047244115617712.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 4.

consider this engagement with European identity as a part of Heaney's cosmopolitanism, although I also discuss his ambivalent relationship with the United Kingdom and his links to the United States.⁴⁷

In 'Seamus Heaney's Globe'⁴⁸ Jahan Ramazani extends his work on transnational poetics and considers the relationship between the local and global dimensions of Heaney's poetry. He argues that 'the time seems ripe for such questions,' and refers to a number of poems in his exploration of 'the relation between the global and the act of writing.'⁴⁹ Ramazani considers the importance of County Derry in Heaney's 'poetic consciousness.' Rather than see this as a sign of opposition between local and global concerns in Heaney's poetry, he argues that it represents the 'interpenetrating vortices of localization and globalization.'⁵⁰ Ramazani's approach to the transnational dimension of Heaney's work provides a model for my study of transnationalism and memory in the late works.

Since Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* was first performed, there has been a strand of scholarship dedicated to his adaptations and translations of texts from classical antiquity. Within this field, there has been a particular focus on the use of classical texts in post-colonial contexts. It is my contention that Heaney often engages with cultural memory by filtering cultural memory through these adaptations, using the deep past to comment on present conditions. In developing this argument, I draw on the work of Lorna Hardwick⁵¹ and Stephen Wilmer.⁵² Both read *The Burial at*

⁴⁷ While the United Kingdom is, of course, also a part of Europe, the complexity of the UK/EU relationship is beyond the scope of this analysis (particularly at the post-Brexit moment of writing).

⁴⁸ Jahan Ramazani, 'Seamus Heaney's Globe,' *The Irish Review* 49, no. 49-50 (2015). Also published in 'After Heaney,' themed issue, *Irish Pages*, 9, no. 1 (2016).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵¹ Lorna Hardwick, 'Classical Texts in Post-Colonial Literatures: Consolation, Redress and New Beginnings in the Work of Derek Walcott and Seamus Heaney,' *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 9, no. 2 (2002), doi:10.1007/BF02898436; "'Murmurs in the Cathedral': The Impact of Translations from Greek Poetry and Drama on Modern Work in English by Michael Longley and Seamus Heaney,' *The Yearbook of English Studies* 36 no. 1, (2006), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3508748>; 'Shades of Multilingualism and Multivocalism in Modern Performances of Greek Tragedy in Post-Colonial Contexts,' in *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds*, ed. Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵² Stephen E. Wilmer, 'Finding a Post-Colonial Voice for Antigone: Seamus Heaney's *Burial at Thebes*,' in *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds*, ed. Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Stephen E. Wilmer and Audrone

Thebes in terms of post-colonialism, particularly the historical relationship between England and Ireland, but also the United States' foreign policy in the Middle East. Although post-colonialism is not my focus, these analyses have provided a basis for my study of memory in Heaney's *Antigone*. Hardwick and Wilmer focused on the 'war on terror,' treating the Francis Hughes dimension as peripheral; I aim to draw out the significance of this aspect of the text.

While critics have long asserted the importance of memory in Heaney's work, there has been little sustained critical attention to cultural memory. Developing an analysis of this aspect of his work is my contribution to the field. Reviews, books and journal articles have sometimes dealt with memory as a theme or leitmotif, for example by examining the bog as a symbol for cultural memory, but this is treated as a peripheral rather than central theme.⁵³ It seems to have become a truism that Heaney is a poet of memory, but there is little academic scholarship that develops the ways that memory functions in his lyric poetry and translation. Much of the criticism deals with collective memory in his poetry in an oblique way, for example by discussing myth or tradition. Some exceptions are Anthony Cuda, Rand Brandes, Charles Armstrong and Stephen Regan.

Anthony Cuda's article on an unpublished epigraph to *North* is a very specific analysis of the representation of memory in earlier work. He argues that this excerpt has been a touchstone for Heaney throughout his career. Cuda argues that Heaney was influenced by Eliot's view of memory as 'a generative principle of love and self-renewal.'⁵⁴ He proposes that Heaney turned to Eliot at a time when he had pressing questions about the 'use of memory.'⁵⁵ Cuda has located archival material that shows the uncorrected galley proofs of *North* with an epigraph – redacted prior to publication – from T.S. Eliot's 'Little Gidding':

Zukauskaitė, *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵³ Elmer Andrews, *Poetry of Seamus Heaney: All the Realms of Whisper* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1988); Neil Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).

⁵⁴ Anthony J Cuda, 'The Use of Memory: Seamus Heaney, T.S. Eliot, and the Unpublished Epigraph to *North*,' *Journal of Modern Literature* 28, no. 4 (2005):153, http://search.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/citedreferences/MSTAR_201671388/20079FE394D64482PQ/1?accountid=8330.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

This is the use of memory:
 For liberation – not less of love but expanding
 Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
 From the future as well as the past. Thus, love of a country
 Begins as attachment to our own field of action
 And comes to find that action of little importance
 Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,
 History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,
 The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them
 To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern...

Cuda argues that these lines are 'intensely relevant' to the poems in Part 1 of *North*.⁵⁶ He goes on to trace the importance of this epigraph in Heaney's later prose: 'Heaney revisits Eliot's stanza from 'Little Gidding' time and again until it becomes a permanent feature in his own imaginative landscape, one that repeatedly helps him to determine memory's role in calibrating the relationship between the irreducible particulars of history and the abstractions of the visionary.'⁵⁷ In my final chapter, I consider how these lines from 'Little Gidding' relate to his final collection, *Human Chain*. My focus is on the way that his memories of his parents are 'transfigured' to present different perspectives from earlier work.

In "'Letter by strange Letter": Yeats, Heaney, and the Aura of the Book' Rand Brandes examines the 'art of memory' in Heaney's work by exploring his fascination with material print culture and with his appreciation for the 'marvellous' in later life. Brandes writes that 'the marvellous, as a mediator, shuttles between the material world and the world of memory.'⁵⁸ He writes that memory is Heaney's 'principal muse' and that it is a 'unifying, clarifying, and ordering force, a force of continuity in synch with the marvellous.'⁵⁹ Brandes discusses Heaney's interest in Frances Yates's work on 'artificial memory' in term of the imagery of alphabets in his work. Brandes describes the material presence of a book as an 'incarnation of memory.'⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid., 157.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 159

⁵⁸ Rand Brandes, "'Letter by Strange Letter": Yeats, Heaney, and the Aura of the Book," *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 2, no. 2 (1998).

⁵⁹ Ibid., p 32

⁶⁰ Ibid., p34

One of the most detailed examinations of memory in Heaney's work occurs in Charles Armstrong's *Figures of Memory: Poetry, Space, and the Past*. Informed by Nora's work on sites of memory, Armstrong considers the ways that ten poets use personal and collective memory in their work. Armstrong restricts his discussion to Heaney's poetry up until the *Electric Light* collection. He distinguishes between autobiographical, 'aesthetic' and collective memories in poetry. Armstrong compares Heaney's childhood memories to the figures of memory presented by Wordsworth and Eliot and concludes that, like Eliot, Heaney relies on 'organic structurations of memory in order to achieve ... temporal unities.'⁶¹ Like Armstrong, Stephen Regan focuses on the personal dimension of memory in Heaney's work. He explores the symbolic value of objects as 'traces of a former life, as remainders and reminders of human endeavor.'⁶² My departure is to shift the focus on the forms of memory beyond the personal, specifically by imposing other frames: national, cultural, and familial, and to focus on Heaney's later work.

My thesis draws together these strands of criticism. My contribution is to analyse how complex processes of remembering and forgetting are remediated in his poetry and adaptations. From finding parallels for the Troubles in Greek tragedy and in the sacrificial victims of the Iron Age, to the nostalgia of family memory in his final works, Heaney has engaged with memory in a variety of ways. I develop an analysis of memory in Heaney's later poetry and adaptations, with specific attention to the transnational dimension of his work the navigation of his public role.

Memory Studies: Concepts and Methods

Given this preoccupation with memory, a memory studies approach provides a fresh perspective on Heaney's poetry. A central focus of my thesis is the way that Heaney shapes public memory by modifying and reprising his own work and

⁶¹ Charles I Armstrong, *Figures of Memory: Poetry, Space, and the Past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 147.

⁶² Stephen Regan, "'Things Remembered': Objects of Memory in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney," *Éire-Ireland* 49, no. 3 (2014): 320, doi:10.1353/eir.2014.0020.

adapting and translating canonical texts. Because the premise of memory studies is the interplay between past, present and future, it is a particularly helpful lens for examining Heaney's work. In an interview conducted in 1999 he reflected upon the relationship between the 'literary deep past' and 'the historical present': 'The movement between a deep past and what is going on around us is necessary, I think, if we are to hold onto ourselves as creatures of culture ... That is one way for the inner and outer to get into some type of alignment, for some kind of coherence to get established, some stay against confusion.'⁶³ In his late work this dynamic between past, present and future plays out in interesting ways: in the way that he constructs a collective memory of the Troubles in works written in the 1990s; in his use of the elegy to commemorate the passing of important contemporary poets; in his writing on events with transnational significance, such as 9/11; and in the slippages between past and present in poems about his family.

The revival of interest in memory studies in the 1990s was driven by approaches that viewed collective memories in terms of nation or culture. Pierre Nora's influential work on *lieux de mémoire* described a strong linkage between memory and the formation of group identity. He argued that social groups created a shared past and used memory to build solidarity. Nora's focus upon French sites of memory presents memory as national memory. As influential as Nora's work was, critics such as Astrid Erll and Jeffrey Olick have identified limitations in his concept of a national memory, particularly the exclusion of the immigrant population and the French history of colonialism.⁶⁴ Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* has been described as offering an 'antiquated idea of French culture'⁶⁵ and as 'rather nostalgic.'⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the 'sites of memory' approach has had a significant influence on the development of memory studies.

The concept of sites of memory can be understood as particularly appropriate for Northern Ireland, a place in which historical events functioning as sites of

⁶³ Karl Miller, *Seamus Heaney in Conversation with Karl Miller* (Between the Lines, 2000).

⁶⁴ Astrid Erll, 'Travelling Memory,' *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (2011): 7, doi:10.1080/13534645.2011.605570.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁶ Jeffrey K. Olick, 'Introduction: Memory and the Nation – Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations,' *Social Science History* 22, no. 4 (1998):379, doi:10.1017/S0145553200017880.

memory proliferate: the 1916 Easter Rising, Bloody Sunday, Hunger Strikers on the one hand, and the Battle of the Boyne, the Siege of Derry, Bloody Friday and the Enniskillen bombing on the other. At the same time, urban and rural spaces are sites where historical sectarian allegiances are marked out. Sara McDowell contends that commemoration in Northern Ireland, which was initially seen as a mechanism for expressing loss, has become increasingly politicised; memorial markers are used both to demarcate territory and to 'reflect the ongoing power plays of the present.'⁶⁷ The sectarianism in civic life is reflected in a sectarian construction of collective memory, and the opposition is based on contested ideas of what the national identity should be for people living in the North. This division reveals the constraints of a national perspective on memory. Heaney's late poetry shows the poet attempting to move beyond these entrenched oppositions, and this can be seen in the way that he shapes public memory in these works. For this reason, transnational approaches to memory provide a productive framework for the analysis of Heaney's late work.

Michael Rothberg complicates the relationship between collective identity and memory with his idea of 'multidirectional memory.' He argues that the relationship between memory and identity is not straightforward and that there is the potential to 'create new forms of solidarity' rather than excluding 'forms of commonality with others.'⁶⁸ He suggests that solidarity can be created out of the 'specificities, overlaps, and echoes of different historical experiences.'⁶⁹ This is particularly relevant to my study because of the way that Heaney seeks commonality with others and finds parallels for contemporary events in ancient histories and classical texts. Heaney's strategy has been dismissed, particularly by Irish critics, as an abdication of poetic responsibility. In a review of *North* Ciaran Carson argues that Heaney's use of Iron Age sacrificial victims to symbolise the Troubles made Heaney 'a mythmaker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, an apologist.'⁷⁰ Twenty-five years later critics were equally appalled by his use of a Latin ode to

⁶⁷ Sara McDowell, 'Armalite, the Ballot Box and Memorialization: Sinn Féin and the State in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland,' *The Round Table* 96, no. 393 (2007): 727, doi:10.1080/00358530701635306.

⁶⁸ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), Kindle edition, 4.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁰ Ciaran Carson, 'Escaped from the Massacre?' *The Honest Ulsterman* 50 (1975): 183.

commemorate 9/11, suggesting that Heaney 'adopts the self-distancing, universalizing stratagem of translating the ancients to speak to the present.'⁷¹

Both positions are based on the premise that there is an ethical dimension to poetry and that this type of comparison misrepresents the truth of experience. I suggest, instead, that Heaney's use of the deep past is a means of finding solidarity with people in other places and times. In a dialogue with Dirk Moses, Rothberg discusses the ethical dimension of memory in terms of transcultural comparisons, suggesting that they run a continuum between '*equation* and *differentiation*.'⁷² He argues that we also need to consider the purpose of the comparison by adding an 'axis of political affect,' with a continuum between competition and solidarity.⁷³ The political situations and contexts represented by Heaney have been defined and confined by nationalist discourses. The 'Troubles,' for example, was a conflict based upon competing versions of the national in Northern Ireland, while the 9/11 attacks were configured as an attack upon American values. Viewed through Rothberg's formulation of comparison, what Heaney seeks to do with his appropriation of other memories is not to differentiate or compete, but instead to establish a transnational solidarity with other peoples who have suffered.

Like Rothberg, Astrid Erll problematises the idea of national memory cultures. Her 'travelling memory' is a reaction to the single culture – or 'container culture' – approach to cultural memory. She argues that 'a transcultural perspective also implies questioning those other grids (territorial, social, temporal), which we tend to superimpose upon the complex realities of remembering in culture.'⁷⁴ The implied challenge to territorial and temporal grids is particularly relevant to Heaney's work. As a writer who is actively engaged in the construction of social memories, he is not constrained by a fixed understanding of national or ethnic identity or by present animosities. The deterritorialisation of memory can also be seen in Heaney's elegies for other poets. Erll focuses on the dynamic nature of

⁷¹ David-Antoine Williams, *Defending Poetry: Art and Ethics in Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, and Geoffrey Hill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 153.

⁷² A. Dirk Moses and Michael Rothberg, 'A Dialogue on the Ethics and Politics of Transcultural Memory,' in *The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders*, ed. Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), ProQuest ebook.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁴ Erll, 'Travelling Memory,' 8.

memory creation, using ‘travelling’ as a metaphor for the ‘constant, unceasing motion’ of ‘cultural memory, people, media, mnemonic forms, contents, and practices.’⁷⁵ This idea of constant motion is integral to understanding the parallels Heaney draws in his work, and travel itself becomes the defining motif of his first post-ceasefire collection, *The Spirit Level*.

Rigney and De Cesari’s ‘scales’ of memory is a concept that threads through my thesis. They, too, reject the premise that the nation-state is ‘the natural container, curator and telos of collective memory.’⁷⁶ They imagine a memory that is ‘multi-layered, multi-sited, and multi-directional.’⁷⁷ Central to their argument is the interdependence of local, national and global frames, which are conceived as interlocking scales. Rigney and DeCesari reject the idea that there is ‘linear’ progress from familial to global memories: ‘transnational dynamics of memory production operate in conjunction with the continuous presence and agency of the national, with which it thus remains deeply entangled.’⁷⁸ The idea that memory is formed within and beyond the nation dovetails with the concept of ‘cosmopolitics’ developed by Cheah and Robbins. They argue that cosmopolitanism is more than ‘universal reason in disguise,’ but is ‘a series of scales, as an area both within and beyond the nation.’⁷⁹ These scales illustrate the ‘complex belonging’ that they understand as the foundation of cosmopolitanism. ‘Cosmopolitics’ describes ‘the genuine striving towards common norms and mutual translatability.’⁸⁰ This approach is particularly helpful for considering Heaney’s work because a nationalist sensibility maintains a ‘continuous presence’ in his work, even when he oscillates between different perspectives – from the globally circulating memory of 9/11 in ‘Anything Can Happen’ to the intimate, multi-layered family memories seen in *Human Chain*.

The different scales are also evident in poetry that engages directly with the cessation of violence in Northern Ireland. In my discussion of *The Spirit Level*, I draw on work by Debarati Sanyal, Michael Rothberg and Mark Sanders on

⁷⁵ Erll, ‘Travelling Memory,’ 12.

⁷⁶ De Cesari, C., and A. Rigney. *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*. (Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), ProQuest Ebrary edition, 12.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁹ Robbins, *Cosmopolitics*, 12.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 12-3

complicity and implication in memory. These writers consider what it means to be implicated in, or folded into, a situation of violence or injustice. Each seeks to complicate the model of perpetrator and victim by considering other subject positions in relation to trauma. These ideas are particularly fruitful in relation to the poetry of the 1990s, in which Heaney worked through his ambivalence about the Troubles and the progress towards peace. He was particularly concerned with whether he had made the right decisions about when to speak publicly about the violence and when to remain silent.

In my final chapter I focus on the intersection of personal and collective memory in Heaney's representation of family. My analysis is informed by Svetlana Boym's work on reflective nostalgia. Boym contends that nostalgia is about more than a longing for a place or homeland, but is really a longing for a time that has passed and a desire to 'revisit time like space.'⁸¹ She distinguishes between restorative nostalgia, which is 'based on a single plot of national identity,' and reflective nostalgia, which 'consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory.'⁸² Reflective nostalgia collapses the divisions between past, present and future and provides a productive frame for evaluating Heaney's poetry on personal and family memories. This return to familial and regional frames of memory in his final works seems to signify a return to first principles.

With her figure of 'portable monuments,' Ann Rigney presents a specific model for understanding the mnemonic processes of literary texts. She regards literary texts as a part of a dynamic process of memory creation, an argument that is particularly relevant to Heaney's elegies and to his adaptation of *Antigone*. She argues that textual monuments can move across borders and through time: whereas stone monuments are 'fixed in a particular site (which becomes literally a *lieu de mémoire*), texts are not, and hence they may be recycled among various groups of readers living in different parts of the globe and at different historical moments. In this sense, texts are "portable" monuments, which can be carried over

⁸¹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, (Basic Books, 2001), Introduction, Kindle edition.

⁸² Ibid.

into new situations.’⁸³ This idea can bring something new to a critical study of Heaney’s work by considering the effect of texts and forms that have persisted over time. Heaney’s elegies for other poets demonstrate his ability to ‘recycle’ both the form and the style of the subject to construct a poetic memorial. As Auden wrote in his elegy for Yeats: ‘The words of a dead man / Are modified in the guts of the living’ (‘In Memory of W. B. Yeats,’ ll. 23-4). Heaney’s translation and adaptation of canonical texts from classical antiquity show a different approach to constructing ‘portable monuments’ of literary texts. He appropriates texts from ‘different historical moments’ and uses them to reflect on the contemporary world.

In his *Odes* Horace had introduced the idea of *aere perennius*, or a text that will last longer than bronze. Both Rigney and Heaney are engaged with Horace’s figure of texts as monuments, though in different ways. In his 1975 poem, ‘Whatever you say, say nothing’ Heaney writes: ‘I believe any of us / Could draw the line between bigotry and sham / given the right line, *aere perennius*.’ (ll. 51-3) In this context he is writing of the issue that would define and shape his public role: the relationship between art and politics, between speech and silence. In his allusion to Horace he suggests that poetry might have a role in the ‘Troubles.’ In his later translation of Horace, ‘Anything Can Happen,’ he draws on an ancient text to comment on the 9/11 attacks. Rigney focuses on the ability of the text to withstand the ravages of time: ‘Indeed, as Horace and many others after him pointed out, textual artifacts may be even more durable than stone or bronze (*aere perennius*), since they are not susceptible to the wear and tear of erosion and lichen but can be reproduced in pristine condition at later moments in time.’⁸⁴ For Rigney, literary texts have a durability because they are prized as ‘pieces of verbal art and hence preserved as a recognized part of a cultural heritage.’⁸⁵ Heaney’s appropriation of canonical texts shows a recognition of this cultural value, and his use of these texts to reveal something about the present demonstrates how texts can have what Astrid Erll describes as ‘cultural afterlives.’

⁸³ Ann Rigney, ‘Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans,’ *Poetics Today* 25, no. 2 (2004): 383, doi:10.1215/03335372-25-2-361.

⁸⁴ Rigney, ‘Portable Monuments,’ 383.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 383.

One of the ways in which Heaney shapes memory is through engaging with the literary afterlives of canonical texts, often using texts from the deep past to shape memories of contemporary events. His adaptations of Sophocles, Horace and Virgil recalibrate the readers' understanding of the relationship between past and present. Astrid Erll proposes that '[i]n reconstructing the "social life" of a literary text we may ask how it was – across long periods of time – received, discussed, used, canonized, forgotten, censored, and re-used.'⁸⁶ In his translations, adaptations and appropriations Heaney builds upon pre-existing interpretations and versions of the texts. His *The Burial at Thebes*, for example, draws upon the previous interpretations of *Antigone*, which makes the text an appropriate medium for political reflection given the performance history of the play during the twentieth century.⁸⁷ Similarly, he deliberately chooses the choral ode for public poetry, as he did in *The Cure at Troy*. In his latest work, *Human Chain*, he takes a different approach to collapsing the distinctions between past, present and future in the afterlives of texts. His adaptation of Virgil's *Aeneid VI* in *Human Chain*, and subsequent translation of the text, draw upon its narrative thread rather than its political implications. For instance, the reunion with the dead father on the banks of the River Lethe becomes the object of the journey to the underworld. In these appropriations Heaney is reshaping personal memory by framing it within a cultural narrative of reunion and continuity.

In memory studies there has been a great deal of attention to narrative memory in literary texts, but there has been relatively little written about non-narrative forms such as the lyric poem. My aim is to develop an analysis of poetry as a vehicle of memory. Aleida Assmann has theorised the relationship between cultural memory and the arts in *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*. In this text she specifically outlines the mnemonic function of poetry, noting that 'it was poets and historians who provided the media for cultural memory in societies with and without writing.'⁸⁸ She observes that 'in the Greco-Roman culture of *fama*, greatness, glory, and immortality through the

⁸⁶ Astrid Erll, 'Traumatic Pasts, Literary Afterlives, and Transcultural Memory: New Directions of Literary and Media Memory Studies,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 3 (2011): 3, doi:10.3402/jac.v3i0.7186.

⁸⁸ Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 89.

memory of posterity were the priceless and exclusive gifts that only a poet could bestow on the hero.⁸⁹ Across a range of language cultures poets were traditionally charged with being carriers of cultural memory. Assmann traces the role of poets as 'professional immortalisers' from the Greek poet, Simonides, through the Middle Ages and Renaissance to the Romantics. She explains that events are preserved in the 'temple of memory' not because they happened but 'because they were transformed into narrative and song.'⁹⁰ In my analysis, I consider the role the contemporary poet plays as a 'professional immortalizer.' I argue that, like the Greek poets, Heaney was writing for posterity in much of his late work, and writing into the elegiac tradition. Heaney preserves other poets for posterity in his elegies. His parents, too, become immortalised in his late elegiac writing for family. My research draws on concepts and approaches from memory studies and literary studies to consider the way that a poet can preserve memories for future generations. In Heaney's poetry, events and people are linked to texts from other places and times and, in this way, are written into cultural memory.

⁸⁹ Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, 33.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

CHAPTER 2: MEMORY AND COMPLICITY IN *THE SPIRIT LEVEL* AND *BEOWULF*

*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.*

Seamus Heaney 'Mycenae Lookout'

When *The Spirit Level* was published in 1996, Northern Ireland was engaged in the peace process. In *The Spirit Level* and *Beowulf* Heaney writes the transition to an 'imperfect peace'¹ in Northern Ireland into public memory. Heaney had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature the previous year, which had the effect of authorising and legitimising his speech. The confluence of these events created a space for the poet to reflect on his engagement with the 'Troubles,' resulting in an expression of anger and frustration at the waste of life in the preceding 25 years. In the poetry of this period there is a sense that at times his own failure to speak out might have implicated him in the violence.

The relationship between memory and complicity has become important in recent work in memory studies. As an act of public remembrance, *The Spirit Level* mediates the lived experience of the peace process and explores the ways in which the community has been implicated in the violence, even those who were not victims or perpetrators. In this chapter I consider three different types of implication in the poems of *The Spirit Level* and in his translation of *Beowulf*: 'Mycenae Lookout' considers the role of witnesses and spectators who are not empowered to change the outcome; in 'The Flight Path' Heaney considers the ways that he is implicated as a Northern Catholic, an idea that is developed and resolved in 'Tollund'; 'Weighing In' and *Beowulf* explore the responsibility of a writer.

Heaney explores the transnational dimension of the memory through the motif of travel, the revision of earlier work, and by the adaptation of literary works from

¹ Attributed to British Labour MP and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam.

classical antiquity. Heaney's reflections on the end of the Troubles occur at and outside the borders of national memory. This is significant as so much of the conflict evolved from competing national memories in which fixed identities were forged and tempered. In 'Mycenae Lookout' Heaney uses a Greek tragedy to work through his anger. In 'Tollund' he looks back to post-ceasefire Ireland from Denmark, and in 'The Flight Path' he reflects on a lifetime spent travelling away from and toward the place of his birth. Heaney's work in *The Spirit Level* exemplifies the type of memory work that Astrid Erll describes in 'Travelling Memory' as 'unfolding across and beyond cultures.'² She describes the 'container-culture' view of memory as 'epistemologically flawed, because there are too many mnemonic phenomena that do not come into our field of vision with the "default" combination of territorial, ethnic and national collectivity as the main framework of cultural memory – but which may be seen with the transcultural lens.'³ Levy and Sznajder write that 'national and ethnic memories are transformed in the age of globalization rather than erased.'⁴ Heaney's choice to commemorate the end of a conflict that was based in nationalism by stepping outside of national borders foregrounds the idea that 'territorial, ethnic and national collectivity' are blinders which impede a clear view of past events.

Heaney's permanent departure from the North in 1972 marked the beginning of a life spent traversing the globe, and looking at the civil conflict that wracked the province from the outside. In *The Spirit Level* he revisits and revises imagery and ideas from earlier collections, a pattern that dominates his late work. The first collection in which he directly engaged with the violence of the 'Troubles,' *North* (1975), was also the first collection he published after he left Northern Ireland to live south of the border, or 'escaped from the massacre,' as he wrote in 'Exposure.' This poem, and the collection, concludes with the idea that he 'blows / up sparks / for their meagre heat' and has missed 'the once-in-a-lifetime portent' of the 'Troubles.' In *The Spirit Level*, published twenty years later, he reprises the themes

² Astrid Erll, 'Travelling Memory,' *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (2011): 9, doi:10.1080/13534645.2011.605570.

³ Ibid., 8.

⁴ Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, 'Memory Unbound: the Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory,' *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 89, doi:10.1177/13684310222225315.

and imagery of *North* to reflect on the ways in which he was implicated in the violence of the 'Troubles,' both when he spoke out and when he chose to remain silent. In his 1999 translation of *Beowulf* Seamus Heaney extends the exploration of complicity initiated in *The Spirit Level*.

Memory and Complicity

Recent work in memory studies explores the subject positions available for people who are neither victims nor perpetrators. These approaches are useful for approaching Heaney's work from the 1990s. In *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* Debarati Sanyal explores the 'transnational reverberations' of the Holocaust in Francophone literature, perceiving complicity as a way of engaging with 'multiple histories.'⁵ She examines the way that the recognition of complicity in ourselves presents a challenge by requiring us to step aside from the collective tendency to identify with victims and instead 'consider our sometimes contradictory position within the political fabric of a given moment, as victims, perpetrators, accomplices, bystanders, witnesses, or spectators.'⁶ Sanyal argues that representation in art and literature invites 'complicitous identifications.'⁷ In *The Spirit Level* Heaney reflects on how he has been implicated as a poet, as a public figure, as a nationalist and as a bystander. Michael Rothberg's concept of the implicated subject illustrates the fluidity of subject positions in relation to violence and explores the idea that a narrative of victims and perpetrators is 'not sufficient.'⁸ He claims that this narrow focus tends to 'evacuate the field of other crucial subject positions.'⁹ Rothberg's definition of implicated subjects clarifies the problem: 'Neither simply perpetrators nor victims, though potentially either or both at other moments, implicated subjects are participants in and beneficiaries of a system that generates dispersed and uneven experiences of

⁵ Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 2.

⁶ Ibid., 1.

⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁸ Michael Rothberg, 'Trauma Theory, Implicated Subjects, and the Question of Israel/Palestine,' (Paper presented at 2014 MLA convention, Chicago). <https://profession.commonsonline.org/2014/05/02/trauma-theory-implicated-subjects-and-the-question-of-israel-palestine/>.

⁹ Ibid.

trauma and well-being simultaneously.’¹⁰ In *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* Mark Sanders’s particular focus on the complicity of writers provides an interesting perspective on *The Spirit Level*. He maintains that all people within a system are complicit by virtue of being human: ‘folded-together-ness (complicity) – in human being.’¹¹ Sanders pays particular attention to the role of writers as intellectuals. He argues that ‘the duty to speak out is linked with a will or desire not to be an accomplice.’¹² He posits that literary works call upon a reader to question ‘the limits of filiation’ and frame the intellectual as ‘a figure of responsibility-in-complicity.’¹³ This, he argues, is a precondition for action: ‘Complicity, in this convergence of act and responsibility, is thus at one with the basic folded-together-ness’ of being, of human being, of self and other.’¹⁴ Rothberg accepts Sanders’s definition of complicity and suggests implication is a related – but not identical – condition: ‘*implication* draws attention to how we are *entwined with* and *folded into* ... histories and situations that surpass our agency as individual subjects.’¹⁵ This definition acknowledges the disempowerment of being involved in a political situation over which one has no control.

Naomi Mandel draws upon Sanders’ model to explain the concept of a domain of complicity. She contends that ‘the distinction between complicity, collaboration, and culpability can be effectively demarcated by the possibility or impossibility of judgement: collaboration (a charge) and culpability (a verdict) are well within judgement’s sphere, while to be complicit is to stand in relation to this sphere on which judgement has yet to fall.’¹⁶ Mandel argues that complicity should be disassociated from judgement to expand the ‘possibility of thinking about what it might mean to occupy that domain and how to function in it.’¹⁷

In the poems of *The Spirit Level* Heaney explores a range of complicities. While some poems extend and develop the role of the poet, what Sanders might call

¹⁰ Rothberg, ‘Trauma Theory’.

¹¹ Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), Kindle edition, Introduction.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Naomi Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust, and Slavery in America* (Charlottesville; London: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 214.

¹⁷ Ibid., 215.

'responsibility-in-complicity,' others deal with more active complicity. As a Northern Irish Catholic, Heaney grew up within a system of inequality. After a permanent move to the south in 1972, he took himself outside of the civic violence. Because his family and close friends remained in the North, and because he remained committed to the cause of constitutional nationalism, he was always 'entwined' or 'folded' into the political situation of the North, but at the same time he had been released from firsthand experience of the Troubles by his choice of profession and by his fame. Because he has had a higher public profile than the other Northern Irish poets of his generation, there has been more attention to the stance Heaney has taken on the 'Troubles,' one which is not significantly different to that of Michael Longley or Derek Mahon.

Over the years a number of Irish critics have condemned Heaney for either endorsing the violence of the IRA or for being too reticent. This opposition can be seen in two critical appraisals of his work published in the final years of the 'Troubles.' In 'The Trouble with Seamus' (1992) James Simmons, another prominent Northern Irish poet and erstwhile friend, suggests that despite a talent for description, Heaney 'has no moral centre' and 'may turn out to be an almost total irrelevance.'¹⁸ He claims that Heaney's poetry shows 'deep ... commitment to violent nationalism.'¹⁹ Desmond Fennell, on the other hand, criticises the poetry for being anodyne and apolitical. His pamphlet 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing: Why Seamus Heaney is No. 1' is most notable for demonstrating a level of personal vitriol seldom seen in literary criticism. Fennell asserts that Heaney 'says nothing about irrational violence' except that it is rather sad, 'an insight which we hardly need to read poetry for.'²⁰ Fennell argues that Heaney's work is directed towards an 'elite' and 'liberal' group of English and American critics and professors.²¹ Both Fennell and Simmons represent Heaney as a careerist, a poet with one eye always on his own success. Fennell claims that Heaney would not have achieved this success without the war in Northern Ireland and that he has 'ridden to power on

¹⁸ James Simmons, 'The Trouble with Seamus,' in *Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Elmer Andrews (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992) 61.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 62

²⁰ Desmond Fennell, *Whatever You Say, Say Nothing: Why Seamus Heaney Is No. 1*, (Dublin: ELO Publications, 1991), 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

the backs of the IRA.’²² Although this poetry can hardly be seen as a direct response to these critiques – Heaney describes Fennell’s attack as ‘hardly devastating’²³ and Simmons as a poet whose work he did not ‘rate’ very highly²⁴ – there is a sense in which his rumination upon his own complicity is part of an ongoing dialogue about the extent to which he was complicit in the violence or responsible for his own stance in the preceding years.

The Nobel Effect

In later years Heaney reflected at length about the quandary in which he found himself as the Troubles progressed. He was determined not to be associated with the nationalist paramilitaries and did not want to be complicit in the violence they perpetrated. In a 2010 interview he recalled: ‘when it was a civil rights protest – in the late 60’s – when we had the high ground of non-violent protest – then it was easy to write from that position and to represent the minority position but when the IRA started to bomb and, you know, shoot – when violence and killing entered on behalf of as it were your cause ... there was no way I was going to be enlisted on that behalf.’²⁵ It seemed an impossible choice between speaking on behalf of the Nationalist community (and being aligned with the IRA) and refusing to speak, which created its own type of complicity by tacitly endorsing the actions of the state.

In ‘Cessation 1994,’ an essay written one week after the IRA ceasefire, Heaney reflects on the initial feeling of elation being beaten down by a profound anger at the waste of the previous 25 years, ‘a terrible black hole,’ which led to ‘a point that is politically less promising than things were in 1968.’²⁶ He felt that at that time, when the movement was based on the non-violent civil rights demonstrations, there was the potential for sectarian divisions to be broken down. He argues that: ‘small changes of attitude, small rapprochements and readjustments were being

²² Ibid., 39.

²³ Dennis O’Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), Kindle edition, 341.

²⁴ Ibid., 111.

²⁵ Lawrence Pollard, ‘Seamus Heaney, Poet,’ BBC World Service, Podcast Audio, 18 Jan, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p005rwnv>.

²⁶ Seamus Heaney, ‘Cessation 1994,’ *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002), 48.

made.²⁷ Rather than breaking down divisions, he argues that the IRA's 'campaign of violence' excluded many from the discussion, especially poets and artists.²⁸ He concludes that the ceasefire presented a 'space where hope can grow,' limiting his definition of hope to that espoused by Vaclav Havel: 'it is not the expectation that things will turn out successfully but the conviction that something is worth working for, however it turns out.'²⁹ As a consequence, Heaney uses the poems in *The Spirit Level* to work through feelings of frustration, rage and complicity in order to leave a space for hope, expressed in 'Postscript,' the final poem, in the image of a wind that can 'catch the heart off guard and blow it open' ('Postscript' l.16). On a number of occasions, he has paraphrased the words of Czesław Miłosz, in finding himself 'stretched between contemplation / of a motionless point / and the command to participate / actively in history' ('Away From it All' ll. 22-5). This tension between contemplation and action continued to shadow his later work.

Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1995, which he described at the time as 'a bit like being caught in a mostly benign avalanche.'³⁰ He used the Nobel acceptance speech as an opportunity to reflect on the position he had taken in relation to the 'Troubles.' He describes it as 'having to conduct oneself as a poet in a situation of ongoing political violence and public expectation. A public expectation, it has to be said, not of poetry as such but of political positions variously approvable by mutually disapproving groups.'³¹ He talks of the period between 1974 and the ceasefires of 1994 as a time bereft of hope, a time when the people of the North 'settled in to a quarter century of life-waste and spirit-waste.'³² What Heaney then discusses at length is the type of 'foldedness' that Sanders identifies as integral to 'responsibility-in-complicity.' He recounts the story of the Kingsmill massacre of 1976, 'one of the most harrowing moments in the whole history of the harrowing of the heart in Northern Ireland,' when 11 Protestant workers travelling on a minibus were shot by the IRA. For Heaney the instructive

²⁷ Ibid., 49.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 50.

³⁰ Henri Cole, 'Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry No. 75,' *The Paris Review* 144, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1217/the-art-of-poetry-no-75-seamus-heaney>.

³¹ Seamus Heaney, 'Nobel Lecture: Crediting Poetry,' Nobelprize.org, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1995/heaney-lecture.html.

³² Cole, 'Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry No. 75.'

element comes from the moments before the victims realised which paramilitary had attacked them and tried to protect their Catholic workmate. In the Nobel speech this anecdote is followed immediately by a reflection upon the position he has taken in relation to the violence:

It is difficult at times to repress the thought that history is about as instructive as an abattoir; that Tacitus was right and that peace is merely the desolation left behind after the decisive operations of merciless power. I remember, for example, shocking myself with a thought I had about that friend who was imprisoned in the seventies upon suspicion of having been involved with a political murder: I shocked myself by thinking that even if he were guilty, he might still perhaps be helping the future to be born, breaking the repressive forms and liberating new potential in the only way that worked, that is to say the violent way – which therefore became, by extension, the right way. It was like a moment of exposure to interstellar cold, a reminder of the scary element, both inner and outer, in which human beings must envisage and conduct their lives. But it was only a moment.³³

By acknowledging this atavistic tendency to endorse the violence of his own side, Heaney demonstrates the difficulty of functioning as an intellectual within a civil conflict. Sanyal conceives of complicity as ‘not a fixed stance but a structure of engagement that produces ethical and political reflection across proliferating frames of reference.’³⁴ In this – his most public speech – Heaney recognises the ‘proximity between self and other, past and present’ that Sanyal writes of, though it is often the case that the ‘other’ is not the Northern Irish Protestant, but the Republican fighter. Heaney returns to the Kingsmill massacre, describing the solidarity of the workers as indicative of a potential future peace: ‘The birth of the future we desire is surely in the contraction which that terrified Catholic felt on the roadside when another hand gripped his hand, not in the gunfire that followed, so absolute and so desolate, if also so much a part of the music of what happens.’³⁵

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 17.

³⁵ Heaney, ‘Nobel Lecture.’

Responsibility-in-complicity – ‘Every now and then, just weighing in / Is what it must come down to’

In ‘Weighing In’ Seamus Heaney examines the responsibility of the poet through the metaphor of counterweight. This poem explores the idea of ‘responsibility-in-complicity’ that Sanders identifies. He argues that in order to oppose a system you must first acknowledge your complicity in it. He claims, in relation to apartheid, that interventions are ‘marked by degrees of affirmation and disavowal, in a continuum of foldedness or responsibility in complicity.’³⁶ Heaney expressed a similar sentiment in an interview conducted in 1994: ‘I think the poet who didn’t feel the pressure at a politically difficult time would be either stupid or insensitive. I take great comfort in this regard from a formulation of Robert Pinsky’s in his essay on the responsibility of the poet ... Pinsky says that as long as you feel the need to answer you are being responsible, because it’s in the ground of one’s answering being that the responsibility of the poet is lodged.’³⁷ Acknowledging the ways that his profession implicated him in the political conflict does not make him feel that the response is predetermined, and he describes his own attempt to maintain a position ‘in-between’ as a matter of ‘temperament.’³⁸

In ‘Weighing In’ he describes the strain of maintaining this balance, and foregrounds the ‘fool’s errand’ from which the title of the collection derives, a task set by his father ‘to find me a bubble for the spirit level’ (‘The Errand’ l. 3). He uses a scale as a symbol of his own implication in the political conflict in Northern Ireland in the preceding 25 years. The poem opens with the image of the 56-pound counter weight, ‘a solid iron / unit of negation’ and a ‘socket-ripping / Life-belittling force’ (ll. 1-6). In this image he foregrounds the labour of trying to counter-balance ‘dead weight’ (l. 8) until ‘everything trembled, flowed with give and take’ (l. 12). This is a poem that is fully engaged with what it means to ‘weigh in’ on a topic. In the second section of the poem he describes the constraints of filiation and affiliation:

And this is all the good tidings amount to:

³⁶ Sanders, *Complicities*, Introduction.

³⁷ Cole, ‘Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry No. 75.’

³⁸ Ibid.

The principle of bearing, bearing up
And bearing out, just having to

Balance the intolerable in others
Against our own, having to abide
Whatever we settled for and settled into

Against our better judgement. (ll. 13-19)

The extended metaphor of weight is developed in the idea of 'bearing' and 'balance.' The use of first and second person pronouns reinforces the principle of being 'folded' into a minority community. By using 'our own' to contrast the 'intolerable in others' Heaney is identifying himself with the Catholic minority, though it is not clear whether 'others' represents the unionist community or the paramilitary Nationalists. In the 1994 interview he explains that 'the inbetweenness comes into play more problematically in relation to the nationalist and republican traditions in Ireland ... people with a strong republican commitment would probably consider me to have been insufficiently devoted to their program and policies and insufficiently vocal against what they see as imperial British activities in Northern Ireland.'³⁹ The division between the Nationalist and Unionist communities masked an equally bitter divide within the nationalist community. In *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* Richard English describes the 'bitter rivalry' between the Provisionals and constitutional nationalists, especially the Social Democratic and Labour Party led by John Hume.⁴⁰ In the late 1980s Hume began a process of rapprochement with Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams in order to bring about an end to the conflict. The peace process in Northern Ireland could only succeed with all stakeholders making major concessions. When Heaney writes of 'having to abide / Whatever we settled for and settled into // Against our better judgement,' he might well be talking of the negotiations between Sinn Féin and the SDLP. The choice of the word 'abide,' with its connotations of forbearance and endurance, emphasises the difficulty of the concessions made in the peace process.

³⁹ Cole, 'Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry No. 75.'

⁴⁰ Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Kindle Edition, Ch. 7.

In the third section of the poem Heaney draws upon biblical imagery to imagine an alternative to the restraint he has shown in the past. By considering the contrast between retribution and mercy, Heaney reveals the complexity of responsibility-in-complicity. He invokes the Christian command to turn the other cheek and the story of Jesus saving the woman who was to be stoned for adultery by writing in the sand. In his essay 'The Government of the Tongue' he had used this story as a symbol of the function of poetry: 'a break with the usual life, but not an absconding from it ... in the rift between what is going to happen and what we would wish to happen, poetry holds attention for a space ...'⁴¹ In 'Weighing In' he imagines the path he has not taken:

To refuse the other cheek. To cast the stone.
 Not to do so some time, not to break with
 The obedient one you hurt yourself into

Is to fail the hurt, the self, the ingrown rule.
Prophesy who struck thee! When soldiers mocked
 Blindfolded Jesus he didn't strike back

They were neither shamed nor edified, although
 Something was made manifest – the power
 Of power not exercised, of hope inferred

By the powerless forever. Still, for Jesus' sake,
 Do me a favour, would you, just this once?
 Prophesy, give scandal, cast the stone. (ll. 25-36)

The allusion to the story of Jesus highlights the potency of refusing to retaliate ('the power of power not exercised'). The enjambment of the 'hope inferred / by the powerless' across stanzas highlights the poet's ambivalence about this response. In the following sentence, the tone of frustration appears to be directed

⁴¹ Seamus Heaney, 'The Government of the Tongue,' in *The Government of the Tongue: Selected Prose 1978-1987* (London; New York: Faber and Faber, 1988), Kindle edition.

at his own reticence. The biblical 'cast the stone' implies that he should have been more critical, though it is less clear at whom the stone should have been thrown. He berates himself for the instances in which he should have spoken out but did not.

The remaining section of the poem extends and develops this idea. Heaney concludes that silence can make one complicit with the violence. The metaphor 'weighing in' shows the imperative to speak out against injustice:

Two sides to every question, yes, yes, yes ...
But every now and then, just weighing in
Is what it must come down to, and without

Any self-exculpation or self-pity. (ll. 37-40)

The repetition of 'yes, yes, yes' seems to negate the 'in-betweenness' that has marked his stance in relation to the 'Troubles.' He writes that he 'held back' when he 'should have drawn blood / and that way (*mea culpa*) lost an edge' (ll. 45-6). In this final section the repetition of derivatives from the Latin *culpa* clarifies his position in relation to his own stance. He accuses himself of not having 'weighed in,' participated in the discussion, but, instead, of having indulged in some degree of 'self-exculpation.' The poem might be read as a response to the final poem of *North*, 'Exposure,' in which he reflects on what it means to be in exile from the conflict of the North, where he sits 'weighing and weighing' his 'responsible *Tristia*' (ll. 21-2). The fact that he feels that this 'lost an edge' implies that he feels blameworthy for what he has done or for what he has failed to do. Sanders argues that literature provokes a 'questioning of the limits of filiation.'⁴² Heaney had been testing the limits of filiation throughout his poetry of the 1970s and 1980s, and in *The Spirit Level* more than ever before.

⁴² Sanders, *Complicities*, Introduction.

Refusal of Complicity – ‘When, for fuck’s sake, are you going to write something for us?’

In the series of six linked poems that make up ‘The Flight Path’ Heaney explores the folds of memory and implication through the twinned motifs of travel and translation. The refusal of complicity with *Sinn Féin* is framed by a series of poems that explore what ‘home’ means. In the second poem he writes of his Wicklow home, in the flight path of jets from Dublin airport:

Standing-in in myself for all of those
 The stance perpetuates: the stay-at-homes
 Who leant against the jamb and watched and waited, (ll. 25-7)

The stance he describes, to stay at home, implies its opposite – to leave. Although he chose to live in the Republic of Ireland after 1972, Heaney never again lived in the North where he had grown up. His parents, siblings and friends were the ‘stay-at-homes,’ and in *The Spirit Level* he acknowledges their stoicism. These lines recall an earlier poem in the collection, ‘Keeping Going,’ dedicated to his brother: ‘My dear brother, you have good stamina. / You stay on where it happens’ (ll. 67-8). The filiation and affiliation that Sanders has described as a defining condition of responsibility in complicity is complicated by voluntary exile. In the third poem of ‘The Flight Path’ he is the passenger, moving through the airport and flying from Dublin to New York and then California. He describes the return to Ireland as ‘re-entry,’ evoking a space mission (l. 44). This poem deals with the travels ‘across and across and across’ (l. 50) the Atlantic as he commuted between a faculty position at Harvard and a family home in Dublin, both far removed from the northern village of his childhood.

Heaney also alludes to the cultural traditions that have informed his work as a translator. His translation of the medieval Irish text *Buile Suibhne* is paired with his translation of a line from Horace: ‘Sweeney astray in the home truths out of Horace: / *Skies change, not cares, for those who cross the seas*’ (ll.54-5). The line incorporates a move across time, to the Ancient and Medieval worlds, and also

across linguistic borders. The final line of the stanza shows clearly that being 'escaped from the massacre' ('Exposure' l. 33) does not mean escape from 'cares.' The use of the colloquial expression 'home truths' introduces the problematic notion of where 'home' is, and also has connotations of a truth that is discomfiting. In the various sections of this poem sequence 'home' is – at the same time – Dublin, Glanmore, Boston and his place of origin, Bellaghy. In the fifth poem he recalls being stopped at a roadblock by the police and stating 'far away' as where he came from: 'And now it is – both where I have been living / And where I left' (ll. 103-4). Poetry, as Jahan Ramazani observes, is 'especially well suited to ... the imaginative enactment of geographic displacement.'⁴³ Heaney's memories of the Troubles are always at a remove, and his reflections on the impact they have had on his birthplace are always mediated by this geographic displacement. He has not been a 'stay-at-home' and has not directly witnessed the atrocities of the previous 25 years, but he is implicated still by his loyalty to place and by his affiliation to those who stayed behind.

In the fourth poem of 'The Flight Path' Heaney recalls a train encounter with Danny Morrison, publicity director of Sinn Féin, who urged him to support the prison protests of the 1970s. This deals with a more sinister form of complicity, the demand that he speak for the Republican movement. His refusal to comply is represented as a line drawn in the sand, a stance taken. The poem represents the attempt to resist a forced complicity and the inevitability of being implicated anyway. The tone is somewhat combative:

The following for the record, in the light
Of everything before and since:
One bright May morning, nineteen-seventy-nine,
Just off the red-eye special from New York,
I'm on the train for Belfast ... (ll. 56-60)

The opening lines imply that there have been conflicting opinions about Heaney's relationship with Sinn Féin and that this poem is an attempt to set the record straight. The specificity of the time and location establishes memory as a form of

⁴³ Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 52.

testimony. It also highlights his displacement from the province, having just arrived on a 'red-eye.' He goes on to contrast the 'Plain, simple / Exhilaration at being back' (l. 60-1) with Danny Morrison's entry into the train carriage:

Enter then –

As if he were some *film noir* border guard –

Enter this one I'd last met in a dream,

More grim-faced now than in the dream itself (ll. 65-9)

Heaney represents Morrison self-consciously playing the role of a stereotypical film villain, emphasised by the 'as if he were.' Heaney's contempt for Morrison is developed by referring to him as 'this one.' He recalls the dream of Morrison recruiting him for a clandestine operation – 'all I'd have to do was drive a van' to meet a school friend, 'a wink and a smile ... And I'd be home in three hours' time, as safe / as houses' (ll. 73-82). In the dream Heaney grapples with the invitation to participate in the violence, to be actively complicit in the IRA campaign.

This dream is immediately followed by the chance meeting with Morrison. This indicates that Heaney felt that to speak for Sinn Féin would make him an accomplice to the violence:

So he enters and sits down

Opposite and goes for me head on.

'When, for fuck's sake, are you going to write

Something for us?' 'If I do write something,

Whatever it is, I'll be writing for myself.'

And that was that. Or words to that effect. (ll. 83-88)

The suggestion that Morrison's approach is aggressive is portrayed in the 'head on' attack and in the use of profanity, which is rarely a feature of Heaney's writing. The injunction to 'write something for us' is clearly intended to convey a wish that Heaney publicly endorse the IRA campaign, specifically the dirty protests that were occurring at the Maze prison at the time of this encounter. The immediacy of refusal is emphasised in the decision to begin his response on the same line as

Morrison's demand. The attempt to refuse complicity is conveyed in the phrase 'I'll be writing for myself.' There is a real anger in the sense that he was being asked to be actively complicit in a political organisation that he did not support.

Heaney is careful to distinguish between the protestors and their spokesman, Danny Morrison. There is a sense of ambivalence about being asked to speak for the perpetrators of violence who were, at the time of the prison protests, also the victims. When recalling this incident in *Stepping Stones* Heaney concedes that the poem makes Morrison 'a bit more aggressive than he was at the time,' though insists that his 'presumption of entitlement' is 'rendered faithfully.'⁴⁴ His description of Morrison as an 'interlocutor' suggests that he believes he was an envoy from *Sinn Féin*, who were at the time attempting to build support for the prison protests. He recalls that he did not feel threatened during the ten minute encounter, but 'rebelled at being commanded.'⁴⁵ At the time, he says, he had been considering dedicating a poem to the prisoners⁴⁶ but he felt that after his train encounter he 'wasn't so much free to refuse as unfree to accept.'⁴⁷ In an earlier interview, conducted at the time of his Nobel prize, he recalled the same incident and the sense that 'what I was being asked to do was to lend my name to something that was also an IRA propaganda campaign.'⁴⁸ In the final stanza he recalls the prison protest:

The gaol walls all those months were smeared with shite
 Out of Long Kesh after his dirty protest
 The red eyes were the eyes of Ciaran Nugent
 Like something out of Dante's scurfy hell,
 Drilling their way through the rhymes and images
 Where I too walked behind the righteous Virgil,
 As safe as houses and translating freely:
When he had said all this, his eyes rolled
And his teeth, like a dog's teeth clamped round a bone,
Bit into the skull and again took hold. (ll. 89-98)

⁴⁴ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 257-8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁴⁶ The 'Ugolino' sequence, a translation from Dante's *Inferno*, published in *Field Work*.

⁴⁷ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 258.

⁴⁸ Cole, 'Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry No. 75.'

The final lines are taken from his translation of Dante, in which Count Ugolino is condemned to starve to death in a tower with his sons after an act of treason. In Dante's afterworld Count Ugolino is trapped in ice with his enemy and spends eternity gnawing on his skull. In Heaney's 'The Flight Path' it is IRA men who take on the mantle of Count Ugolino, who are metaphorically prepared to spend eternity feeding on their own hatred. The translation was first collected in 1979, in *Field Work*, and at that time Heaney was 'toying' with the idea of dedicating it to the prisoners engaged in the protest for political status, but 'our friend's intervention put paid to any such gesture.'⁴⁹ This refusal of complicity is one which clearly delineates Heaney's position in relation to paramilitary violence after the imposed silence of the years before the ceasefire. Sanyal argues: 'Complicity might in fact be at the foundation of responsibility since it is the refusal of complicity that is the traditional hallmark of commitment ... The recognition of complicity with structural violence, of the effects that our actions or inactions have on the fate of others, can serve as a catalyst for ethical and political action.'⁵⁰ It was only after the ceasefire that Heaney spoke publicly against the Republican paramilitaries.

The complicity of the witness in 'Mycenae Lookout' – 'No such thing as innocent bystanding'

Heaney's 'Mycenae Lookout,' written in October of 1994,⁵¹ is an adaptation of the first play of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, *The Agamemnon*. The poem was written in the immediate aftermath of the IRA ceasefire announced in August of 1994 and can be read as a reflection of the preceding 25 years of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. Like 'Station Island' (1984) the poem deals with what it means to speak or stay silent during the 'Troubles.' Heaney describes writing the poem as giving in to the impulse 'to give a snarl rather than sing a hymn.'⁵² The unmasked fury expressed in 'Mycenae' is rare in his lyric poetry. He says in an interview roughly contemporaneous with the publication of *The Spirit Level*:

⁴⁹ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 259.

⁵⁰ Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 13.

⁵¹ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 351.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 350.

When I went home from Harvard in 1994 ... the really big shift – big at all levels, personal and public – was the IRA ceasefire the following August. That was a genuine visitation, the lark sang and the light ascended. Everything got a little better and yet instead of being able just to bask in the turn of events, I found myself getting angrier and angrier at the waste of lives and friendships and possibilities in the years that had preceded it. It was 1994 and we had got no further, politically, than we had been in 1974. Had slipped back, indeed. And I kept thinking that a version of the *Oresteia* would be one way of getting all of that out of the system ...⁵³

In 'Seamus Heaney and the Mantle of Aeschylus,' Anne Devlin describes *Oresteia* as a play 'about the bigger problem of how to prevent cyclical violence.'⁵⁴ She suggests that the play cycle is 'a movement from vengeance to justice,' but that Heaney uses poetry rather than law to achieve justice.'⁵⁵ This made the play an apposite choice for representing the ceasefire.

'Mycenae Lookout' is made of five parts loosely based on the *Oresteia*. Rather than retell the story of Agamemnon, Heaney's poem uses two speakers to reflect on the violence of the Trojan war and the peripheral characters of the watchman and Cassandra. Elizabeth Lunday argues that 'the deliberate silence of the "Mycenae Lookout" Watchman has as many consequences as his speech.'⁵⁶ She sees the character as one 'torn by loyalty and wracked with dread' who observes 'a society contaminated by violence and offers a voice that breaks the silence.'⁵⁷ Helen Vendler argues that Heaney's deliberate choice of the two non-violent characters of Agamemnon are 'surrogates' for his own anger.⁵⁸ Heaney himself has spoken of writing the poem as one in which he 'stalked around' the idea for some time before the 'watchman started singing like a stool pigeon.'⁵⁹ The watchman's

⁵³ Cole, 'Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry No. 75.'

⁵⁴ Anne Devlin, 'Seamus Heaney and the Mantle of Aeschylus: The Aftermath of the War,' *The Irish Review* 49, no. 49-50 (2015): 185.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 188.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Lunday, 'Violence and Silence in Seamus Heaney's "Mycenae Lookout,"' *New Hibernia Review* 12, no. 1 (2008): 120.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 114.

⁵⁸ Helen Vendler, 'Seamus Heaney and *The Oresteia*: "Mycenae Lookout" and the Usefulness of Tradition,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 143, no. 1 (1999): 118.

⁵⁹ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 466.

role in the poem is to witness the end of the Trojan wars and Heaney explores the difficulties of being implicated by witnessing.

From the opening lines of 'The Watchman's War' Heaney suggests that the cessation of hostilities might not be cause for uncritical celebration. As well as highlighting the bloodshed of the war, he shows the despair of the watchman who has been forced to witness atrocity and treachery. The watchman describes the impending end of the Trojan Wars:

Some people wept, and not for sorrow – joy
 That the killing had armed and upped and sailed for Troy,
 But inside me like struck sound in a gong
 That killing-fest, the life warp and world-wrong
 It brought to pass, still augured and endured. (ll. 1-5)

The contrast established between the sorrow of the silent watchman and the feeling of joy in the community is condensed in the simile of 'struck sound in a gong,' with the implication that the 'killing-fest' must be spoken of before it can be put to rest. The image of lives bent out of shape by the protracted conflict shows the impact not just on those who died, but also those who lived through it. Sanyal writes of the post-Auschwitz world as one 'forever tainted by the complicity between those guilty of the crime and those who stood by or looked away.'⁶⁰ Heaney's watchman is a representation of the figure of the bystander. Within the stanza he repeats and extends the epigraph, taken from Aeschylus, 'the Ox is on my tongue':

And then the ox would lurch against the gong
 And deaden it and I would feel my tongue
 Like the dropped gangplank of a cattle truck,
 Trampled and rattled, running piss and muck,
 All swimmy-trembly as the lick of fire,
 A victory beacon in an abattoir ... (ll. 11-6)

⁶⁰ Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 11.

The weight of silence is reinforced in these lines, with the heaviness of a 'dropped gangplank' sullied by the waste of the cattle headed for slaughter. In these lines Heaney is dealing with feelings of complicity that emerge from silence. The sense is not that it was an elected silence, but an essential silence. The watchman acknowledges: 'My sentry work was fate' (l. 24). As the watchman awaits the end of the ten-year war he finds himself 'balanced between destiny and dread,' a peripheral figure without the agency to affect the outcome (l. 38). The watchman is 'gazing, biding time / In my outpost on the roof' (l. 31-2). These lines position the witness as a spectator who does not have the power to affect the events or the outcome. The disempowerment of the watchman is analogous to the role of the audience in Greek drama. Edith Hall explains: 'watching a tragedy is like sitting in the seat of a god, but bound in shackles. The spectator is moral witness but not a moral agent.'⁶¹ In a sense it is Heaney who has been the watchman, the peripheral figure balanced between the world of violence in Northern Ireland and the relative safety of his home[s] during that period – in Glanmore, Dublin, Boston and Oxford. His memories of the Troubles are mediated by distance.

In the fourth poem, 'The Nights,' Heaney extends his reflection on the weight of silence. Here implication is figured as an inability to move. As the watchman rues his role in concealing Clytemnestra's infidelity, he compares the burden of remaining silent to Atlas carrying the weight of the world:

The ox's tons of dumb
 Inertia stood, head down
 And motionless as a herm.
 Atlas, watchmen's patron,
 Would come into my mind,
 the only other one
 up at all hours, ox-bowed
 under his yoke of cloud
 out there at the world's end. (ll. 153-61)

⁶¹ Edith Hall, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering under the Sun*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Ebrary version, 8.

The image of Atlas 'ox-bowed' with the weight of knowledge, like a beast of burden, is recalled in his later Nobel speech where he confesses that he spent years 'bowed to the desk like some monk bowed over his *prie-dieu* ... in an attempt to bear his portion of the weight of the world, knowing himself incapable of heroic virtue or redemptive effect, but constrained by his obedience to his rule to repeat the effort and the posture.' This idea of the weight of responsibility – like Atlas bearing the weight of the world – is one that can be finally put to rest if the Troubles have ended.

'Cassandra,' the second poem in the 'Mycenae' sequence, shows the palimpsestic nature of memory. It is not possible to examine the feelings of complicity in 'Mycenae Lookout' in *The Spirit Level* without considering the ways in which the poem revises and reframes the feeling of complicity expressed in 'Punishment,' the most divisive poem in *North*. The imagery of 'Punishment' is overwritten, but not erased, and this creates layers of meaning centred on the idea of complicity within the Nationalist community. 'Punishment' is about IRA punishment attacks in the early years of the Troubles and explores the responsibility of witnesses and bystanders. In 'Punishment' the body of Windeby Girl,⁶² assumed to have been killed for adultery, is used to symbolise Irish girls who were tarred and feathered for consorting with British soldiers during the 'Troubles.' The poem focuses on the 'tar black' beauty of the girl's face, and the frailty of her naked body. 'Punishment' opens with the speaker empathising with the victim:

I can feel the tug
Of the halter at the nape
Of her neck ... (ll. 1-3)

The speaker is an 'artful voyeur' (l. 32) who witnesses the punishment; he both identifies with and condemns the victim. The speaker admits that he would have cast 'the stones of silence' (l. 31), a particularly biblical punishment, the

⁶² Now known as 'Windeby I.' In 2006 Professor Heather Gill-Robinson used DNA testing to prove that the 'Windeby Girl' was a boy.

implication being that silence is actively complicit. Heaney suggests that the bystanders share some responsibility for the punishment:

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

 who would connive
 in civilized outrage
 yet understand the exact
 and tribal, intimate revenge. (ll. 37-44)

The primary focus of the final stanzas of this poem is the elected silence of the speaker, who has 'stood dumb' while the punishment attacks were carried out. By characterising the girls as 'betraying sisters' of the bog body Heaney hints at a sense that they have somehow brought this punishment upon themselves, just as the 'little adulteress' was being punished for transgressing the values of the community.

Although not a perpetrator, the speaker can 'understand' the 'exact' violence enacted on the victim. The subject position is one of hypocrisy – the speaker 'would connive / in civilized outrage' with those who are appalled by the punishment, but he 'understand[s]' the actions taken by the perpetrators. Edna Longley, in a much-cited critique of the poem, questions whether Heaney can really 'run with the hare ... and hunt with the hounds'⁶³ by empathising with both. In a review in *The Honest Ulsterman* northern Irish poet and critic Ciaran Carson accused Heaney of naturalising suffering and depoliticising these types of acts.⁶⁴ Carson suggests that Heaney offers his 'understanding' as 'consolation.'⁶⁵ Heaney's suggestion that he understands the punishment makes the final stanzas morally equivocal. The apparent sympathy with those who would punish the girls is the

⁶³ Edna Longley, 'North: "Inner Émigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. Tony Curtis (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1982; reprint, 1994), 78.

⁶⁴ Ciaran Carson, 'Escaped from the Massacre?', *The Honest Ulsterman* 50 (1975), 185.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

source of the controversy surrounding this poem; the atavistic nature of the 'exact / and tribal, intimate revenge' suggests that violence against women who have transgressed is accepted .

In many ways, Heaney's ambivalence about the plight of the girls is representative of dominant views of the time. Journalist Nell McCafferty wrote of this phenomenon for *The Irish Times* in 1971 and noted that 'regrets for the incidents are, by and large, confined to the method and not to the principle of punishment.'⁶⁶ In her reflection on the negative public response to the girls who were being tarred and feathered for 'fraternizing'⁶⁷ with British soldiers, McCafferty observes that 'in this tribal context public opinion states that it is wrong to step outside and claim the right to enjoyment with those who your tribe has said is the enemy.'⁶⁸ 'Punishment' has been the site of so much critical debate primarily because of where the speaker (and, by extension, the poet) stands in relation to the act of violence that is being witnessed. Although the speaker outwardly deplores the violence by expressing 'civilized outrage,' his failure to speak makes him complicit; his silence takes him to 'the limits of filiation.'⁶⁹

In 'Cassandra' Heaney's reprisal of the imagery of 'Punishment' leads to a re-evaluation of the concluding lines of the earlier poem. The reader is no longer invited to be complicit in the punishment attacks. This reversal is made explicit from the opening lines of 'Cassandra':

No such thing
as innocent
bystanding. (ll. 47-9)

It is hard to read these lines as anything other than a direct renunciation of the final stanzas of 'Punishment,' where the speaker can 'connive / in civilized outrage' at the same time as he understands the 'exact / and tribal, intimate revenge.' The

⁶⁶ Nell McCafferty, 'Derry's Soldier Dolls,' in *Vintage Nell: The McCafferty Reader*, ed. Nell McCafferty and Elgy Gillespie (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2005), Kindle edition, 33.

⁶⁷ One victim, Martha Doherty, had been engaged to a British soldier stationed in Derry since before the beginning of the troubles. Another had attended a dance run by British soldiers. Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Sanders, *Complicities*, Introduction.

watchman is the speaker in the opening of this section and it is he who describes Cassandra, who has been kidnapped and raped by Agamemnon. The description contains echoes of the voyeuristic description of the bog body in 'Punishment' which had focused on her nipples and her 'shaved head / like a stubble of black corn' (ll. 17-8) and her 'beautiful' 'tar-black face' (l. 27). The broken lines of 'Cassandra' pick up similar images, but fracture them:

Her soiled vest,
her little breasts,
her clipped, devast-

ated, scabbed
punk head,
the char-eyed

famine gawk -
she looked
camp-fucked

and simple. (ll. 50-9)

The stanzas present an inversion of the apparent beauty of the bog body, and the harshness of the consonants reinforce the brutality of the description. Where the bog body in 'Punishment' is described in a peaceful repose, her body integrated in a natural landscape ('barked sapling,' 'oak-bone'), the visual imagery here is focused on the damage perpetrated – her head is 'devast-ated' and 'scabbed' and she looks like a victim of rape. The frailty of her body – in 'Punishment' she is 'flaxen-haired, / undernourished' – has become a 'famine gawk.' There is no longer any pleasure in looking at the abused girl.

Heaney goes beyond a renunciation of the aestheticisation of bog bodies he was accused of in *North*. In this poem he explicitly condemns the inaction of witnesses to sexualised violence. He writes of the:

...result-

ant shock desire
in bystanders
to do it to her

there and then.
little rent
cunt of their guilt: (ll. 91-7)

In these lines Heaney foregrounds the way that the witnesses are aroused by the rape of Cassandra (alluded to in 'Punishment' in the speaker's confession that he is an 'artful voyeur'). The use of the word 'cunt' emphasises the brutality of the bystander's response. Because Heaney rarely uses profanity in his work, this graphic metaphor for the guilt of the bystanders highlights the problematic stance of the witness. Critics have debated the meaning of this type of language in 'Mycenae Lookout.' While Elmer Kennedy-Andrews sees this as recognition of 'the dark, unspoken erotics of violence that seem to underlie the whole of human history,'⁷⁰ Helen Vendler describes the 'unprecedented linguistic violence'⁷¹ of the poem as a response to the violence in the preceding years. The distortion of form and language, Vendler argues, are evidence that 'only outraged language could suit outrageous acts.'⁷²

'Cassandra' is certainly stylistically and linguistically distinct from Heaney's other lyric poetry. While he has experimented with a range of forms in his collected work, and specifically with the shortened line in the bog body poems and with trimeter in 'Station Island,' the clipped and disjointed line breaks and use of graphic language are a departure from earlier work that appear to support Vendler's argument. Elizabeth Lunday's focus in the 'Cassandra' section is on the complicity of the watchman who witnesses the scene; she suggests that the watchman, although he does not rape Cassandra, is implicated by his lust as he

⁷⁰ Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, "'Mycenae Lookout,' Seamus Heaney,' *Irish University Review* 39, no. 2 (2009): 360.

⁷¹ Vendler, 'Seamus Heaney and the *Oresteia*,' 116.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 120.

observes the attack on her.⁷³ Lunday argues that the poem explores the effects of violence on a society: 'violence compels connivance and silences the individual.'⁷⁴ It is the silence that leads to complicity, and the watchman is wracked by his own failure to act. While the perpetrators enact violence on victims the witness can choose to intervene or to remain silent.

Like the tarred and feathered girls in Ulster, Cassandra stands alone. While she exists within a cycle of retaliatory violence, no-one will avenge her death. Because Cassandra is a woman and an outsider in Argos, no-one listens to her prophesies of her own death and that of Agamemnon. In the final lines of the second section Cassandra's speech is used to show that her death can be wiped away:

... 'A wipe
of the sponge,
That's it.

The shadow-hinge
Swings unpredict
-ably and the light's

Blanked out.' (ll. 104-10)

The final line, which breaks the tercet structure of the remainder of the poem, announces her death. She has gone willingly 'to the knife, / to the killer wife' (ll. 99-100). Sanyal argues that there are many circumstances in which 'readers, spectators, witnesses' are positioned in complex ways as 'victims, perpetrators, accomplices, or bystanders.'⁷⁵ This poem explores the ways in which observers are complicit in violence. The failure to intervene becomes an act as worthy of condemnation as the violence itself.

By extension, the specific act of tarring and feathering can be paralleled with the myriad acts of violence perpetrated by participants during the long years of the

⁷³ Lunday, 'Violence and Silence in Seamus Heaney's "Mycenae Lookout,'" 118.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 9.

'Troubles.' The speaker's uncomfortable stance in relation to the violence makes him complicit. Heaney later claimed that the poem was also about 'standing by as the British torture people in barracks and interrogation centres in Belfast,'⁷⁶ 'about standing between those two forms of affront.'⁷⁷ Sanyal argues that a recognition of complicity might be more powerful than shame and trauma in fighting injustice.⁷⁸ She writes that it can be 'a catalyst for ethical and political action.'⁷⁹ The 'Cassandra' section of 'Mycenae Lookout' is more than an exploration of the complicity of bystanders; for Heaney, it is also a way to expiate the guilt of choosing silence. Vendler argues that 'The Watchman's troubled speechlessness and the prophetess's disbelieved speech represent the dilemma of the poet in a time of dishonesty, victimage, murder, infidelity, and rape.'⁸⁰ In a sense Heaney is twice removed. The sin he accuses himself of in this section is not one of watching the assault without intervening, but rather of failing to use his public role to draw attention to injustice, and he seems to suggest that failing to speak makes him equally culpable.

Foldedness – 'Ourselves again, free-willed again, not bad'

By revisiting and reprising 'The Tollund Man' in 'Tollund,' Heaney explores a different type of complicity. This poem explores the 'foldedness' that Sanders and Rothberg describe, but allows for the possibility of moving beyond the cycle of retaliatory violence. In 'The Tollund Man,' collected in 1972 in *Wintering Out*, and the first of the bog body poems, he had attempted to create 'images and symbols adequate to our predicament.'⁸¹ The poem describes an imagined journey to a museum in Aarhus to see the exhumed 'saint's kept body' (l. 16) of the Tollund Man. Heaney uses the bog body as a symbol of the republican victims killed in the early years of the Troubles and considers how it would be to 'risk blasphemy' (l. 21) by praying to the Tollund Man to 'make germinate' their bodies. By representing the bog body as a holy relic, Heaney sacralises his martyrdom. In the final section of the poem he writes that in the 'old man-killing parishes' of Jutland

⁷⁶ Cole, 'Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry No. 75.'

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 12.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁸⁰ Vendler, 'Seamus Heaney and the *Oresteia*,' 119.

⁸¹ Seamus Heaney, 'From Feeling into Words,' in *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002), 25.

he will feel 'lost, / unhappy and at home' (ll. 43-4). This implies that the ritual sacrifice of Iron Age Denmark is being played out in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. In 'Tollund' he describes the completion of that imagined journey when he and his wife visit the site in Denmark where the Tollund Man was dug from the peat. Dated September 1994, the poem is intended as a response to the complete ceasefire of the IRA, which had been announced on August 31. 'Tollund' represents the completion of the pilgrimage, and the explicit revisiting of the themes of 'The Tollund Man' underlines the poet's intention that the poems should be read in tandem.

As with other poems in the collection, Heaney is able to reflect upon the end of the Troubles from outside of the province. It is a poem that describes the release from implication. 'Tollund' opens with the line 'That Sunday we had travelled far' although, as in 'The Tollund Man,' where he predicted he would feel 'lost, unhappy and at home,' the place they find themselves is 'hallucinatory and familiar' (l. 4). The speculative Jutland landscape that Heaney had dreamed of visiting in 'The Tollund Man' – 'the old man killing parishes' (l. 42) – has been replaced with the reality of contemporary Denmark, with traffic sounds and satellite dishes. While in 'The Tollund Man' he had predicted that he would be directed by 'country people, not knowing their tongue' (l. 40), in 'Tollund' he finds a 'user-friendly outback' with 'tourist signs in *futhark* runic script / In Danish and English' (ll. 15-6). The revision in 'Tollund' does not reinforce the themes of 'The Tollund Man,' but seeks to leave them in the past. 'Things had moved on' he declares at the end of the fifth stanza: 'It could have been Mullhollandstown or Scribe' (l. 17).

The geographical distance from Ireland conveys a sense of freedom in the final stanza. The implication of being unshackled from commitment is conveyed through recollection of being 'footloose / at home beyond the tribe.' In the following stanza he writes:

More scouts than strangers, ghosts who'd walked abroad
 Unfazed by light, to make a new beginning
 And make a go of it, alive and sinning,
 Ourselves again, free-willed again, not bad. (ll. 21-4)

In *Stepping Stones* Heaney speaks of the feeling engendered in this visit to Tollund as 'hope rather than optimism,' which is why he chose the 'complicating echo' of the Sinn Fein motto ('we ourselves') in the words 'ourselves again.'⁸² The complicating echo emerges from using the motto in a collective pronoun that includes himself. The phrase that precedes this – 'alive and sinning' – suggests that no-one is without fault, though the following phrase – 'free-willed again' – suggests that self-determination had been a casualty of the 'Troubles.' The latter phrase seems to negate the complicity implied in 'alive and sinning / Ourselves again.' While Heaney uses the pun on the Sinn Fein motto, there is no suggestion that he is complicit, in the conventional sense of the word, with their campaign. The preceding poems in the collection suggest rage rather than sympathy. 'Tollund' is a poem that does not engage with the polarity of victims and perpetrators; instead, we are left with the speaker who is – by his own admission – implicated in what has gone before. The foundation of 'Tollund' is the idea that hope is possible after the twenty-five years of bloodshed described in 'Mycenae Lookout.'

Beowulf and Complicity: 'the long times and troubles they'd come through'

In his 1999 translation of *Beowulf*, Seamus Heaney explores a type of complicity through language. This translation returns to the complicity of cyclical violence that had been so important in *The Spirit Level*, but also engages with the 'English/Irish antithesis' that has shadowed Heaney's lyric poetry from the beginning.⁸³ The sense of complicity arises from working with the text that is considered the initiating text in English Literature. He first encountered *Beowulf* as a student at Queens University and acknowledges that some critics might feel 'that in translating the poem I studied I was exhibiting all the symptoms of the colonial subject.'⁸⁴ In 1984, he had written 'An Open Letter' as a response to being included by editors Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion in *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*. The poem was published in the first pamphlet from

⁸² O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 352.

⁸³ Seamus Heaney, 'Further Language,' *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 30, no. 2 (1997): 10, <http://search.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/docview/198091420?accountid=8330>.

⁸⁴ Seamus Heaney, 'The Irish Poet and Britain,' in *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (New York: Farrer, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 414.

the Field Day Theatre Group's publishing division, intended to engage directly with postcolonial theory.⁸⁵ In this poem Heaney acknowledges that he primarily publishes in English publications, 'whose audience is, / via Faber' (ll. 77-8), but insists 'You'll understand I draw the line / at being robbed of what is mine, / my *patria* ...' (ll. 91-3). His involvement with Field Day also produced *Sweeney Astray*, a translation of the twelfth century Irish poem cycle, *Buile Suibhne*. His Sweeney, like his adaptations of Sophocles, Horace and Virgil, is best described as an adaptation, or what he calls a 'version.' *Beowulf*, on the other hand, was commissioned for the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, and so intended for students encountering the text for the first time. McGowan observes that there is an irony in the fact that the 'prime market' for the Norton Anthology, students in British Literature courses, will be introduced to *Beowulf* in a translation written by a Northern Irish poet.⁸⁶

For some critics there was a sense in which translating *Beowulf* could be seen as a betrayal of Ireland. The charge that to translate *Beowulf* was a form of collusion with the British is addressed in the introduction to the Faber edition, in which he claims the text as a part of his 'voice-right.'⁸⁷ He reports that this realisation 'took a while'; for a long time he regarded English and Irish as 'adversarial tongues' and the Irish language as 'the language I should by rights have been speaking but I had been robbed of.'⁸⁸ Conor McCarthy observes that 'Irish writers whose heritage is politically nationalist, but who write in English, necessarily feel a difficulty with the linguistic heritage of the language that they write in.'⁸⁹ For Heaney, the internal conflict was resolved by finding words common to both languages, initiated by the realisation that the word 'thole' was a word that his aunt had used. This realisation led to an epiphany: it was not 'a self-enclosed family possession but an historical heritage,' one that had a place 'in the

⁸⁵ Seamus Deane argues that Field Day's analysis derives from the conviction that it is, above all, a colonial crisis. Seamus Deane, *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 6.

⁸⁶ Joseph McGowan, 'Heaney, Caedmon, Beowulf,' *New Hibernia Review* 6, no. 2 (2002): 37, doi:10.1353/nhr.2002.0035.

⁸⁷ Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), xxiii.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

⁸⁹ Conor McCarthy, 'Language and History in Seamus Heaney's Beowulf,' *English* 50, no. 197 (2001): 149, doi:10.1093/english/50.197.149

official textual world.’⁹⁰ This ‘illumination by philology’ led to the conclusion that he wanted his Beowulf to sound like the ‘big-voiced scullions’ of his father’s family.⁹¹

That his translation exploits the Northern vernacular is evident from the first word of the epic with the controversial translation of the opening interjection as the Ulster inflected ‘So.’⁹² Nicholas Howe critiques his use of ‘so’ in the opening as ‘too understated, too domestic for the start of a poem.’ He observes that Heaney ‘seems intent to downplay its assertion of epic temporality and heroic achievement.’⁹³ The description of the birth of Beowulf establishes the nature of this translation:

Afterwards a boy-child was born to Shield
a cub in the yard, a comfort sent
by God to that nation. He knew what they had tholed,
the long times and troubles they’d come through (ll. 12-15)

While these lines reproduce some conventions of the epic form (the use of compound words, alliteration and appositive constructions), the diction foregrounds the Irish dimension. In this line of the text, McCarthy notes, Heaney had chosen to use ‘thole’ to translate a different noun conveying ‘grievous distress ... caused by wickedness.’⁹⁴ When the verb ‘polian’ is used later in the text, Heaney translates it as ‘undergo.’⁹⁵ Additionally, Heaney’s translation to ‘troubles’ seems to deliberately locate the poem; the line is elsewhere translated as ‘suffering,’⁹⁶ ‘griefs,’⁹⁷ and ‘dire need.’⁹⁸ Thomas McGuire argues that the use of an Ulster voice

⁹⁰ Heaney, *Beowulf*, xxv.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

⁹² Howell Chickering, ‘Beowulf and “Heaneywulf,”’ *The Kenyon Review* 24, no. 1 (2002), http://www.jstor.org/stable/4338314?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents; Nicholas Howe, ‘Scullionspeak – Beowulf: A New Verse Translation,’ *The New Republic*. (2000); Thomas McGuire, ‘Violence and Vernacular in Seamus Heaney’s Beowulf,’ *New Hibernia Review* 10, no. 1 (2006): 82, doi:10.1353/nhr.2006.0027.

⁹³ Howe, ‘Scullionspeak,’ 34.

⁹⁴ McCarthy, ‘Language and History in Seamus Heaney’s Beowulf,’ 152.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Craig Williamson and Tom Shippey, *The Middle Ages Series: Beowulf and Other Old English Poems* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), Ebrary edition, 70.

⁹⁷ Michael Alexander, *Beowulf*, (London and New York: Penguin, 2003), Proquest edition, 3.

'transforms the song of suffering that is Beowulf into a keen for his own people's troubles.'⁹⁹ The timing of the translation is of key importance. Although Heaney had been working on it since the mid-80s, it was first published in 1999, soon after the Good Friday Agreement and some 15 years after his first involvement with Field Day. As he wrote in 'Tollund,' 'things had moved on.'

The 'Finnsburg episode' in *Beowulf* can be read in terms of the complicity of the writer or artist who creates an aesthetic representation of violence. While the poet does not collaborate in the violence and is not culpable for the outcome, there is a sense in which he is complicit in the violence by creating a heroic narrative to celebrate the victors. The 'Finnsburg' section can be understood as an extension of Heaney's ongoing exploration of the role of a poet in a context of cyclical violence. The role of the scop, or bard, was to perform songs celebrating the heroism of the warriors, and also to reinforce cultural identity.¹⁰⁰ After Beowulf has defeated Grendel, the *Beowulf* poet includes an episode where the scop tells the story of King Finn, who makes peace with the Danes but is ultimately killed in an act of revenge. This section of the poem is, as noted by the medievalist Nicholas Howe, 'truer to the original than any other parts of Heaney's translation.'¹⁰¹ He refers specifically to the metre, which is marked by a two-part line with two stressed syllables in each part. In the introduction, Heaney highlights the 'slight quickening of pace and shortening of the metrical rein' in this section.¹⁰² This section is set apart from the remainder of the poem by typography; the use of italics and separate lines emphasise the epic conventions of caesurae and half line. While this section of text is often seen as a digression, Heaney chose to emphasise the importance of the scop performing a poem to celebrate the achievements of the hero. He describes the Finnsburg episode as a 'society that is at once honour-bound and blood-stained, presided over by the laws of the blood feud.'¹⁰³

⁹⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2014), 13.

⁹⁹ McGuire, 'Violence and Vernacular in Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf*,' 82.

¹⁰⁰ Hugh Magennis, *Germanic Legend and Old English Heroic Poetry*, (Blackwell Reference Online, 2010), Blackwell ebook.

¹⁰¹ Howe, 'Scullionspeak,' 34.

¹⁰² Heaney, *Beowulf*, xiii.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

This has obvious parallels to the Troubles in Northern Ireland. The defeat of Grendel and subsequent celebrations mark an end to violence and uncertainty, but the story described by the scop foreshadows future violence. As in 'Mycenae Lookout,' Beowulf explores the suffering of characters who have no power to prevent the violence or change the outcome. The scop tells of Hildeburh:

Son and brother
she lost them both
on the battlefield.
She, bereft
and blameless, they
foredoomed, cut down
and spear-gored ... (ll. 1071-73)

These lines contain cadences of the Ulster accent, one which Heaney had once described as a 'staccato consonantal one.'¹⁰⁴ The harsh, plosive sounds are emphasised in the alliteration of 'brother,' both,' 'battlefield,' bereft and 'blameless' and highlighted by the consonance of the sibilant 's' sound.

In this episode a 'truce' is proposed in which both sides must make concessions. The King swears to abide by the agreement, but even so it is an uneasy peace during the 'resentful, blood-sullen / winter with Finn' (ll. 1130-1). The use of kenning, 'blood-sullen' in these lines, evokes the specific mistrust and sullenness generated by a 'blood' feud. The truce is broken by the need to exact revenge:

Thus blood was spilled,
the gallant Finn
slain in his home
after Guthlaf and Oslaf
back from their voyage
made an old accusation:
the brutal ambush,

¹⁰⁴ Seamus Heaney, 'Feeling into Words,' *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1980), 44.

*the fate they had suffered,
all blamed on Finn.
The wildness in them
had to brim over.
The halls ran red
with blood of enemies.*

(ll.1146-52)

The 'old accusation' and subsequent retaliation evoke the years of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. The narrative concludes and the audience return to their celebrations: 'the poet had performed, a pleasant murmur / started on the benches ...' (ll. 1160-1). Sanyal asks how complicity functions within cultural memory 'as a mode of encountering, or witnessing, an aesthetic representation of past injury or suffering.'¹⁰⁵ It seems clear that within the world of *Beowulf*, the scop is complicit in the violence. The narrative is presented as an integral part of the victory celebrations and the scop plays a very important part in these. The scene also functions to foreshadow the attack on Heorot by Grendel's mother, who 'had sallied forth on a savage journey, / Grief racked and ravenous, desperate for revenge. (ll. 1278-9). Her attack is described as 'a fresh blow / to the afflicted bawn.' (ll. 1303-4) The word 'bawn' is a deliberate choice by Heaney. As he explains in the introduction, 'bawn' was a word used to describe the 'fortified dwellings that the English planters built in Ireland to keep the dispossessed natives at bay.'¹⁰⁶ He writes that 'putting a bawn into *Beowulf* seems one way for an Irish poet to come to terms with that complex history of conquest and colony, absorption and resistance, integrity and antagonism.'¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

Heaney's *Beowulf* can be seen as the conclusion to a decade of transition in the North. While he had been significantly more reticent in the 1970s and 1980s, at the height of the 'Troubles,' after the ceasefire and when it seemed that some type of peace was possible he began (like the watchman in 'Mycenae Lookout') 'singing

¹⁰⁵ Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Heaney, *Beowulf*, xxx.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

like a stool pigeon.’¹⁰⁸ *The Spirit Level* and *Beowulf*, Heaney’s major publications in the late 90s, indicate the direction he was to take in his later work. The role of translation and adaptation is of particular importance, as is the pattern of reprising poems, concerns and motifs from earlier collections. These texts function in the way that he’d intended ‘Station Island’ to in 1984 – as ‘an examination of conscience’ and written ‘to release an inner pressure.’¹⁰⁹ Poems such as ‘Mycenae Lookout’ and *Beowulf* are concerned with cyclical violence. While *The Spirit Level* deals with the issue of whether silence is culpability, in *Beowulf* we are shown its opposite – the bard who celebrates heroic victory in verse. Heaney’s ambivalence about this role, and his ongoing examination of the public role of a poet, would continue into the new millennium.

¹⁰⁸ O’Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 466.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 235.

CHAPTER 3: *THE BURIAL AT THEBES* AS 'PORTABLE MONUMENT'

*Pull back. Yield to the dead. Don't stab a ghost.
What can you win when you only wound a corpse?*

Seamus Heaney *The Burial at Thebes*

In this chapter I explore how *The Burial at Thebes*, Seamus Heaney's adaptation of *Antigone*, commemorates the Long Kesh hunger strike and critiques the immanent military invasion of Iraq. It is a work that draws on the political connotations of previous adaptations, translations and productions. In 2003, as Heaney was writing *The Burial at Thebes*, George W. Bush had declared a 'war on terror,' the U.S. was preparing to invade Iraq, and prisoners were being denied the protection of the Geneva conventions at Guantanamo Bay. Although this context informed Heaney's adaptation, *The Burial at Thebes* is not a 'war on terror' *Antigone*. He also draws on the history of colonisation in Ireland and the 1981 Republican hunger strike, when ten men starved themselves to death in Northern Ireland as a means of drawing attention to their claim as political prisoners. This was the final stage of a five-year prison protest that had been initiated by the withdrawal of 'Special Category' status for paramilitary prisoners. A turning point for the Nationalist cause, the hunger strike marked the beginning of Sinn Féin's ultimately successful foray into electoral politics when Bobby Sands, who was subsequently the first man to die, was elected as an MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

The period of the hunger strike was a time that Seamus Heaney later described as 'desperately and ethically confusing.'¹ The conflict between Heaney's private opinions and his public role was brought into sharp relief during this period. Heaney's reprisal of the hunger strikes illustrates Erll and Rigney's observation that memory is an 'an ongoing process ... in which individuals and groups continue ... [to] reconfigure their relationship to the past and hence reposition themselves in relation to established and emergent memory sites.' Rather than reproducing

¹ Lawrence Pollard, 'Seamus Heaney, Poet,' interview with Seamus Heaney, BBC World Service, podcast audio, January 18, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p005rwnv>.

well-worn tropes of blood sacrifice for Mother Ireland, Heaney's *Antigone* presents a transnational perspective on the remembrance of the hunger strikers.

In *The Burial at Thebes* Heaney reactivates the memory by restoring local and transnational dimensions to a memory that is most often understood within the confines of national memory. I will be exploring his use of *Antigone* as an attempt to navigate a fresh path through a collective memory that has seemed mired in a particular form of remembrance, one centred on the importance of martyrdom in Irish history. Heaney delivered the Jayne Lecture for the American Philosophical Society in 2004. In this lecture, 'Title Deeds,' he discussed his adaptation of *Antigone*, Heaney explains that for constitutional nationalists the hunger strike was understood as 'both an exercise in *realpolitik* and an occasion of sacred drama,' and that 'support for their fast could be read by the IRA and others as support for their violent methods.'² In *The Burial at Thebes* Heaney focuses on the ripple effect of one event from that troubled time, the burial of Francis Hughes. He explains how the 'hijacking of the body' resulted in conflict between the state and the mourners when 'security forces deemed it necessary to take charge and to treat the body effectively as state property.' He argues that in looking for a parallel to the conflict between Antigone and Creon, 'we could hardly do better than the incident on the street in Toomebridge.'³

Finding the parallels between the disruption of Hughes's funeral cortege and Antigone's dilemma allows Heaney to memorialise the strike without endorsing the IRA. Although the adaptation was commissioned for the national theatre, and engages with a memory that has been claimed by Irish nationalists, the national frame is insufficient. Antigone's claim is based on kinship; she has a duty to bury her brother with the proper rites. By choosing *Antigone* as a vehicle for the memory of the hunger strike Heaney restores the dead hunger strikers – whose memory has been appropriated for the Republican cause – to their families and local communities.

² Seamus Heaney, 'Title Deeds: Translating a Classic,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 148, no. 4 (2004): 412, <https://amphilsoc.org/sites/default/files/proceedings/480401.pdf>.

³ *Ibid.*, 411.

Ethics of Commemorating the 1981 Hunger Strike: ‘Sacred Drama’?

Acts of commemoration in Northern Ireland have been at the heart of much of the sectarian violence of the ‘Troubles.’ The injustice of the past is presented as a justification for conflict and division in the present. The Nationalist and Unionist communities’ commemoration of significant events has been, at times, a provocation for further violence, a self-perpetuating cycle of violence and retaliation. Many memorials are used to mark out territory in the urban landscapes of Belfast and Derry, and parade routes mark out unionist and nationalist enclaves. The CAIN project⁴ catalogues several hundred physical memorials to the Troubles – murals, plaques, memorial stones and gardens – including at least 78 devoted to the 1981 hunger strike. These visible enactments of memory within the province can make it seem that the memory of 1981 is hermetically sealed within a container of national – or specifically nationalist – memory. De Cesari and Rigney argue that ‘the transnational dynamics of memory production operate in conjunction with the continuous presence and agency of the national, with which it thus remains deeply entangled.’⁵ They recognise the implicit power of the nation in forming identities and memories. Their argument that there is no ‘linear “progress” from the familial, to local, to national to global memories’ is fundamental to understanding the way that memory works in *The Burial at Thebes*. At different times, and in different parts of the text, each of these comes into play. Heaney’s production of memory in *The Burial at Thebes* does not deny the national framework, but does explore alternative ways of remembering the same event.

Many argue that the hunger strike conferred legitimacy upon Sinn Féin and that it is still used to ‘sanctify’ their current policies. Heaney renounces the idea that the memory is ‘owned’ by Sinn Féin, who have continued to actively shape a narrative of historical continuity. Their office on the Falls Road features a famous mural of Bobby Sands on a gable wall, an example of the way that the party continues to actively appropriate and use the memory of 1981. They present the strike as a pitched battle between the IRA and the British government, a position that fails to acknowledge the many other stakeholders who were involved in trying

⁴ ‘Cain Web Service – Conflict and Politics in Northern Ireland,’ Ulster University, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/index.html>.

⁵ De Cesari and Rigney, *Transnational Memory*, 18.

to broker a resolution (including the European Committee for Human Rights, the Vatican, the International Red Cross, the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace).⁶ These interventions have been erased from the collective memory; they have no symbolic function as they detract from the starkness of the opposition between two groups who refused to concede or negotiate.⁷ In choosing the hunger strike as a strategy to draw attention to their cause in the 1970s and 1980s, the Republicans were consciously aligning themselves with the rebels of 1916 and the ancient Irish tradition of self-sacrifice through hunger. The hunger strike itself was a mnemonic strategy which drew on the Nationalist mythology of the past in order to create and justify a new collective memory of martyrdom and sacrifice in 1981.

Even more than twenty years after the 'cruel time' of the hunger strikes there is still an element of reticence in Heaney's response. In many of his public comments about the hunger strikers, he is careful to identify their 'sacrifice' as 'noble,' a 'sacred drama' by distancing them from the organisation they represented and were a part of, the IRA. In *The Burial at Thebes* he has found a way to commemorate the sacrifice of the hunger strikers in a way that does not involve speaking for the IRA and Sinn Féin. Even so, Heaney's solution elides some important aspects of the collective memory. 1981 was one of the most dangerous periods in Northern Ireland, and the heightened tensions around the funerals of the hunger strikers, especially in the early months, created a very real security risk within the province. While Heaney reads the actions of the police as a provocation, they can also be understood as an attempt to prevent further violence. For instance, in the aftermath of Bobby Sands' death there had been widespread rioting and three deaths in North Belfast.⁸ Likewise, in the days following Hughes's death there had been further deaths, including that of a fourteen-year-old girl who was killed by plastic bullets fired by soldiers. Heaney wrote in full recognition of these deaths.

⁶ Thomas Hennessey, *Hunger Strike: Margaret Thatcher's Battle with the IRA, 1980-1981*, (Sallins, Co. Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2014), Kindle edition, ch. 6; Padraig O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair*; David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987).

⁷ Thomas Hennessey's *Hunger Strike: Margaret Thatcher's Battle with the IRA, 1980-82*, based on documents recently available under freedom of information, brings the idea of intransigence on both sides into question by detailing extensive behind the scenes negotiations.

⁸ McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, 859-62.

Transnational memory and ‘portable monuments’

Heaney draws out the transnational dimension of *Antigone* by re-inscribing the memory of 1981 onto a text that already functions as a palimpsest. He constructs the past in the present by drawing together two seemingly disparate conflicts in order to highlight what they have in common – intransigent leadership, individuals denied the protection of law, and individuals who challenge what they perceive as injustice. Instead of viewing the hunger strike through the lens of Irish history, we are asked to read it as Greek tragedy – specifically, as a Greek tragedy that has been performed, translated, and adapted in more countries than any other.

Understanding how a text may operate as a ‘portable monument’ provides a useful framework for reading *The Burial at Thebes*. Literary texts shape public memory differently than other mnemonic forms. In ‘Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeannie Deans’ Ann Rigney suggests that literary works are more ‘durable’ than other mnemonic forms. As ‘portable monuments’ they can travel more easily than other sorts of memorials. Central to a reading of *Antigone* as a portable monument is this idea that literary texts can easily move into different times as well as different places. As Rigney observes, memories are ‘are not flies in amber, which are passed on in pristine state from one person or generation to another.’⁹ *Antigone* might be considered a particularly loaded text to use as a vehicle of memory. As Erin Mee and Helene Foley observe in their study of modern productions of *Antigone*, when writers choose to ‘remix’ the text they are making a conscious choice to ‘invoke the political questions raised by the play and the largely political legacy of its performance tradition.’¹⁰ We are also asked to use the memory of the hunger strike to evaluate and criticise the ‘war on terror,’ and to use the events of 2003 to reconfigure the memory of the hunger strike. *Burial* is both a memorial to the hunger strike and a critique of the Bush government’s military intervention in Iraq in 2003. In an important essay on the source text, Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood outlines how ‘earlier readings’ of a text

⁹ Ibid., 367.

¹⁰ Erin B. Mee and Helene P. Foley, *Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

can 'create filters through which the text is unconsciously structured.'¹¹ She argues that to read *Antigone* through these filters runs the risk of concealing its 'complexities, polysemies, ambivalences and ambiguities, and any multivocality and warring discourses it may contain.'¹² She objected, particularly, to readings of the play which present Antigone as an individual opposing the state, arguing that the polis was not just the political establishment, but also the 'ordered world of its citizens.'¹³

As many memory scholars have observed, a model of collective memory that is confined to the national frame has a number of limitations. In seeking to move 'beyond methodological nationalism,' Rigney and De Cesari's 'multi-layered, multi-sited and multi-directional'¹⁴ approach is well suited to an analysis of Heaney's version of *Antigone*. An interpretation of his adaptation rests upon the interplay of the different scales of memory (familial, local, national and transnational). Rothberg's multi-directional memory also provides a means of considering 'the public sphere as a malleable discursive space' which is 'open to continual reconstruction.'¹⁵ Rothberg's conviction that there is a path through memory to productive dialogue is in keeping with Heaney's approach to his public role during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Rothberg re-evaluates arguments that approach the Holocaust in terms of an 'easily manipulated abstract code.'¹⁶ He argues that this code of 'good and evil' is insufficient in a post 9/11 world as it 'provides precisely the wrong framework for thinking about the legacies of political violence.'¹⁷ The situations that inform Heaney's adaptation of *Antigone* are defined by these legacies, and in some ways Heaney is a Tiresian figure who warns of the folly of entering into a cycle of retribution and retaliation. Rothberg understands multi-directionality as a way of cutting across and through 'genres, national contexts, periods, and cultural traditions.'¹⁸ He notes that 'what looks at first like

¹¹ Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Assumptions and the Creation of Meaning: Reading Sophocles' *Antigone*,' *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 109 (1989):135, doi:10.2307/632037.

¹² Ibid., 135.

¹³ Ibid., 135.

¹⁴ Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney, *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, (Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), ProQuest Ebrary edition, 4.

¹⁵ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), Kindle edition, 5.

¹⁶ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 265.

¹⁷ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 265.

¹⁸ Ibid., 17.

my own property often turns out to be a borrowing or adaptation from a history that might initially seem foreign or distant.¹⁹ Heaney might have chosen to adapt a text or genre from the Irish literary tradition to commemorate the hunger strike, but 'borrowing' from classical Greece allows him to step outside of the constraints imposed by national sites of memory.

Irish and transnational Antigones: 'our own special allegory'?

The Abbey Theatre, the Irish national theatre co-founded by W.B. Yeats, commissioned *The Burial at Thebes* for their 2004 centenary celebrations. *Antigone* is a play which, like many defining works of the Irish theatre, contributes to cultural memory by bringing the past to life in the present. This is a pattern in modern Irish theatre best exemplified by an early Abbey production, Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, which was later described by Richard Kearney as a play in which Ireland is 'revived by the blood of her heroes.'²⁰ He argues that blood-sacrifice is seen as 'the only means to redeem that nation.'²¹ The connection between nationalism, Irish mythology and martyrdom is clearly established in the work of Yeats and other writers of the Irish Literary Revival. Yeats's later poem, 'Man and the Echo,' famously poses the question: 'Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?'

The Abbey had also played a part in the development of a narrative around hunger strikes as a political strategy. The history of blood sacrifice and martyrdom was to influence the public perception of the 1981 IRA hunger strikes. A lesser known play by Yeats, *The King's Threshold*, was first performed in 1903 and presented again at the Abbey Theatre in 1921 with a revised ending to honour the hunger striker, Terence McSwiney. In the play an intransigent king overrules the right of a Bard, Seanchan, to dine at his table. The Bard embarks on a hunger strike in protest and, in the conclusion of the first published version his acolytes encourage him to die and 'proclaim the right of the poets.'²² Heaney explains his

¹⁹ Ibid., 5.

²⁰ Richard Kearney, 'Myth and Terror,' in *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies*, ed. Mark Patrick Hederman and Richard Kearney (Dublin: Blackwater Press, 1982), 283.

²¹ Ibid.

²² William Butler Yeats and Declan Kiely, *The King's Threshold: Manuscript Materials* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005).

silence in 1981 in terms of this play: 'I was wary of ennobling their sacrifice beyond its specific historic and political context. Uneasy, for example, about seeing it in light of Yeats' *The Kings Threshold*, his play about a hunger strike in the heroic age, in the other country of the legendary past.'²³ He is critical of Yeats's use of national memory and myth to elevate the suffering of those who fought for the Nationalist cause. This is also a revision of his own earlier position. In poetry written in the 1960s and early 1970s Heaney had deployed the nationalist myths from which he later consciously stepped away. By using a Greek tragedy as a 'carrier' of cultural memory Heaney is reclaiming the narrative of the hunger strikes, taking it out of time and place, and considering it in a transnational and transhistorical context. This elasticity of time and place draws attention to the inherently dynamic nature of cultural memory; just as literary texts can be used to build a national mythology, they can also transform, revise or subvert this mythology.

There were a number of Northern Irish adaptations of *Antigone* during the 'Troubles.' Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes* brings a transnational and transhistorical dimension to the hunger strike, but also draws on the special resonance of the text in Northern Ireland. He dates the Northern Irish *Antigone* to 1968. In an 'essay of seminal importance,'²⁴ Conor Cruise O'Brien used the text to report on a civil rights march in Derry, describing Antigone as 'an ethical and religious force.' His conclusion that that society would be 'safer without the trouble-maker from Thebes' is moderated by the observation that the loss of dignity inherent in the elimination of Antigone may result in 'man ... gain[ing] peace at the price of his soul.'²⁵ Heaney felt that at that time O'Brien was 'highly aware of the righteousness of their cause and highly sensitive also to the ominousness of the situation.'²⁶ By the early 1970s O'Brien had controversially revised his position: '... after four years of Antigone and her understudies and all those funerals – more than a hundred dead at the time of writing – you begin to feel that Ismene's commonsense and feeling for the living may make the more needful, if less

²³ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 260.

²⁴ Heaney, 'Title Deeds,' 417.

²⁵ Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Untitled,' *The Listener*, 24 October 1968, 526.

²⁶ Heaney, 'Title Deeds,' 417.

spectacular element in “human dignity.”²⁷ His argument that Antigone’s fight for the dignity of Polyneices leads to further casualties is based on expediency rather than morality. Heaney was critical of this revision and saw it as evidence of O’Brien moving ‘out of the chair of humanities and into the cabinet of Irish government, a move which for many of his early admirers amounted to a U-turn from the front line of protest to the back room of Creon’s palace.’²⁸ Tom Paulin, whose *The Riot Act* was one of three Northern Irish *Antigones* produced in 1984,²⁹ also saw O’Brien’s shift as a betrayal: ‘He misinterpreted the play, and in doing a version of it I set out to try and prove him wrong again.’³⁰ Conall Morrison’s 2004 production set the story of *Antigone* in the context of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, with Creon as a representation of Ariel Sharon. Like Morrison, Heaney was drawn to global conflict: ‘this long-standing concern with Antigone as our own special allegory is the very thing that made me disinclined to return to it. Besides, conditions in Northern Ireland have changed. The allegory doesn’t quite fit the situation that pertains there now.’³¹ While *The Burial at Thebes* retains base notes of other Northern Irish *Antigones*, it is an adaptation that looks beyond the borders of the province.

Heaney’s adaptation fits more comfortably into the transnational archive of *Antigones*. In text and performance, the play is a palimpsest; as each new translation or adaptation reinscribes the conflict between Creon and Antigone, the imprint of earlier versions is always faintly discernible. Edith Hall reports that the play had ‘already achieved the status of a universally acknowledged masterpiece within a century of its composition.’³² Mee and Foley report that no other play has been produced in as many different countries as *Antigone*.³³ They consider the

²⁷ Conor Cruise O’Brien, ‘Civil Rights: The Crossroads,’ in *States of Ireland*, ed. Conor Cruise O’Brien (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1972), 159.

²⁸ Heaney, ‘Title Deeds,’ 420.

²⁹ Harkin provides a detailed analysis of each production. Hugh Harkin, ‘Irish Antigones: Towards Tragedy without Borders?’, *Irish University Review* 38, no. 2 (2008).

³⁰ Tom Paulin, ‘Antigone,’ *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Version of Greek Tragedy*, ed. Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton (London: Methuen Publishing Limited, 2002), 167.

³¹ Heaney, ‘Title Deeds,’ 420.

³² Edith Hall, ‘Antigone and the Internationalization of Theatre in Antiquity,’ *Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage*, ed. Erin B. Mee and Helene P. Foley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 57.

³³ 609 productions of *Antigone* are recorded on the database at Oxford University from 1900-2000. Edith Hall and Oliver Taplin, ‘Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama,’ (Oxford: University of Oxford, 1996), <http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/research->

narrative a 'global rather than a Western property to be reimagined, remixed and appropriated in response to specific historical, cultural and artistic needs.'³⁴

In his discussion of the process of adaptation Heaney highlights the significance of the performance history, focusing on the 1944 Anouilh production, the 1984 Polish adaptation by Alexander Wajda, and Athol Fugard's 1973 apartheid *Antigone, The Island*. He concludes that 'in a perverse way, this constant revisitation of the play made the Abbey's invitation a tempting one.'³⁵ These productions, translations and adaptations are all reimaginings of the source text, which was first written and performed in a very different social and cultural context. At the core of Greek tragedy was the idea that the play was remote in time even to their audience.³⁶ Edith Hall argues that the ancient Greek audience would have recognised the political immediacy of the play. She notes that the play 'opens at a moment of political crisis caused directly by internecine warfare.'³⁷ Jean Anouilh's wartime *Antigone*, representing the conflict between the resistance and collaborationists in Vichy France, changed the play forever. Stephen Wilmer notes that productions of *Antigone* after Anouilh are more likely to represent her 'defending human rights in defiance of an oppressive and arbitrary authority.' Fugard's 1973 adaptation focuses on the rights of political prisoners in Apartheid-era South Africa, while Wajda's *Antigone* aligned the title character with the solidarity movement in Poland in the early 1980s. Heaney explains that 'agreeing to provide a new version of *Antigone* was more than a conditioned response to a venerable work of antiquity, more than a reverential bow to the cultural authority of the Western canon.' Indeed, as Mee and Foley argue, it is a text that is 'ubiquitous' rather than universal.³⁸ By accepting the Abbey's commission Heaney was drawing upon all of the Northern Irish *Antigones* as well as the post-Anouilh *Antigones*.

collections/performance-database/productions?title=antigone&field_mp_start_year_value_slider%5Bmin%5D%5Bdate%5D=1900&field_mp_start_year_value_slider%5Bmax%5D%5Bdate%5D=2000&field_mp_prod_people_tid=&field_oid_value=&field_mp_assoc_arch_it_target_id=&sort_by=title&sort_order=ASC.

³⁴ Mee and Foley, *Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage*, 4-5.

³⁵ Heaney, 'Title Deeds,' 415.

³⁶ Ruth Scodel, *An Introduction to Greek Tragedy* (Leiden: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

³⁷ Hall, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering under the Sun*, 305.

³⁸ Mee and Foley, *Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage*, 3.

War on Terror: 'Whoever isn't for us / Is against us in this case.'

The political context of Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes* highlights his critique of the American led 'war on terror' and its parallels to the 'Troubles.' This criticism is developed primarily through contemporaneous lectures, interviews and production notes. In the 'Note' published at the conclusion of the Farrar, Strauss and Giroux edition (though not the Faber edition)³⁹ Heaney claims that 'the situation that pertains in Sophocles' play was being re-enacted in our own world. Just as Creon forced citizens of Thebes into an either/or situation in regard to Antigone, the Bush administration in the White House was using the same tactic to forward its argument for war in Iraq.'⁴⁰ His choice of the word 'force' in this context refers to a time when the United Nations Security Council was refusing to give the United States a mandate for military intervention in Iraq. The United States justified the invasion on the basis of self-defence, a contested premise under international law. In *The Burial at Thebes* Heaney highlights the states of exception that have determined the treatment of prisoners, both in the 'war on terror' and in Northern Ireland. In 'Title Deeds' he explains the way that he understands the play: 'Basically Creon turns Polyneices into a non-person, in much the same way as the first internees in Northern Ireland and the recent prisoners in Guantanamo Bay were turned into non-persons.'⁴¹ By aligning the internees in Northern Ireland, those men imprisoned without charge during the early 1970s, with the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay who were (and remain) denied the protection of the Geneva Conventions, Heaney engages directly with the basis of the Northern Ireland prison campaign – the right to be recognised as prisoners of war, or political prisoners.

The entrenched positions of Nationalist and Unionist paramilitaries and the UK government had resulted in a stalemate in the 1970s and 1980s. Heaney's appropriation of *Antigone* suggests that the approach taken by the United States in the war on terror was just as unlikely to 'defeat' terrorism. Long before the Patriot

³⁹ Farrar, Strauss and Giroux is his US publisher, while Faber and Faber is his UK publisher.

⁴⁰ Seamus Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2004), 76.

⁴¹ Heaney, 'Title Deeds,' 422.

Act was introduced in the United States, the United Kingdom was one of the first democratic governments to derogate *habeus corpus* in its own territory by enacting a range of legislative measures that limited the legal rights of those subject to arrest and prosecution.⁴² The counterinsurgency measures in Northern Ireland normalised a state of exception from the rule of law.⁴³ These strategies radicalised the Nationalist community during the 1970s, escalating and protracting the conflict. Heaney's characterisation of Creon as the authoritarian leader who cracks down on dissenters implies that there will be a similar outcome in the 'war on terror.' The idea that we should 'talk to terrorists' was as controversial in 2004 as it had been in Thatcher's Britain in the 1980s. For Heaney, writing a version of *Antigone* for the Abbey in 2003, the parallels to modern geopolitics were unavoidable:

When the Abbey asked me to do the *Antigone*, President Bush and his secretary of defence were forcing not only their own electorate but the nations of the world into an either/or situation with regard to the tyrant of Baghdad. If you were not for state security to the point that you were ready to bomb Iraq, you could be represented as being in favour of terrorism. If you demurred at the linking of Al Qaeda to the despotism of Saddam Hussein, you were revealing yourself as unsound on important issues, soft on terrorism. If you demurred at the suspension of certain freedoms, you were unpatriotic.'⁴⁴

Heaney's objection to the polarisation of the debate is reinforced in an implied criticism of the paucity of the language. In a later interview Heaney describes the language of Bush at this time as 'discourteous' and discusses the need for 'something bardic' in times of crisis, 'a search for some other language.'⁴⁵ In the 1980s he had written about the place of poetry in a context of division and sectarianism, arguing that 'the subtleties and tolerances' of literary expression

⁴² The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act of 1973, 1978, 1987 and 1996, The Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act of 1974, 1976, 1984 and 1989. Didier Bigo and Emmanuel-Pierre Guittet, 'Northern Ireland as Metaphor: Exception, Suspicion and Radicalization in The 'war on Terror',' *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 6 (2011): 486, doi:10.1177/0967010611425532.

⁴³ The Temporary Provisions Act of 1976 contained the legislative change, meaning imprisoned terror suspects were treated as ordinary criminals rather than political prisoners, that led to the dirty protests of the late 70s and the 1981 hunger strikes.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 421-2.

⁴⁵ Pollard, 'Seamus Heaney, Poet.'

were 'precisely what they had to contribute to the coarseness and intolerances of the public life.'⁴⁶

Heaney's translation of *Antigone* draws out the parallels between Creon and George W. Bush by modelling Creon's dialogue on Bush's public statements. The allusions to Bush's rhetoric are used to establish the play as a critique of American policy regarding terror suspects and the military intervention in Iraq. In the opening of the play Antigone reports to Ismene what Creon has said about their brother:

'I'll flush 'em out,' he says.
Whoever isn't for us
Is against us in this case.⁴⁷

As Stephen Wilmer notes, this line echoes Bush's claim concerning the Taliban ('we'll smoke em out').⁴⁸ Heaney's language choices in these lines emphasise the difference between translation and adaptation. In Kitto's translation, for example, the lines are rendered 'he is coming / to make it public here, that no one may / be left in ignorance' (ll. 32-4).⁴⁹ Heaney's paraphrase of Bush immediately links his adaptation to the 'war on terror.' In Creon's first speech there are also linguistic echoes of Bush:

... Nor would I,
Ever, have anything to do
With my country's enemy. For the patriot,
Personal loyalty always must give way
To patriotic duty.

Solidarity, friends,
Is what we need. The whole crew must close ranks.

⁴⁶ Seamus Heaney, 'Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry from Northern Ireland,' *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002), 127.

⁴⁷ Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes*, 7.

⁴⁸ Stephen Elliot Wilmer and Audrone Zukauskaitė, *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 386.

⁴⁹ Sophocles, *Antigone, Oedipus the King, Electra*, trans. H. D. F. Kitto, ed. Edith Hall, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), Kindle edition.

The safety of our state depends upon it.⁵⁰

The use of simple propaganda techniques, especially the identification of a common enemy, were the dominant feature of the president's speeches at that time.⁵¹ The creation of an 'us' and 'them' turned the response to 9/11 into a battle where good would triumph over evil. The opposition of 'enemy' and 'patriot' is particularly significant given the introduction of the Patriot Act in 2001.

The characterisation of Creon is underpinned in an earlier version of the 'Wonders of Man' chorus, published in *The New Yorker* prior to the Abbey production and just days before the invasion of Iraq, though a slightly more nuanced Creon emerges in *The Burial at Thebes*. Heaney says: 'The New Yorker was looking for something to publish so I gave them the chorus and called it Sophoclean, but it could equally have been called An Open Letter to President Bush.'⁵² In Heaney's characterisation of Creon there is an implicit criticism of the intransigence of George W. Bush. Ruth Scodel reads the original ode as a celebration of 'human effort and the ingenuity that has enabled humanity to achieve all the skills of civilisation' and suggests that the song 'gives a more sympathetic presentation of Creon's views than he himself can.'⁵³

The choice of a Greek chorus as an occasional poem for *The New Yorker* is in keeping with Heaney's tendency to engage in public debates using poetic forms that have traditionally been used for 'public' poetry. The Greek chorus provides him with a generically appropriate platform for presenting his own view of the impending conflict: 'The choral ode, the choral mode, allows for and almost requires a homiletic note that you would tend to exclude from personal lyric.'⁵⁴ This 'homiletic' note is apparent in 'Sophoclean,' and the differences between this and the later version of the 'Wonders of Man' chorus reinforce the criticism of the military intervention in Iraq. In 'Sophoclean' he writes:

⁵⁰ Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes*, 16.

⁵¹ Kevin Coe et al., 'No Shades of Gray: The Binary Discourse of George W. Bush and an Echoing Press,' *Journal of Communication* 54, no. 2 (2004), 235, doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2004.tb02626.x.

⁵² Jenny McCartney, 'Seamus Heaney Has Seen It All,' *The Telegraph*, September 13, 2007. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3667860/Seamus-Heaney-has-seen-it-all.html>.

⁵³ Scodel, *An Introduction to Greek Tragedy*, 113.

⁵⁴ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 421.

Homemaker, thought-taker, measure of all things
 He survives every danger except death
 And will yield to nothing else. Nothing
 Else, good or evil, is beyond him.⁵⁵

Here Heaney presents Creon as an unassailable and uncompromising character and he draws on the opposition between good and evil in Bush's speeches. The textual references to the law of the gods are deemphasised in this version, in contrast to the later chorus:

Homemaker, thought-taker, measure of all things,
 He can heal with herbs and read the heavens
 Nothing seems beyond him. When he yields to his gods,
 When truth is the treadle of his loom
 And justice the shuttle, he'll be shown respect –
 The city will reward him.⁵⁶

In this version there is a greater sense of the relationship between a ruler and his people. Instead of yielding only to death, this version allows the possibility that Creon will yield to his gods by focusing on truth and justice, and the 'city will reward him.'

Heaney's translation of this chorus can be read as a comment on the hubris of US foreign policy. He invites us to read Bush's actions as ones which transgress the bounds of his authority. In the final stanzas of 'Sophoclean' he writes:

But let him once
 Overbear or overstep

What the city allows, treat law
 As something he can decide for himself –

⁵⁵ Seamus Heaney, 'Sophoclean,' *The New Yorker*, March 3, 2003.

⁵⁶ Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes*, 25.

Then let this marvel of the world remember:
When he comes begging we will turn our backs.

In this version Creon is presented as an unyielding ruler who 'overbear[s]' as he 'overstep[s]' what the city allows, who makes arbitrary decisions about the law. The context is important in understanding this. As it was being published in *The New Yorker*, the US government was forging ahead with a military intervention in Iraq, although the United Nations Charter expressly allows the use of force only in self-defence or with authorisation from the Security Council.⁵⁷ In the later version of the chorus in *Burial at Thebes* Heaney restores the Irish dimension:

But let him once

Overstep what the city allows,
Tramp down right or treat the law
Wilfully, as his own word,
Then let this wonder of the world remember:
He'll have put himself beyond the pale.
When he comes begging we will turn our backs.⁵⁸

'Beyond the pale,' with its evocation of the historical region in Ireland that marked the limits of English jurisdiction, not only suggests that Creon is placing himself outside of the law, but also foregrounds the historical conflict between England and Ireland. It is a phrase that invites us to evaluate where characters stand in relation to the law. Because it is the chorus who has delivered this assessment of Creon, we are positioned to question his judgement, whereas later in the play, in the last exchange between Creon and Antigone, we read it as a sign of his obduracy: 'There's no blood on my hands here. It was she / Who put herself beyond the pale.'⁵⁹ Antigone, he says, has chosen her fate.

Although the dominant reading of *Antigone* in the late twentieth century has privileged Antigone's claim, the Greek audience would have understood the moral

⁵⁷ Christopher Greenwood, 'International Law and the Pre-Emptive Use of Force: Afghanistan, Al-Qaida, and Iraq,' *San Diego International Law Journal*, no. 4 (2003): 7-37.

⁵⁸ Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes*, 25.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

tension between Antigone and Creon in terms of what Harkin describes as a 'collision of equally justified moral powers.'⁶⁰ While Heaney deplores the divisive tactics of the Bush administration, in the play he attempts to rediscover the complexity of Creon's position. In his Creon's first appearance on stage he says:

... We have entered calmer waters.
 Our ship of state was very nearly wrecked
 But the gods have kept her safe
 ... Until a man has passed this test of office
 And proved himself in the exercise of power,
 He can't truly be known ...⁶¹

The play deals with the exercise of power, and the audience is positioned to read Creon's later actions in terms of this 'test of office.' Since classical antiquity, the central issue of Antigone has been whether Creon or Antigone is in the right. There are two dominant readings of the source text: one holds that Creon is wrong and the other, influenced by Hegel's nineteenth century reading, sees the tension between Antigone and Creon as one of competing rightness. Heaney's essay 'Title Deeds' established his sympathy with the Hegelian position.⁶²

The views of other characters help to shape the audience response to Creon. The Creon described in the 'wonders of man' chorus is not the same Creon who reverses his judgement at the conclusion of the play, too late to save Antigone, Haemon and Eurydice. As he pleads for clemency for Antigone, Haemon tells Creon:

Nobody can be sure they're always right.
 The ones who are fullest of themselves that way
 Are the emptiest vessels.'⁶³

⁶⁰ Harkin, 'Irish Antigones,' 293.

⁶¹ Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes*, 16.

⁶² Heaney, 'Title Deeds,' 414.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 43.

These lines suggest that Creon has failed the test of office established earlier in the play. The subsequent change emerges from the advice of the blind prophet, Tiresias, who tells him:

That body lying out there decomposing
 Is where the contagion starts ...
 Consider well, my son. All men make mistakes.
 But mistakes don't have to be forever,
 They can be admitted and atoned for.
 It's the overbearing man who is to blame.
 Pull back. Yield to the dead. Don't stab a ghost.
 What can you win when you only wound a corpse?⁶⁴

The warning makes it clear that intransigence is the greatest fault and that there is nothing to be gained from 'wound[ing] a corpse,' or punishing the dead for their actions in life. Scodel observes that in Greek tragedy 'a ruler who rejects any advice he does not want to hear is on the path to tyranny.'⁶⁵ After the deaths of his family Creon acknowledges that the 'hammer-blow of justice' has brought him low.⁶⁶

Heaney's adaptation highlights the relationship between power and responsibility. By exploring the complexity of Creon's role Heaney is able to interweave two separate political crises to highlight the way that both situations were exacerbated by intransigent leadership. In his final speech Creon acknowledges that his own actions initiated the tragedy:

... Everything I've touched
 I have destroyed. I've nobody to turn to
 No where I can go. My recklessness and pride
 I paid for in the end. The blow came quick.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid., 58-9.

⁶⁵ Scodel, *An Introduction to Greek Tragedy*, 112.

⁶⁶ Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes*, 70.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 74.

Creon's epiphany leads to the final speech of the play, delivered by the chorus, which counsels wisdom in rulers as 'those who overbear will be brought to grief.'⁶⁸ In the explanatory note published at the conclusion of the text Heaney argues: 'Creon, of course, has a point, and a responsibility. His tragedy ... has to do with his overbearing rather than his basic position. Modern audiences are more sympathetic to Antigone's defiant embrace of the law of the gods, her instinctive affirmation of what we might now call a human right against the law-and-order requirements of the state, but in the dramatic balance that Sophocles achieves, Creon's sufferings weigh heavily and evenly in the scales.'⁶⁹ Heaney acknowledges that Bush did have a responsibility for state security, but claims that he mishandled this responsibility by fostering division and distrust. Ruth Scodel observes that Creon's stated position that he will privilege public interest over personal loyalties was 'resonant in the fifth century.'⁷⁰ In 'Title Deeds' he explains: 'And all this circumstance would have made it easy to proceed with a treatment of Sophocles' play where Creon would have been a cipher for President Bush and the relationship between audience and action would have been knowing and predicated on the assumption of political agreement. But to have gone in this direction would have been reductive and demeaning, both of Sophocles' art and of the huge responsibility the White House must bear for national security.'⁷¹ This comment recognises the limitations of using the adaptation of a classical text only as immediate political commentary, an approach that would make *The Burial at Thebes* less relevant as time distances us from the military intervention of 2003.

The interweaving of a second strand of the text, the funeral of IRA hunger striker Francis Hughes, adds another dimension to the adaptation. In *The Burial at Thebes* Heaney shows how these histories are connected; the text performs a commemorative function at the same time as it acts as a real-time critique of US foreign policy. As Michael Rothberg explains: 'Memories are mobile; histories are implicated in each other ... understanding political conflict entails understanding the interlacing of memories in the force field of public space.'⁷² Heaney highlights the way that each situation was exacerbated by intransigent leadership – that of

⁶⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 76.

⁷⁰ Scodel, *An Introduction to Greek Tragedy*, 111.

⁷¹ Heaney, 'Title Deeds,' 421-2.

⁷² Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 312.

Margaret Thatcher, of George W. Bush, and of the IRA leadership. We can use the present to read the past by reading the hunger strike in terms of the 'war on terror,' or use the memory of the past to imagine the future, by considering the ways in which the 'war on terror' repeats some of the mistakes made by British government in Northern Ireland. Heaney becomes a Tiresian figure who warns of the potential consequences of this course of action by showing the way that polarising the community leads to stalemate.

Lamentation and the burial of Francis Hughes: 'No keening, no interment, no observance / Of any of the rites'

Heaney's final decision to accept the commission from the Abbey was made after passing through an Irish 'eye of the needle ... to re-enter the kingdom of Thebes.'⁷³ Just as he had found in the choral ode an appropriate vehicle for public comment when he wrote *The Cure at Troy*, now he saw the potential for lamentation to augment the Irish dimension of his adaptation. In the process of making a decision about whether to accept the Abbey Theatre's commission Heaney found the 'immediate writerly urge' when 'theme and tune coalesced' in the language of a traditional Irish lament.⁷⁴ Heaney cites 'The Lament for Art O'Leary' as a text that gave him 'the poetic go-ahead.' Considered a major work in Irish literature, Eibhlin Dhubh Ni Chonail's eighteenth century poem for her husband, killed in 1773, was first spoken or chanted in Irish. It was passed on through the oral tradition and was first written down from 1800.⁷⁵ Heaney identifies the genre of lamentation as one that gives him permission to do the work of memory in his adaptation of *Antigone*. Patricia Lysaght describes the lament as a 'structured personal, tribal and communal response to death in the traditional manner ... a public document in response to a public duty.'⁷⁶ Lysaght explains how laments function to smooth the passage of the deceased into the underworld. Angela Bourke argues that 'the lamenter occupies a marginal position between the worlds of the living and the dead ... gaining in the process a licence to speak

⁷³ Heaney, 'Title Deeds,' 422.

⁷⁴ Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes*, 76.

⁷⁵ Angela Bourke, 'The Irish Traditional Lament and the Grieving Process,' *Women's Studies International Forum* 11, no. 4 (1988):287, doi:10.1016/0277-5395(88)90065-9.

⁷⁶ Patricia Lysaght, 'Caoineadh Os Cionn Coirp: The Lament for the Dead in Ireland,' *Folklore* 108, no. 1-2 (1997):73, doi:10.1080/0015587X.1997.9715938.

vehemently and even violently.⁷⁷ Bourke's argument rests on the premise that lamentation recognises anger as a 'fundamental part of grieving.'⁷⁸ In 'the Lament for Art O'Leary' Heaney recognises a text with 'exactly the right register' for the character of Antigone.⁷⁹ As an integral part of the mourning process, the practice of lamentation is indivisible from the rights of kin to mourn the dead.

Lamentation was also an important commemorative practice in Ancient Greece. In *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* Margaret Alexiou explains that it was an important and legislated public part of the funeral ritual in Ancient Greece, where it was inseparable from burial.⁸⁰ She explains that in antiquity, ritual lamentation, 'the spontaneous weeping of the kinswomen,'⁸¹ was gradually replaced by the literary and social activity of men in mourning the dead; formal eulogies and elegies focused on commemoration and praise.⁸² Understood in this way, Heaney's appropriation of Antigone's lament, and his identification of her with Art O'Leary's wife, can be read as a defence of Antigone's position. To deny the proper rites of burial serves no purpose except to deepen divisions in the community.

The lamentation of the women is apparent in the prologue of *The Burial at Thebes*. Heaney uses poetic metre to distinguish between Antigone, Creon and the chorus, attempting to restore a 'metrical and musical register' to a text that in its original form is 'verse drama.'⁸³ Antigone believes that lamentation is her duty as the sister of Polyneices. For Heaney, Antigone's despair is best represented through the trimeter of 'The Lament for Art O'Leary.'⁸⁴ This is established in the opening lines:

Ismene, quick, come here!
 What's to become of us?
 Why are we always the ones?

⁷⁷ Bourke, 'The Irish Traditional Lament and the Grieving Process,' 289.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 290.

⁷⁹ Heaney, 'Title Deeds,' 423.

⁸⁰ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1974; 2002), 4.

⁸¹ Ibid., 103.

⁸² Ibid., 4.

⁸³ Heaney, 'Title Deeds,' 423.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 425.

There's nothing, sister, nothing
 Zeus hasn't put us through
 Just because we are who we are –
 The daughters of Oedipus.⁸⁵

Heaney's *Antigone* is isolated in her rage and grief. While other translations open with her calling to her 'own sister, dear Ismene'⁸⁶ or 'my own flesh and blood – dear sister, dear Ismene,'⁸⁷ in this version her opening line is presented as a simple imperative: 'quick, come here!' The separation between the mourning rituals of men and women is signalled in this opening, in which Antigone and Ismene discuss their obligations to Polyneices in terms of family and gender. Creon has explicitly banned lamentation, along with other formal rites of burial.

Memory of the 1981 Hunger Strike: 'What are Creon's rights / when it comes to me and mine?'

The interconnection of lamentation and burial rites leads to the central concern of the play. Heaney presents the funeral of Francis Hughes, the second IRA man to die in the 1981 hunger strike, as an example of the denial of the proper rites. On May 15 Hughes was to be buried in the village where both he and Seamus Heaney grew up. The plan was that his body would be removed from Forster Green hospital in Belfast, where a post mortem had taken place, and proceed through the Falls Road and on to the village of Toomebridge, where mourners would join the hearse to walk alongside the coffin on its final route to the family home in Bellaghy. Fearing that this route through nationalist areas would lead to violent incidents, the authorities delayed the release of the body for seven hours until the family agreed to an amended route out of Belfast. En-route the RUC made the decision to bypass Toomebridge, where a large crowd was waiting. At this point there was a physical altercation between the RUC⁸⁸ and the undertakers, during which

⁸⁵ Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes*, 5.

⁸⁶ Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. H. D. F. Kitto.

⁸⁷ Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone; Oedipus the King; Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York; London: Penguin Classics, 1984).

⁸⁸ Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Hughes's father was knocked to the ground. Seamus Heaney's recollection of this incident is an interesting example of the intersection of familial, local, national and transnational aspects of memory, what De Cesari and Rigney describe as the 'multi-scalarity of socio-cultural processes.'⁸⁹ The 'dishonour[ing]' of the corpse described in the opening scene of *The Burial at Thebes* is reminiscent, for Heaney, of the events of the Hughes funeral cortege, the 'removal of the remains.' In 'Title Deeds' Heaney asks 'Who owned it? By what right did the steel ring of the defence forces close round the remains of one who was son, brother, comrade, neighbour, companion?' He describes the crowd's response to the 'hijacking' of the body as 'a sense that something inviolate had been assailed by the state.'⁹⁰ By focusing on the rite of burial he is able to deflect more difficult issues associated with the character of Hughes and the strike as a political action.

The narrative surrounding the 1981 hunger strike has been contested, even within the Nationalist community. By consciously stepping away from Irish narratives of renewal through sacrifice, Heaney provides a space for an alternative memory of the hunger strike. In 1984 Richard Kearney argued that the IRA hunger strikers were 'realigning their suffering with a mythico-religious tradition of renewal through sacrifice: a tradition stretching back through the 1916 leaders ... to the timeless personae of Cuchulain on the one hand and Christ on the other.'⁹¹ Padraig O'Malley describes the public statements of the hunger strikers as 'ritualistic ... banal, self-conscious, narcissistic assertions of a nobility of purpose that puts belief in vague abstractions above belief in life itself.'⁹² Heaney deliberately avoids the 'heroic' narrative of the Irish past and of using that past as a justification for violence in the present. For him, the choice to remain silent at the time was an expression of his view of poetic authority and responsibility. In *The Burial at Thebes* he commemorates the event that he had felt unable to discuss publicly in 1981.

⁸⁹ De Cesari and Rigney, *Transnational Memory*, 5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 412.

⁹¹ Richard Kearney, 'Myth and Motherland,' *Field Day Pamphlets*, no. 5, (Derry: Field Day Theatre Co., 1984), 62.

⁹² Padraig O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 116.

The Burial at Thebes is a form of commemoration that highlights the right to mourn the death of Francis Hughes without mythologising his sacrifice. Hughes's death becomes a touchstone for Heaney to explore the responsibility of the poet in a time of conflict. He had first written of the death of Francis Hughes in 1984 in Section IX of the 'Station Island' sequence, a poem loosely modelled on Dante's *Purgatorio*. In the aftermath of the hunger strikes – the early 1980s – the symbolism of Dante's *Commedia* appealed to him and he felt it was a way to resolve 'the main tension between two often contradictory commands: to be faithful to the collective historical experience and to be true to the recognitions of the emerging self.'⁹³ From the opening lines of the poem from 'Station Island' it is clear that Heaney is writing about the hunger strikes: 'My brain dried like spread turf, my stomach / Shrank to a cinder and tightened and cracked' (ll. 1-2). The imagery evokes the rural labour of turf cutting in Bellaghy, highlighting Hughes's Irishness. It also echoes the physical description of an earlier martyr, 'The Tollund Man': 'His last gruel of winter seeds / Caked in his stomach' (ll. 7-8). This representation of Hughes as sacrificial victim is not sustained. In the first stanza he describes the criminal activities of the speaker – 'the bomb flash' in a small town, and the speaker leaving the scene in the back of a car 'like a white-faced groom, / A hit-man on the brink, emptied and deadly' (ll. 11-2). Heaney appears to draw upon the man's own criminal past: 'When the police yielded my coffin, I was light / As my head when I took aim' (ll. 13-4). This suggests an exhilaration at his involvement in IRA violence, or a failure to consider the consequences. The connotations of surrender in 'yield' refer to the process by which the body was removed from the prison, though it is a line that stands in contrast to his later exploration of the surrender of the body in *The Burial at Thebes*.

In the opening of the next stanza the voice shifts from the dying hunger striker to the poet. Heaney invokes the history of the Anglo-Irish conflict, but does not use it to elevate the suffering of the hunger strikers. The stanza opens with the lines: 'This voice from blight / And hunger died through the black dorm' (ll. 15-6). There appears to be a suggestion of martyrdom of the hunger strikers with this allusion to the potato blight and the great famine, and the imagery of the 'drift of mass

⁹³ Seamus Heaney, 'Envies and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet,' *Irish University Review* 15, no. 1 (1985): 19.

cards / At his shrouded feet' (ll 17-8). Rather than using this historical context to develop a heroic narrative around Francis Hughes, however, the stanza ends with uneasiness and unrest:

Unquiet soul, they should have buried you
 In the bog where you threw your first grenade,
 Where only helicopters and curlews
 Make their maimed music, and sphagnum moss
 Could teach you its medicinal repose
 Until, when the weasel whistles on its tail
 No other weasel will obey its call. (ll. 23-9)

The shift in voice from the hunger striker to the poet brings an element of judgement. By addressing Hughes as 'unquiet soul,' Heaney suggests that he will not rest in peace. This is reinforced in the clause that follows, in which a direct link is made between Hughes's participation in paramilitary violence and his death. The ambivalence with which the persona addresses the recent ghost is highlighted in the contrast between natural imagery and the technology of armed conflict. The auditory imagery of the 'maimed music' of 'helicopters and curlews' disrupts the pastoral image of repose and evokes the British military presence in Ulster. The potential 'repose' of the bog, a trope appropriated from his earlier bog body sequence, is disrupted by the territorial, predatory call of the 'weasel whistle.' As in the other poems of the 'Station Island' sequence, Heaney uses the encounter with the purgatorial shade to examine the responsibility of the poet in a time of conflict. The ghost of Hughes provides an opportunity for self-reflection, and the speaker concludes 'lulled and repelled by his own reflection' (l. 64).

In 'Frontiers of Writing' Heaney recalls attending a formal dinner at Oxford University on the night that Hughes was buried, and contrasts this with the imagined wake in Co. Derry. In this essay Heaney indicates how pivotal an experience the deaths of the hunger strikers were for him as a constitutional nationalist. He introduces the idea that the choice to not speak in support of them at the time was a decision not taken lightly and a cause of regret even so many years later. He describes his own difficulty in coming to terms with the paradox:

'What was in the eyes of the world at large the death of an IRA hunger striker was in the eyes of a smaller, denser world the death of a son and neighbour.'⁹⁴ He acknowledges the sense of personal obligation as a neighbour, if not as a nationalist. Heaney abhors the tactics of the IRA: 'the spectacle of a fast to the death being used as a weapon in what was by then essentially a propaganda war.'⁹⁵ At the same time, he is empathetic towards 'those who so totally chose the role of victim in order to expose the total intransigence of those in power.' In the later interviews in *Stepping Stones* he elaborates on his own conflicted feeling about Hughes:

Francis Hughes was a neighbour's child, yes, but he was also a hitman and his Protestant neighbours would have considered him involved in something like a war of genocide against them rather than a war of liberation against the occupying forces of the crown. At that stage, the IRA's self-image as liberators didn't work much magic with me. But neither did the too-brutal simplicity of Margaret Thatcher's 'A crime is a crime is a crime. It is not political.' My own mantra in those days was the remark by Milosz that I quote in 'Away From it All': 'I was stretched between contemplation of a motionless point and the command to participate actively in history.'⁹⁶

The motionless point, the intransigence of both sides during the stalemate, and the 'command' to participate, became a recurring theme in Heaney's discussions of the responsibility of the writer. He later confessed that he felt that he had failed poetry at times 'when I should have disregarded Milosz's injunction and my own censor and let bad spirits rather than good spirits choose me, as he says, 'for their instrument.'⁹⁷

This idea of allowing the 'bad spirits' to direct him is particularly interesting in terms of his focus on Hughes in his discussion of adapting *Antigone*. Of all of the hunger strikers, Hughes was possibly the least sympathetic figure to those outside of the Nationalist community. At the time of his arrest, he was infamous as the

⁹⁴ Heaney, 'Frontiers of Writing,' 186.

⁹⁵ Heaney, 'Frontiers of Writing,' 186.

⁹⁶ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 261.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 468.

most wanted man in Northern Ireland; as a triggerman for the IRA he was responsible for the deaths of between 12 and 30 people.⁹⁸ Hughes lives on in Republican memory as 'fearless and tenacious,' 'one of the bravest soldiers of the armed struggle against British rule.'⁹⁹ Heaney did have a connection to the Hughes family through his home village, but Bellaghy was also the home of the ninth hunger striker to die. Thomas McElwee was Hughes's cousin and arguably a more sympathetic character.¹⁰⁰ It is Hughes, though, and not McElwee, who becomes a recurring figure in Heaney's work.

One of the most interesting aspects of Heaney's treatment of Hughes's death is his defence of the right to mourn in relation to the contentious issue of victimhood in Northern Ireland. Debate around who can be considered a victim has had a significant impact on the commemoration of the Troubles. Within the province there is little agreement about what constitutes victimhood, with some victims groups objecting to an approach that creates a hierarchy of victims. Some stakeholders support inclusive definitions of victimhood, while others believe that the term must exclude anyone who was associated with a paramilitary group. In their study of the secondary victims of the violence, the relatives of those killed by state actors, Bill Rolston and Mairead Gilmartin identify the tendency to categorise victims as 'deserving and undeserving.'¹⁰¹ Civilians outrank combatants in the hierarchy, with women and children being considered the most innocent of victims.¹⁰² In *Lost Lives*, a 'chronicle' of the deaths of the 'Troubles,' the authors have chosen a 'non-judgmental' approach.¹⁰³ By differentiating between different categories of victim (for example, by identifying paramilitary affiliation and

⁹⁸ David McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (London: Mainstream, 1999), 860.

⁹⁹ An Phlobacht, 'Francis Hughes – Died on May 12th 1981 on Hunger Strike in the H-Blocks,' May 12, 2016. <http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/23032>

¹⁰⁰ Hughes, McElwee and Heaney are all buried in the same small cemetery in Bellaghy; <http://irishgraveyards.ie/>.

¹⁰¹ Bill Rolston and Mairead Gilmartin, *Unfinished Business: State Killings and the Quest for Truth* (Beyond the Pale Publications, 2000).

¹⁰² Sara McDowell, 'Who Are the Victims? Debates, Concepts and Contestation in "Post-Conflict" Northern Ireland,' <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/introduction/smc07whoarethevictims.html>.

¹⁰³ David McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Co., 1999), 15.

religion) they invite readers to 'bring their own attitudes to bear, ranking different categories as deserving of differing degrees of sympathy.'¹⁰⁴

Heaney's defence of the right to mourn is, in one sense, an assault on the rights of those who have been victims of paramilitary violence. Although the hunger strikes were premised on violence against the self rather than paramilitary targets, the men were representative of an organisation that used violence as a political strategy and Hughes's victims were not only soldiers and policemen but also civilians, including at least two children. In Heaney's memory of the hunger strike Francis Hughes can be both perpetrator and victim, an object of violence and an object of mourning. The deaths of the hunger strikers can be both a propaganda exercise and an 'an awesome sacrifice.' It can be a memory with a national and transnational dimension. Heaney shows that there can be more than one truth exposed through the excavation of memory.

The Burial at Thebes begins *in medias res*; Polyneices, who represents Hughes, has died before the action of the play begins. Heaney focuses on the right of communities to engage in proper burial practices. The conflict in the play is initiated by Creon's proscription of funeral rites for Polyneices. The character is stripped of personhood and his body becomes a symbol of the rights of the community; the conflict that emerges is one between the overbearing ruler and his people. The opposition between the claims of kinship and the law is represented in the conflict between Antigone and Creon. The renaming of *Antigone* as *The Burial at Thebes* foregrounds the right of the community to engage in the traditional rites of mourning. Heaney believes that burial is a word that 'recalls to us our destiny as members of a mortal species and reminds us, however subliminally, of the need to acknowledge and allow the essential dignity of every human creature.'¹⁰⁵

While Antigone is often used to represent individual rights, in Heaney's adaptation she represents the family. The claim she has on Polyneices is not hers alone. In the opening of *Burial* she informs Ismene of Creon's edict:

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Seamus Heaney, 'Search for the Soul of Antigone,' *The Guardian*, November 2, 2005. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/nov/02/theatre.classics>.

Word has come down from Creon
 There's to be no laying to rest,
 No mourning, and the corpse
 Is to be publicly dishonoured
 His body's to be dumped
 Disposed of like a carcass,
 Left out for the birds to feed on.
 If you so much as throw him
 The common handful of clay
 You'll have committed a crime.

This is law and order
 In the land of good King Creon.¹⁰⁶

The dishonouring of the corpse is the ultimate indignity for Antigone. The unpleasant connotations of 'dumped' and 'disposed,' followed by the simile of carrion, suggest that the funeral rituals are what separate humans and animals. Antigone sees the proscription of the funeral rites as a violation of natural law. While Ismene counsels caution, Antigone dismisses her warnings: 'You and the laws of the land!'¹⁰⁷ Creon tells the chorus that Polyneices is 'forbidden / Any ceremonial whatsoever. / No keening, no interment, no observance / Of any of the rites.'¹⁰⁸ Creon's insistence that Polyneices be denied the rights of a citizen of Thebes (the twinned ritual of lamentation and burial integral to funerary practices in Ancient Greece) constitutes a punishment beyond death. In relation to the source text, Zeitlin argues that 'Kreon's refusal to honour the rights of the dead offends against the entire cultural order, against the gods as well as against persons and the collective of the city.'¹⁰⁹ In Heaney's adaptation, the offence against the people is associated with Francis Hughes, reinforcing the idea that the family and the community have a right to mourn the dead.

¹⁰⁶ Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes*, 7.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰⁹ Froma Zeitlin, 'Thebes: Theatre of Self and Society in Athenian Drama,' in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?: Athenian Drama in Its Social Context*, ed. John J. Winkler (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 151.

Heaney's adaptation establishes an important distinction between the rights of the mourners and the rights of the deceased. Creon suggests that those who have been political agitators are less worthy of mourning than patriotic citizens of Thebes. When the guard first brings news that Polyneices has been buried under a coat of dust by someone 'observing all the customs' Creon challenges him: 'The gods, you think, are going to attend / to this particular corpse? Preposterous.'¹¹⁰ He goes on to describe the 'disaffected elements' at work in Thebes, 'a certain poisonous minority / Unready to admit the rule of law.'¹¹¹ He later tells Antigone that her observance of the burial rites for Polyneices dishonours her other fallen brother, Eteocles:

Antigone: The dead aren't going to begrudge the dead.

Creon: So wrong-doers and the wronged ones face the same?

Antigone: Polyneices was no common criminal.

Creon: He terrorized us. Eteocles stood by us.

Antigone: Religion dictates the burial of the dead.

Creon: Dictates the same for loyal and disloyal?

Antigone: Who knows what loyalty is in the underworld.¹¹²

Antigone's reference to Polyneices as 'no common criminal,' where most versions render the line 'not a slave'¹¹³ or 'villain' alludes to the British strategy of treating nationalist prisoners as ordinary common criminals rather than political prisoners. Creon's response, 'he terrorized us,' reinforces the idea that Polyneices's attempt to reclaim Thebes was an act of terror. This may be an allusion to Mrs Thatcher's public statements referring to the hunger strikers as terrorists. Heaney uses the present to comment on the past, specifically by using the treatment of Guantanamo prisoners in 2004 to reframe the way that we understand the issues in 1981.

The right to 'dignity' that extends to all peoples under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not extend to the dead. There is, however, a moral obligation to the living to engage in mourning rituals that preserve the

¹¹⁰ Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes*, 21.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹³ Harkin, 'Irish Antigones,' 305.

dignity of the deceased. Aleida Assmann observes that the eighteenth century marked the 'abolition of the rights of the dead person' as a result of 'cultural changes both in the legal system and in the concept of the subject.'¹¹⁴ In McEvoy and Conway's analysis of the role of law in political / cultural conflicts over the remains, they state: 'Death transforms the human body from a person to an object, and it is through this process of objectification that the notion of ownership often becomes synonymous with control of the remains.'¹¹⁵ The refusal of a decent burial is a problem only for the living. As Tiresias tells Creon in the conclusion of the play: 'No earthly power, no god in upper air / Exerts any authority over the dead.'¹¹⁶

Understood as a right of the living, the burial of Polyneices (and of Francis Hughes), becomes a site of conflict between the community and the state. Scodel observes that refusing burial is almost always condemned in Greek literature.¹¹⁷ In *The Burial at Thebes* Antigone asks her sister, Ismene: 'Are we sister, sister, brother / Or traitor, coward, coward ... What are Creon's rights / when it comes to me and mine?' The same question could be asked of the hunger strike memory – who owns the memory of Francis Hughes death? Is it his family or the IRA and Sinn Féin? In *Precarious Life* Judith Butler asks 'what makes for a grievable life?'¹¹⁸ She argues that we should 'critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others, and thus certain human lives are more grievable than others.'¹¹⁹ While Heaney describes burial and mourning rituals in terms of 'essential human dignity,' Butler's identification of a 'common human vulnerability' incorporates the way that the suffering of certain individuals is legitimised through discourse – that is, particularly in the post 9/11 world, by labelling them as 'terrorists' or 'detainees.'

¹¹⁴ Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 25.

¹¹⁵ Kieron McEvoy and Heather Conway, 'The Dead, the Law, and the Politics of the Past,' *Journal of Law and Society* 31, no. 4 (2004): 540, doi:10.1111/j.1467-6478.2004.00302.x.

¹¹⁶ Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes*, 61.

¹¹⁷ Scodel, 'An Introduction to Greek Tragedy,' 108.

¹¹⁸ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 20.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

From page to stage – ‘Mixing Bush with Beowulf’

It is possible that this blending of past and present is more effective on the page than on the stage. Although there have been a number of professional productions of *The Burial at Thebes*,¹²⁰ the two that Heaney was directly involved with were not critically successful. The first was Lorraine Pintal’s production, for which Heaney’s adaptation was commissioned, the centenary celebrations of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. In 2008 Heaney’s fellow Nobel Laureate, Derek Walcott, directed an opera adaptation at the Globe theatre in London, set in the Caribbean, and with a libretto by Heaney. The critical consensus in both productions is that the staging was at odds with the text. Critics feel that the directors have not done justice to the clarity of Heaney’s text or exploited the musicality of the different metres he employed for each of the major characters. The appropriation of a form from the oral tradition allows for the expression of communal grief and, at the same time, draws out the poetic elements of the lament, to present ‘poetry as poetry.’¹²¹ This metrical variation, a central focus of Heaney’s adaptation, is an aspect that theatre critics feel has been neglected.

The staging of the Abbey production attempted to highlight the transnational aspect of the text. The minimalist set with grey ‘concrete’ walls and drawbridges evoked a palace, but did not suggest any particular nation or culture. Antigone and Ismene were costumed in simple white dresses while the chorus were clothed in beige raincoats and trilby hats: ‘The mid 20th century traditional dress of the Chorus differentiated them socially and in terms of values from the ceremonial figure of Creon and the Guard who wore tunics associated with military dictatorships.’¹²² Wilmer argues that the staging of *The Burial at Thebes* at the Abbey Theatre in 2004 was at odds with the post-colonial sentiment of the text. The casting of an English accented Antigone (as opposed to a Derry accent to evoke Bernadette Devlin), the generic Latin American military costume of Creon, and the

¹²⁰ Including Barbican Centre, London (2007) and Nottingham Playhouse (2005). Hall and Taplin, ‘Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama.’

¹²¹ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Government of the Tongue,’ in *The Government of the Tongue: Selected Prose 1978-1987* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 5.

¹²² The Open University, ‘Classical Reception in Late Twentieth Century Drama and Poetry in English,’ (1996), <http://www2.open.ac.uk/ClassicalStudies/GreekPlays/>

choice of a director from Quebec suggest to Wilmer that the Abbey was making a deliberate choice to internationalise Irish theatre: 'Ireland was regarding itself as part of a global community, rather than in a stultifying relationship with the old British oppressor.'¹²³ Chris Morash's review for the *Times Literary Supplement* celebrates the transnationalism of the Abbey production: 'Mixing Bush with Beowulf, a version of a Greek play with a Quebecois director and designer and an Irish cast, *The Burial at Thebes* is a perversely appropriate addition to the centenary celebrations of Ireland's national theatre, if only because it suggests that the kind of anguished but intimate national drama on which the Abbey's reputation has rested for a century is rapidly being superseded by the porous culture of twenty first century Ireland.'¹²⁴ Michael Billington, writing for *The Guardian*, disagrees, arguing a dearth of 'political animus' in a production which, 'although played in modern dress, lacks any sense of cultural specificity.'¹²⁵ He suggests that 'the dice are loaded both by the directorial style and by Carl Fillion's design, which suggests some standard-issue, theatricalised tyranny.'¹²⁶ His argument is that the 'excessive theatricality' of the production is at odds with Heaney's adaptation. The tension between 'cultural specificity' and 'mixing Bush with Beowulf' does not necessarily lead to a coherent theatrical production.

Derek Walcott's operatic production for the Globe in London was also a critical failure. His staging of Heaney's *Burial at Thebes* located the action in the Caribbean. Rupert Christianson, reviewing the production for *The Telegraph*, feels that the production design was ineffective: 'Derek Walcott's staging, with costumes evoking some tinpot military dictatorship of the modern West Indies, was rudimentary and static,' concluding that Walcott should 'stick to the Nobel Prize-winning day job.'¹²⁷ In *The Times* Richard Morrison described the 'kindergarten orchestration' as 'dull

¹²³ Stephen E. Wilmer, 'Finding a Post-Colonial Voice for Antigone: Seamus Heaney's *Burial at Thebes*,' in *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds*, ed. Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 240.

¹²⁴ Chris Morash, 'Still Sorrowing, Here and There,' *Times Literary Supplement*, TLS, no. 5276 (2004).

¹²⁵ Michael Billington, 'The Burial at Thebes,' *The Guardian*, April 7, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2004/apr/07/theatre>.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Rupert Christianson, 'Review: The Burial at Thebes at Shakespeare's Globe,' *The Telegraph*, October 13, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/opera/3562119/Review-The-Burial-at-Thebes-at-Shakespeares-Globe.html>.

as ditchwater,' a production that would leave Sophocles 'gnashing whatever 2,400-year-old teeth he has left at the ineptitude of it all.' He claims that Walcott's staging is 'as inspired as a bus queue.'¹²⁸ The difficulty of interpreting the transnational element on the stage is not insurmountable, but the translation from text to stage certainly presents significant practical challenges.

Conclusion

In *The Burial at Thebes* Heaney's appropriation of the story of Antigone blends the nationalist collective memory of the 1981 hunger strikes and a transnational critique of the 'war on terror.' He is not merely taking a canonical work from classical antiquity to reveal something about life in the present, but is building on previous versions of that work: Sophocles' *Antigone*, Anouilh's and Brecht's *Antigone*, Wajda's *Antigone* and Fugard's *Antigone*, as well as the hundreds of other *Antigones* that have been performed around the world. By drawing on this performance history he is also drawing on a post 1948 conception of human rights, (one based upon protecting the individual from a repressive state) and is staking a claim on the memory of the 1981 hunger strikes by taking it outside a national and ethnic context. By excluding the blood sacrifice motif that had defined the militant nationalist movement and had been celebrated by the writers of the Irish literary revival, Heaney chooses not to read the event in terms of Catholic martyrdom but instead in terms of kinship and group rights. On the one hand, the Nationalist memory turns ever more inward and local. On the other, Heaney's play aligns the hunger strike with the second Iraq war and the treatment of terror suspects. This comparison has two key functions: firstly, it foregrounds the dangers of the type of divisive rhetoric employed by Bush in the lead up to the invasion of Iraq; and secondly it draws out the parallel between the denial of rights to Guantanamo prisoners and the interference with Francis Hughes's funeral rites. The transnational aspect of the text, drawing together the Troubles and the 'war on terror,' is amplified by the performance history of *Antigone* in the twentieth century, drawing out comparisons to Vichy France, South Africa under apartheid, and Cold War Poland. The literary text as a form of memory is truly portable, lifting

¹²⁸ Richard Morrison, 'A Great Tragedy That This Was Ever Staged,' *The Times*, October 14, 2008.

events out from physical 'sites of memory' and placing them within a transnational continuum of conflict and oppression.

CHAPTER 4: ELEGIES FOR POETS: 'BREAKING BREAD WITH THE DEAD'

*... though the great artists of the past could not change the course of history, it is only through their work that we are able to break bread with the dead, and without communion with the dead a fully human life is impossible.*¹

W. H. Auden

In *The Spirit Level* and *The Burial at Thebes* Heaney uses texts and images from classical antiquity to present fresh perspectives on political conflict in the present, and so the transnational flows are seen in movements across borders and across time. In his elegies, the transnational dimension of memory is manifested in very different ways: in the formal elements of the genre, and in forms of solidarity that are not based on national or ethnic identity. From the early years of his career, Heaney was forging relationships with the most important writers of the age. His positions at Oxford and Harvard, as well as his attendance at writers' festivals around the world, meant that he was as much a part of the community of cosmopolitan world poets as he was of the nationalist community of Northern Ireland. This allegiance leaves its mark on the elegies he wrote for other poets. In this chapter I examine how the cosmopolitan openness which would define his later work can be seen in these elegies, which reveal a form of solidarity which transcends national borders. Elegiac writing is an inherently mnemonic genre, and in his elegies for other poets Heaney memorialises poets who were mentors and friends.

For Seamus Heaney the elegy functions as a metaphorical 'breaking of the bread,' both a form of commemoration and a communion with the dead. The elegy has had a central place in Heaney's work since his first collection, *Death of a Naturalist*, and his writing encompasses a range of elegiac codes, including classical eclogues, the English pastoral and the modern elegy. He has written elegies for family members, for victims of the 'Troubles,' and for close friends. The elegies written for poets reveal Heaney's shifting perspective on the function of

¹ W. H. Auden, *Secondary Worlds: The TS Eliot Memorial Lectures* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 141.

elegy, the place of the poet, and the public nature of the genre. By choosing to elegise poets who, as well as being personal friends, had grappled throughout their own lives with the ethical representation of 'song and suffering,' Heaney contributes to an ongoing poetic dialogue about the responsibility of the poet. In the foreword to his first collection of critical prose, *Preoccupations*, Heaney writes of his 'half-clarified desire' to learn from the example of other poets.² He asks: 'how should a poet properly live and write? What is his relationship to be to his own voice, his own place, his literary heritage and his contemporary world?'³ This ongoing preoccupation is played out in the elegies for Robert Lowell, Joseph Brodsky, Ted Hughes, and Czeslaw Milosz.

Elegies provide a space for him to reflect upon his own poetic vocation, examine the idea of poetic responsibility and provide a record of important poets for future generations. By writing elegies for major poets, Heaney also writes himself into memory and into the literary tradition of poets as 'professional immortalizers.'⁴ In *The Life of the Poet* Lawrence Lipking classifies elegies for other poets as *tombeaux*, or poetic monuments: 'the tomb of the poet is written by other poets; their verses take him in.'⁵ In his elegies Heaney creates verbal monuments to his poetic mentors, and by creating these monuments he participates in shaping collective memory of the subjects. As public acts of remembrance, his elegies foreground some characteristics of the subject and disregard others. His commitment to speaking well of the dead has implications for this project of shaping memory. Elegiac writing is the active production of a memory of an individual and, as such, can be understood as a misremembering. The living poet allows the subject to live on through verse, but the subject is confined within the elegist's version of the past. As W. H. Auden wrote in his elegy for Yeats: 'the words of a dead man / Are modified in the guts of the living' ('In Memory of W. B. Yeats,' ll. 22-3). The act of writing an elegy is both homage and

² Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose, 1968-1978*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), 11, Kindle edition.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 29.

⁵ Lawrence Lipking, *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 139.

appropriation – by memorialising his mentors in verse, Heaney influences how they will be remembered.

These elegies become part of an ongoing conversation in verse between poets from different times, nations and language traditions. In his study of transnational poetics, Jahan Ramazani considers the way that genres travel and argues that to read elegies as ‘works that take up and recast specific literary conventions of mourning for the dead – you necessarily place them within a cross-nationally comparative framework.’ He argues that that elegiac transnationalism ‘redirects poetic mourning across national borders, building affective microcommunities that instance the possibilities of a public sphere not contained and subsumed by the nation-state.’⁶ Heaney’s elegies highlight the transnational dimension of public mourning and remembrance. In these elegies he identifies as part of a community of cosmopolitan poets.

Elegies and memory

Elegies are rooted in the traditions of lamentation in ancient Greece, and are one of the earliest literary examples of cultural memory. The elegy performs the work of cultural memory more effectively than other poetic forms by actively shaping our understanding of individuals who have died. Margaret Alexiou argues that the early Greek *elegos*, while not exclusively funereal, were associated with men and their purpose was ‘to speak well of the departed,’ differing from the ritual lamentation of women, which focused on grieving.⁷ In *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, Aleida Assmann argues that ‘the anthropological heart of cultural memory is *remembrance* of the dead.’⁸ She also observes that the practice of sharing a meal with the dead is an ancient form of preserving social memory.⁹ This is also the basis of ‘break[ing] bread with the dead,’ W.H. Auden’s metaphor for continuing dialogue with ‘great artists of the past.’ Assmann draws out the tension between remembering and forgetting in a culture: ‘While *fama* looks

⁶ Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 82.

⁷ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1974; 2002), 105.

⁸ Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilizations*, 23.

⁹ Ibid.

forward to future generations who will preserve forever an event deemed to be unforgettable, memory looks backward through the veil of oblivion into the past: it follows long faded, long forgotten tracks, and reconstructs those elements that are considered important for the present.’¹⁰ In preserving memories of dead poets, Heaney is conscious of speaking ‘well of the departed’ for present and future generations, even though to do so might be read as a misremembering of the past.

The English pastoral elegy derives from this tradition of writing for posterity and provides a model for the elegy which has a poet as its subject. Elegiac conventions have changed over time, and Heaney’s elegies reflect some of these shifts. In *The Classical Tradition*, Grafton, Most and Settis outline the foundational texts for the later English pastoral elegy, Theocritus’s *Idyll* and Virgil’s *Eclogues*. They write that post-classical elegies ‘normally move from lament to consolation; praise of the deceased emphasizes both the loss to the living and the deceased enduring fame or heavenly reward.’¹¹ Virgil’s *Eclogue 5* provides the most ‘imitated ancient model’ for later pastoral elegies mourning the death of poets, such as Milton’s ‘Lycidas.’¹² In the English literary tradition, ‘Lycidas’ and Spenser’s ‘Astrophel’ became prototypes of the pastoral elegy in which the dead poet is imagined as a shepherd. In *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*, Peter Sacks identifies and analyses the conventions of the pastoral elegy from Spenser to Yeats, but notes that in the aftermath of World War I people ‘found scant solace in imagined dialogues of mourning herdsmen.’¹³ As the pastoral elegy declined in popularity, the modern elegy became less concerned with consolation. David Kennedy observes that the conventions of elegy ‘no longer seem as settled as they once did.’¹⁴ In *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* Iain Twiddy argues that the pastoral elegy is not obsolete, but that it has evolved and changed to accommodate social and historical changes: ‘pastoral elegy is constitutionally about change and accepting change’ and is therefore

¹⁰ Ibid., 39.

¹¹ Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis, *The Classical Tradition*, vol. 21 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 303.

¹² Ibid., 304.

¹³ Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 261.

¹⁴ David Kennedy, *Elegy* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 11, Kindle edition.

'provisional.'¹⁵ Twiddy sees the elegy as a form which is 'feeding from the stock of the past.'¹⁶

While traditional elegiac conventions are often inverted or subverted in the modern elegy, the genre itself remains important. There has always been a connection between the genre of elegy and the formal mourning rituals of a culture. In *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*, Jahan Ramazani argues that, in the twentieth century, changes in elegy are 'best understood in relation not only to literary but also to social codes, including funeral rites, obituaries, and other protocols of bereavement.'¹⁷ He describes how the loss of traditional mourning rituals resulted in poetry becoming 'an important cultural space for mourning the dead.'¹⁸ Peter Sacks outlines how 'attitudes towards death in the twentieth century make it difficult to write a conventional elegy.'¹⁹ Ramazani distinguishes between traditional elegies which 'translate grief into consolation,'²⁰ and the modern elegy, which demonstrates 'not transcendence or redemption of loss, but immersion in it.'²¹ Both Sacks and Ramazani read the genre in terms of psychoanalytic theory: Sacks sees the traditional English elegy doing 'the work of mourning' and Ramazani reads the modern elegy as a work of 'melancholic mourning.'²²

While the insights into the conventions of the form provided in these studies provide a basis for reading Heaney's elegies, my focus will not be on how elegy performs the work of mourning. Rather, I am interested in how the elegy can be used to perform the work of cultural memory. Embedded within the codes of traditional elegy is the immortalisation of poets, as both subject and composer of elegy. Many of the most important elegies in the English language were written to mark the deaths of poets, and to be elegised might be seen as a rite of passage in

¹⁵ Iain Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (London: Continuum Literary Studies, 2012) 14, Kindle edition.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁷ Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), xi.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁹ Sacks, *The English Elegy*,

²⁰ Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²² *Ibid.*

the literary world. Lawrence Lipking observes: 'Few significant poets die without an elegy from a spokesman of the next poetic generation: an estimate of what they leave. Such elegies are at the heart of literary history, at once a memorial of the past and an attempt to improve upon it or put it to use.'²³ Heaney's elegies for Lowell, Hughes, Brodsky and Milosz perform this function: they construct a memory of the past and they 'put to use' elements of the subjects' work. In doing so Heaney draws out one of the paradoxes of elegy. As Kennedy observes: 'elegy is the story that begins at the end ... one individual's poetry continues because another's cannot.'²⁴ Heaney's allusions to the poetry of the subjects within each elegy exemplify this continuation through language, but is also an appropriation of the language and reputation of another.

Heaney draws upon the conventions of the elegiac writing but, like many elegists before him, shapes them to his own ends. As with his adaptation of *Antigone*, the elegies can be read as 'portable monuments.'²⁵ Ann Rigney observes that literary texts are 'by definition susceptible to being relocated, because they are valued as pieces of verbal art and hence preserved as a recognized part of a cultural heritage.'²⁶ This value as verbal art is enhanced through the allusiveness of Heaney's elegies, in which he adopts elements of style from the subject of the elegy. Renate Lachmann explains the significance of intertextuality in cultural memory, observing that when texts are inscribed onto earlier texts, they change them in the process.²⁷ She argues that 'the memory of the text is formed by the intertextuality of its references.'²⁸ In Heaney's elegies for poets, memory is shaped through formal conventions and allusion.

²³ Lipking, *The Life of the Poet*, 138.

²⁴ Kennedy, *Elegy*, 116.

²⁵ Ann Rigney, 'Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans,' *Poetics Today* 25, no. 2 (2004): 383, doi:10.1215/03335372-25-2-361.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 383.

²⁷ Renate Lachmann, 'Cultural Memory and the Role of Literature,' *European Review* 12, no. 2 (2004): 172, doi:10.1017/S106279870400016X.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

Establishing a pattern in 'Elegy' for Robert Lowell – 'The way we are living ... will have been our life'

While my primary concern is with elegies for poets included in *Electric Light* and *District and Circle*, the foundational text for this series of Heaney poems was written twenty years earlier in 'Elegy' for Robert Lowell. The incorporation of aspects of Lowell's own work in the elegy initiates a pattern that will be adopted in later elegies. Heaney's particular style of commemoration incorporates formal elements borrowed from the subject. Critical consensus holds that Heaney's shift in style in *Field Work* (1979), the collection in which 'Elegy' appears, shows Lowell's influence.²⁹ Michael Cavanagh identifies a range of ways in which Heaney adopts elements of Lowell's elegiac style in *Field Work*, including allusiveness and unattributed quotations. Heaney himself confesses to 'ventriloquizing for Robert Lowell' in another of *Field Work's* elegies.³⁰ Lipking writes that the *tombeau* will 'incorporate many reminiscences of the poet it memorializes – style, verse forms, images, specific lines – and it may even try, eerily, to impersonate his voice.'³¹ These forms of reminiscence are a feature of Heaney's elegies for other poets, and are first seen in his elegy for Lowell.

Heaney had first met Lowell in 1972 and he delivered the eulogy at his memorial service in London in 1977.³² In both the eulogy and the elegy he wrote for Lowell he conforms to social convention by 'speaking well of the departed.' Lowell, renowned for his influence as a confessional poet and also for his alcoholism and mental illness, had been a controversial figure in his final years, in part because of the way that he used verbatim extracts of letters from his former wife, Elizabeth Hardwick, in the collections *For Lizzie and Harriet* (1973) and *The*

²⁹ Michael Cavanagh, *Professing Poetry: Seamus Heaney's Poetics* (Catholic University of America Press, 2009); Neil Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), Helen Hennessy Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Blake Morrison, *Seamus Heaney*, (London, New York: Methuen, 1982).

³⁰ Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 195, Kindle edition.

³¹ Lipking, *The Life of the Poet*, 140.

³² Cavanagh, *Professing Poetry*, 110.

Dolphin (1973). Lowell was roundly criticised by former friends and poets Adrienne Rich and Elizabeth Bishop for 'violating a trust.' In a scathing review, Adrienne Rich asks 'Finally, what does one say about a poet who, having left his wife and daughter for another marriage, then titles a book with their names, and goes on to appropriate his ex-wife's letters written under the stress and pain of desertion, into a book of poems nominally addressed to the new wife?'³³ She calls it 'one of the most vindictive and mean-spirited acts in the history of poetry.'³⁴ Heaney's eulogy, one which 'stuck to his calling as a poet and his conduct of it, and made reference neither to his madness nor to his marriages' was denounced by Mary McCarthy as 'the biggest cover up since Watergate.'³⁵ In 'Yeats as an Example?' Heaney presents the idea that Lowell's self-awareness absolves him, describing him as 'sympathetic to the imperfections of the living.'³⁶

In 'Elegy' Heaney is most concerned with how Robert Lowell should be remembered. This can be seen as an extension of the profound respect for the rituals of mourning represented in much of his early poetry. He establishes a pattern for his later elegies, particularly those for Brodsky and Hughes, by passing over the personal failings of the subject to foreground the quality of his work. This poem opens with a declaration:

The way we are living,
timorous or bold,
will have been our life. (ll. 1-3)

The use of the inclusive 'we' in the opening line establishes the contrast in the second: the suggestion is that it is Heaney who is timorous, with its connotations of fearfulness, while Lowell has been bold. This initiates the central idea of the poem – that Lowell has been a model for Heaney. He is described as 'the master elegist / and welder of English' (ll. 11-2), a metaphor which highlights the skill it

³³ Adrienne Rich, 'Caryatid,' Review, *American Poetry Review* 2, no. 5 (1973), 42, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27774677>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁵ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 220-1.

³⁶ Seamus Heaney, 'Yeats as an Example?,' *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002), 103.

takes to craft great poetry. This poem for Robert Lowell illustrates Lipking's argument that every *tombeau* represents a collaboration between two poets, the dead and the living.³⁷

As he had in the funeral oration, in 'Elegy' Heaney focuses on the poet *as poet*, and not on his personal failings. There is a sense of envy and admiration when he describes Lowell 'promulgating art's / deliberate, peremptory / love and arrogance' (ll. 21-3). Heaney's public expressions of mourning for Lowell foreground the subject's positive qualities, a pattern he would return to in his later elegies for Brodsky and Hughes. He saw Lowell as a role model for the reconciliation of public and private roles, and it is this aspect of his character that is written into memory in Heaney's elegy. He is able to forgive Lowell's personal flaws and admire the public man, one whom he felt 'manifested a kind of *gravitas*. ... There was a sense that he stood for something.'³⁸ He paraphrases Lowell in the sixth stanza: 'Your eyes saw what your hand did,' echoing a line from Lowell's 'Dolphin,' a confessional poem in which Lowell accepts blame for 'not avoiding injury to others': 'my eyes have seen what my hand did' ('Dolphin' l. 11, 15). Heaney follows this with an allusion to the controversial collections, writing that Lowell 'bullied out / heart-hammering blank sonnets / of love for Harriet / and Lizzie ...' (ll. 24-9). In these lines Lowell's private failings are subsumed into his work. Heaney evades criticism of Lowell by foregrounding the places in which the poet himself had been self-critical. In 'Lowell's Command' Heaney considers Lowell's role as a public poet in more detail. He writes that Lowell's *Life Studies*, initially seen as 'private and self-absorbed,' could later be seen as 'as firm and approachable as a public monument.'³⁹ For Heaney, Lowell's use of the confessional mode was a way of making amends for what he had inflicted on others.

In 'Elegy' Heaney pays homage to Lowell's body of work by alluding directly and indirectly to some of his most important poems and collections. The nautical

³⁷ Ibid., 139.

³⁸ Henri Cole, 'Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry No. 75,' *The Paris Review* 144 (1997), <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1217/the-art-of-poetry-no-75-seamus-heaney>.

³⁹ Heaney, 'The Government of the Tongue,' 131.

imagery in the poem can be read as a tribute Lowell's most well-known elegy, 'The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket.' It is introduced in the second stanza of 'Elegy' with a wind off the Irish sea shaking a reading lamp. This is followed by:

As you swayed the talk
And rode on the swaying tiller
Of yourself, ribbing me
About my fear of water,

What was not within your empery? (ll. 14-7)

In this metaphor Lowell is presented as a skilled sailor who can chart a course through rough waters. While in Lowell's 'Quaker Graveyard' the sea itself is a symbol of the power of nature over humankind, in 'Elegy' Heaney allows Lowell to master the sea. His admiration for the older poet is demonstrated in the final clause of the sentence, the first line of the following stanza, which refers to Lowell's 'emperry.' This dominion over the sea is reinforced in the ninth stanza:

helmsman, netsman, *retiarius*.
That hand. Warding and grooming
and amphibious. (ll. 34-6)

This list suggests an ability to conquer the sea by steering a course and casting a net, suggested in the description of Lowell as 'retiarius,' a type of Roman gladiator who fought with a net and trident. In a 1981 interview Heaney says that what he learned from Lowell was 'to trust in the amphibious quality of being public and private at the same time.'⁴⁰ In 'Elegy' he describes Lowell's 'amphibious' hand, suggesting the ability to move effortlessly between two worlds. The use of the determiner 'that' refers back to the hand in the earlier stanza, which has possibly been the source of harm. In the following stanza he describes Lowell as 'our night ferry / thudding in a big sea' (ll. 39-40). Both metaphors highlight his skill, his ability to craft poetry and navigate difficult waters.

⁴⁰ Helen O'Shea, 'Interview with Seamus Heaney,' *Quadrant* 25, no. 9 (1981): 123.

'Elegy' is a poem which is more concerned with the skill of its subject than with Heaney's personal memories of Lowell. While much of the poem establishes a reverence for the great poet, in the final stanzas his relationship with the elder poet is refigured as a father/son bond. Heaney includes an unattributed quotation from Lowell's 'Fall, 1961': '*A father's no shield / for his child-*,' which is enjambed with 'you found the child in me' in the following stanza (ll. 47-9). In the following lines he invokes the classical tradition of using bay laurels to adorn poets by recalling his final farewell to Lowell 'under the full bay tree / by the gate in Glanmore' (ll. 51-2). These lines suggest that he is preparing to take up the mantle of the subject of this elegy. In doing so he is conforming to elegiac codes; both Sacks and Kennedy identify the surviving power of the elegist being a part of the purpose of elegy. Paul Muldoon argues that in these lines Heaney 'has positioned himself as the natural heir to Lowell,'⁴¹ while Neil Corcoran suggests that it is 'too knowing': 'Where there is leisure for ambition there is, perhaps, too little grief.'⁴² Corcoran's critique, a paraphrase of Samuel Johnson on Milton's 'Lycidas,' reinforces Johnson's critique of the artifice of elegy.⁴³ Corcoran suggests that Heaney's elegy is more concerned with poetic inheritance than with genuine grief. To write an elegy for a poet he describes as 'master elegist' indicates that Heaney felt he was at a point in his literary career where it was appropriate to do so: the man who published his first poems under the pseudonym 'Incertus' was now a part of the literary establishment.

He prefigures the later elegies by concluding the poem with a thought on the function of poetry. Another aspect of his elegy for Lowell that establishes a pattern for later elegies is his use of elements of Lowell's own styles to write him into memory, a strategy he also uses to elegise Brodsky, Hughes and Milosz. In doing so, he demonstrates the elegiac transnationalism that Ramazani describes: he acknowledges poetic influence, declares solidarity, and uses the form to carve out his place in a cosmopolitan community of poets.

⁴¹ Paul Muldoon, *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2006), 197.

⁴² Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 93.

⁴³ Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets* (London: Jones and Company, 1825), 45. 'Its form is that of a pastoral: easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting; whatever images it can supply are long ago exhausted.'

Electric Light, published twenty years later, includes a series of poems marking the deaths of fellow poets. Heaney's elegies for poets show the transnational networks of the genre. While 'Elegy' is addressed only to Lowell, in the later elegies there is a sense of a broader dialogue between poets from across time and national borders. From the brief 'To the Shade of Zbigniew Herbert' to the poem sequence, 'Would They have Stay'd,' written to commemorate the Scots poets Norman McCraig, Iain MacGabhainn, Sorley MacLean and George Mackay Brown, *Electric Light* is a collection marked by its engagement with a transnational community of poets. Denis O'Driscoll observes in his review of *Electric Light* that 'Heaney's acknowledgement of his literary peers and forebears ... has increasingly spilled over into his poems through citation, homage, dedication and elegy.'⁴⁴ This pattern continues into his final collections, *District and Circle* and *Human Chain*.

Elegy for Joseph Brodsky: 'Do again what Auden said / Good poets do: bite, break their bread'

In 'Audenesque,' Heaney's elegy for Joseph Brodsky, he 'breaks bread with the dead' by entering a dialogue with dead twentieth-century poets. In doing so, he participates in a broader discussion about the function of elegy in the modern world. What Astrid Erll describes as 'the deterritorialization of memory'⁴⁵ can be seen in this poem. The chain of elegies⁴⁶ that lead to 'Audenesque' is an example of the 'cross-hatched picture of intercultural borrowings, affinities, and flows' that Ramazani writes of.⁴⁷ The poem is a pastiche of the third section of Brodsky's 'Verses on the Death of T. S. Eliot.' Brodsky's elegy was modelled on W. H. Auden's 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats.' Auden had employed the metre used in Yeats's self-elegy, 'Under Ben Bulbin' (published only four weeks prior to Auden's), a poem in

⁴⁴ Dennis O'Driscoll, 'Steady under Strain and Strong through Tension,' *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* 26, no. 2 (2002),

<http://search.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/docview/198793747?accountid=8330>.

⁴⁵ Erll, 'Travelling Memory,' 13.

⁴⁶ As this thesis was being prepared for submission, a new book was published which explores the literary tradition of elegies for other poets in more. In this text Sally Connolly uses the same chain of elegies discussed in this chapter (Auden for Yeats, Brodsky for Eliot, Heaney for Brodsky) to argue that these 'genealogical elegies' show 'a branching and intersecting tree of influence and indebtedness. Sally Connolly, *Grief and Meter: Elegies for Poets after Auden* (University of Virginia Press, 2016).

⁴⁷ Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics*, 12.

which, according to Lipking, Yeats 'tells us exactly how he chooses to be remembered.'⁴⁸ Nina Martyris describes this series of poems as 'one of the most extraordinary elegiac conversations of our time.'⁴⁹

Yeats and Auden had redefined the elegy for the twentieth century by disrupting the conventions of praise and consolation. In 'Audenesque,' Heaney writes into the dialogue amongst poets about the purpose of elegy. Sacks argues that for the 'massacred generation' of the first World War, 'the old consoling formulae now seem not only obsolete but hypocritical.'⁵⁰ This is evident in the work of Wilfred Owen, who repudiated the elegiac tradition in his preface:

Above all I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War ... Yet these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They may be to the next. All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful.⁵¹

Yeats took a very different view of the war elegy. In 'On Being Asked for a War Poem' he claimed that it was 'better that in times like these / A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth / We have no gift to set a statesman right.'⁵² Yeats had controversially refused to include the work of the war poets in his anthology, *The Oxford Book of Modern Poetry*, because he felt that many war poets, who were officers, 'felt bound ... to plead the suffering of their men' and 'made that suffering their own,' concluding that 'passive suffering is not a theme for poetry.'⁵³ While Auden took issue with many aspects of Yeats's public persona, in his essay 'Yeats as an Example' he claims that this elegy for his patron's son⁵⁴ was 'something new and important in the history of English poetry.'⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Lipking, *The Life of the Poet*, 152.

⁴⁹ Nina Martyris, 'Mourning Tongues: How Auden Was Modified in the Guts of the Living,' *Los Angeles Review of Books*, January 28, 2014, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/mourning-tongues-auden-modified-guts-living/>.

⁵⁰ Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 260.

⁵¹ Wilfred Owen and Jennifer Breen, *Wilfred Owen: Selected Poetry and Prose* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 1988), 81.

⁵² Cited in Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 261.

⁵³ William Butler Yeats, *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892-1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), xxxiv.

⁵⁴ Yeats had redefined the form in his commemorative poems for the son of his patron, Lady Gregory. Sacks writes that his pastoral elegy for Major Gregory, modelled on

Auden's elegy, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats,' distances the modern elegy from the pastoral tradition. Rather than being a poem of simple praise and consolation, it complicates Yeats's legacy by subverting elegiac conventions. Most notably, as Lipking points out, Auden 'robs Yeats of property rights in his own death' by opening the poems with a bleak urban scene rather than the rural landscape of pastoral elegy.⁵⁶ Edward Mendelson believes that elegy is transformed into 'a bleak new mode' and a world where 'neither poetry nor metaphor is any use.'⁵⁷ The renunciation of pastoral codes and settings seems to also be a rejection of the consolatory function of elegy. After two sections in which Auden interrogates Yeats's sense of his own importance and his political relevance, he uses the final section, mimicking the trochaic metre of 'Under Ben Bulbin,' to finally praise Yeats's legacy:

Earth, receive an honoured guest;
 William Yeats is laid to rest:
 Let the Irish vessel lie
 Emptied of its poetry. (ll. 46-9)

He commands Yeats: 'With your unconstraining voice / still persuade us to rejoice' (ll. 72-3). Lipking argues that Auden's poem sequence, 'deliberately internationalizes' Yeats and robs him of the claim on his own death that he had staked in 'Under Ben Bulbin.'⁵⁸ He does, though, believe that 'the mode of the poem, as well as its versification, derives from the poet it commemorates.'⁵⁹ Heaney also writes of Auden 'accepting (metrically as well as in other ways) Yeats's deathbed version of himself as poetic oracle and ancestor, carrying on the

Spenser's 'Astrophel,' was 'a disappointment' and foreshadows the demise of the pastoral elegy in the twentieth century because 'it floats at a vague remove' from its subject, 'expressing little of the man whom it mourns and still less of the man who mourns him.' His later work, 'In Memory of Major Robert Gregory,' helped to redefine elegiac writing for the twentieth century by 'dispens[ing] with many of the comforting fictions of the genre.'

⁵⁵ W. H. Auden, 'Yeats as an Example,' *The Kenyon Review* 10, no. 2 (1948): 193.

⁵⁶ Lipking, *The Life of the Poet*, 154.

⁵⁷ Edward Mendelson, *Later Auden* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1999).

⁵⁸ Lipking, *The Life of the Poet*, 154.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

beat of 'Under Ben Bulbin.'⁶⁰ The use of the poet's own metre to elegise him becomes part of a dialogue about the form itself, one which continues through the sequence that follows it. The trochaic metre becomes the most visible link in this chain of elegies.

The 'intricate enmeshment'⁶¹ of poetic affiliations is demonstrated in Joseph Brodsky's appropriation of Auden's poem for his own elegy for T. S. Eliot.⁶² Although written to commemorate the death of Eliot, it is really a homage to Auden. In 1965, when Joseph Brodsky wrote his elegy for Eliot, he was living in exile in a Russian village and 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats' was his first encounter with Auden's verse.⁶³ Like Auden's, his elegy for Eliot is arranged in three parts, and was written immediately after the death of the subject (it is dated January 12, 1965). The first section, like Auden's elegy for Yeats, describe cities in the wintertime. In the final section Brodsky adopts what he describes as Auden's 'ballad-cum-Salvation Army hymn' meter.⁶⁴ He diverges from Auden by reintroducing imagery associated with pastoral elegy. Brodsky opens this section by commanding Apollo to 'fling your garland down, / Let it be the poet's crown' (ll. 55-6). The garland is represented as Eliot's rightful inheritance from Apollo, and the remainder of the poem is focused on the 'immortality' (l. 57) of the poet. Brodsky departs from the urban setting of Section 1 to describe 'forests,' 'hill and dale,' 'wood and field' and the 'voice of the lyre' (ll. 59, 63, 79, 60). In Brodsky's poem the lines 'Blades of grass his memory hold, / just as Horace had foretold' (ll. 65-6) recall Horace's claim to have 'raised a monument more durable than bronze.' This reinforces the place of elegy as 'portable monument' and the living poet, Brodsky, assures Eliot that if he is not 'recalled by stone,' he will remain 'known' (ll. 69-70).

⁶⁰ Seamus Heaney, 'All Ireland's Bard,' *The Atlantic Monthly* 280, no. 5 (November 1997), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1997/11/all-irelands-bard/377005/>.

⁶¹ Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics*, 12.

⁶² Joseph Brodsky and George L. Kline, 'Joseph Brodsky's "Verses on the Death of T.S. Eliot,"' *Russian Review* (1968). doi:10.2307/127027.

⁶³ In the following decade Auden helped him to emigrate to the United States after his expulsion from Russia.

⁶⁴ Sven Birkerts, 'The Art of Poetry No. 28,' *The Paris Review* 83 (1982), <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3184/joseph-brodsky-the-art-of-poetry-no-28-joseph-brodsky>.

In 'Audenesque,' his elegy for Brodsky, Heaney enters the dialogue. To commemorate the life of Brodsky, a friend and fellow Nobel Laureate, he uses the same metre and adopts other formal elements from Brodsky's work. His contribution features aspects of Brodsky's style and Auden's focus on language. Heaney had first met Brodsky in 1972, and they remained friends until his death. His admiration of Brodsky's work was tempered by a recognition of his arrogance and dogmatism.⁶⁵ Brodsky was much admired as a poet, but generally regarded as a difficult man. His friend, Susan Sontag, observed some years after his death: 'No one, least of all Joseph himself, could claim that he had a good character. He liked to say sometimes that he had a rather bad character.'⁶⁶ Nevertheless, in both his elegy and an obituary written for *The New York Times Book Review* Heaney adheres to the generic convention of praise for the deceased.

His choice of form in 'Audenesque' is a way of honouring what was important to Brodsky: 'Joseph was a stickler for form and had echoed that Auden metre in his elegy for T. S. Eliot.'⁶⁷ The poem opens with the familiar 'jaunty'⁶⁸ trochaic tetrameter:

Joseph, yes, you know the beat.
 Wystan Auden's metric feet
 Marched to it, unstressed and stressed,
 Laying William Yeats to rest. (ll. 1-4)

By adopting this metre in the opening of his elegy, Heaney creates another link in the chain of elegies begun with Yeats's 'Under Ben Bulbin.' He fortifies this connection by noting that Brodsky had died on the same date as Yeats: '(Double-crossed and death-marched date, / January twenty-eight)' (ll. 7-8). The poem was written immediately after Brodsky's death and Heaney notes that, in other circumstances, he might have seen such a prompt poetic response 'as a form of

⁶⁵ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 378-9.

⁶⁶ Valentina Polukhina, 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at Joseph Brodsky,' *Words Without Borders*, June 2008, <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/thirteen-ways-of-looking-at-joseph-brodsky>.

⁶⁷ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 376.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

bad taste,'⁶⁹ but that in this circumstance it seemed appropriate, perhaps because Auden and Brodsky had composed their elegies within a similar time frame. He also alludes to the role of versification: Like the previous elegies in this chain, 'Audenesque' is written in quatrains:

Its measured ways I tread again
 Quatrain by constrained quatrain,
 Meting grief and reason out
 As you said a poem ought. (ll. 9-12)

The structure of the quatrain metaphorically contains emotion, or allows its expression in a 'measured' way. The composition of the poem becomes a way of working through grief and paying respect to Brodsky by doing what a poem 'ought' to do.

As in his elegy for Lowell, the subject's less appealing qualities are given little weight. The living poet chooses to emphasise the positive qualities of his friend. While Heaney saw Lowell as a mentor, an elder statesman figure, Brodsky was his peer. He acknowledges that Brodsky was 'politically incorrect' and elaborates:

Jokes involving sex and sect,
 Everything against the grain,
 Drinking, smoking like a train. (ll. 38-40)

The jokes about 'sex and sect' suggest that Brodsky delighted in offending others, and the following reference to his habits suggest a man who had little time for abstemiousness. This observation is presented without judgement and the train simile is used as a link to the recollection of a train journey the two poets took in Finland in 1994. Heaney remembers showing Brodsky work in progress for the first time, 'swapping manuscripts and quips, / Both of us like cracking whips' (ll. 43-4). This simile suggests that Brodsky could be relied upon for both advice and witty repartee. This encounter is described with images of speed and light:

⁶⁹ Ibid., 377.

Nevermore that wild speed-read
 Nevermore your tilted head
 Like a deck where mind took off
 With a mind-flash and a laugh. (ll. 49-52)

In this stanza Heaney portrays the subject as a mercurial intellect, one whose quick wit and humour made him excellent company.

This elegy is addressed to Joseph Brodsky, but is also a 'breaking of bread' with W. H. Auden. This partly reflects Brodsky's reverence for Auden, and partly Heaney's developing ideas about the relationship between poetry and politics. In the fifth stanza Heaney alludes to Auden's poem for Yeats, which begins with the lines:

He disappeared in the dead of winter:
 The brooks were frozen, the airports almost deserted,
 And snow disfigured the public statues;
 ('In Memory of W. B. Yeats' ll. 1-3)

Heaney reprises Auden's opening in the image of 'cold / in the poet and the world' by imagining 'Dublin Airport locked in frost' when Brodsky dies (l. 19). In the final stanza Heaney makes reference to Auden's statement on the ancient custom of eating with the dead:

Dust-cakes, still – see Gilgamesh –
 Feed the dead. So be their guest.
 Do again what Auden said
 Good poets do: bite, break their bread. (ll. 65-8)

The allusion to the ancient epic of Gilgamesh draws on the connotations of the dead eating clay in the underworld. By inviting Brodsky to 'be their guest,' Heaney suggests an elegiac chain that goes much further back in time than Auden's elegy for Yeats. Auden's discussion of the tradition of 'breaking bread' is linked to his ideas about the 'impotence of art' in the face of political crises: 'though the great

artists of the past could not change the course of history, it is only through their work that we are able to break bread with the dead, and without communion with the dead a fully human life is impossible.’⁷⁰ Auden’s point that art cannot change the course of history was expressed in the second part of his elegy for Yeats in the line ‘for poetry makes nothing happen.’⁷¹ Heaney adds another dimension to Auden’s metaphor by the inclusion of the word ‘bite.’ By ‘biting’ into the bread, Heaney suggests the practice of imitating and appropriating the work of other poets in elegies, works which are ‘modified in the guts of the living’ (‘In Memory of W. B. Yeats,’ ll. 23). Each elegist consumes and modifies the work of earlier elegists, as Heaney is doing in this poem for Brodsky.

As in the elegy for Lowell, Heaney conforms to the conventions of *tombeaux* by adopting elements of the subject’s style. In the middle stanzas there is a sense that Heaney is continuing a friendly ongoing disagreement about rhyme. In *Stepping Stones* he revealed that Brodsky could sometimes ‘act the boss poet’ but that he ‘also enjoyed backchat.’⁷² He discusses Brodsky’s view that Yeats’s rhymes were inferior because he employed half-rhyme. In ‘Audenesque’ Heaney rhymes ‘frost and breast,’ ‘strength’ and ‘month,’ ‘cheeks’ and ‘jokes,’ perhaps a droll gesture towards having the last word on the topic of half rhyme. O’Driscoll reads parts of the poem as a mimicry of Brodsky’s ‘gauche verbosity’:

Nevermore that rush to pun
Or to hurry through all yon
Jammed enjambments piling up
As you went above the top, (ll.53-6).

In this stanza the clumsy syntax can be understood as a light-hearted jibe. Heaney acknowledges the occasional clumsiness of Brodsky’s English translations of his own work, ‘Revving English like a car / You hijacked when you robbed its bank,’ but observes that ‘Russian was your reserve tank.’ The elegy does not descend

⁷⁰ Auden, *Secondary Worlds*, 141.

⁷¹ In a later interview, Heaney explicitly addressed Auden’s contention that poetry makes nothing happen by claiming that it ‘is too often used to foreclose the question.’ Cole, ‘Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry No. 75.’

⁷² O’Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 378.

into critique or mockery, though, and Heaney maintains a respect for Brodsky's passionate views on language.

Elegy for Ted Hughes – 'Passive suffering: who said it was disallowed /
As a theme for poetry?

'On His Work in the English Tongue,' a poem dedicated to Ted Hughes and collected in *Electric Light*, is not an elegy in the strictest sense of the word, as it was first published before Hughes's death. In the poem Heaney attempts to shape the way that Hughes will be remembered, and he is particularly concerned with restoring his reputation as a poet. 'On his Work' is the final link in another sequence, this time an epistolary chain. The poem began as a private correspondence between the poets, a letter sent to Hughes before the publication of *Birthday Letters*, itself a series of letters from Hughes to his first wife, Sylvia Plath.⁷³ When first published in *The New Yorker* in October of 1998, shortly before Hughes's death, Heaney's poem was titled 'On First Looking into Ted Hughes's Birthday Letters.'⁷⁴ The subsequent retitling and epigraph dedicating it to the memory of Ted Hughes in *Electric Light* allow it to serve an elegiac function.

Most often read as an insight into the private relationship between Hughes and Plath, *Birthday Letters* can also be read as a statement about the public role of the poet. Just as Hughes's poems to Plath can be read as a public right of reply, Heaney's defence of the collection is a public statement of solidarity with Hughes.

⁷³ In his last letter to Heaney, dated 27 June 1998, Hughes replies: 'God knows what that book of mine is, but I know in my heart it sets a problem for readers (who don't respond in a purely sentimental way, or a "well this isn't quite our idea of the leading edge" way) and your poem seems to acknowledge the problem with the wise human comprehending solution – which made certain aspects of what I've done clearer to me too. So I was/am very grateful that you've written this piece. The weird effects of having got rid of it all (and maybe, especially, of staying absolutely clear of the public response to it) are still making themselves felt. Strange euphorias of what I can only call "freedom" or a sense of self-determination, internally, that are quite new to me. Sometimes I have a mad waft of how I felt in 1955, before I met S.P. I wouldn't want a thing different. But a pity I left that unburdening (even if was mainly symbolic unburdening) so late!' Christopher Reid, *Letters of Ted Hughes* (Faber and Faber, 2007), 715.

⁷⁴ Seamus Heaney, 'On First Looking into Ted Hughes's "Birthday Letters,"' *The New Yorker*, 5 October 1998. This allusion to Keats's 'On first looking into Chapman's Homer' refers to Heaney writing his response immediately after reading the galley proofs of *Birthday Letters*, just as Keats had written an immediate response to the source text. It also suggests Keats's 'On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once again.'

The relationship between Hughes and Plath had long been grist for the critical mill, as had Hughes's editorial decisions about Plath's work. As her literary executor, he made a series of decisions about the inclusion and order of poems in *Ariel*, which was published posthumously. Many of the *Birthday Letters* are directly addressed to Plath, and show Hughes writing in the confessional mode for the first time. Sarah Churchwell reads *Birthday Letters* as 'a public response to disputes over the politics of publication, representation, and literary authority.'⁷⁵ Heaney sees Hughes's decision to publish this collection as emblematic of a moral quandary: 'Here was a poet whose long silence simply had to be broken, who had earned the right to release himself finally from the pincer jaws of an emotional and artistic dilemma.'⁷⁶ Heaney had reviewed *Birthday Letters* for *The Irish Times* in January of 1998. He wrote that Hughes had been maligned 'by the media and the academy which has been mostly unsympathetic and on some occasions fiercely vindictive.'⁷⁷ In this review, he comments that the critical attention to Hughes's work has sometimes been a 'spectator sport.'⁷⁸ In 'On His Work' Heaney highlights the private suffering behind the public reticence, writing of Hughes being 'pounded like a shore by the roller griefs / In language that can still knock language sideways' (ll. 5-6).

In the second part of the poem Heaney suggests that reading *Birthday Letters* felt voyeuristic. This sense of eavesdropping on a private conversation is reinforced in the use of auditory imagery. The transient experience of passing through a tunnel is used as a simile for reading confessional poetry:

I read it quickly, then stood looking back
 As if it were a bridge I had passed under –
 The single span and bull's eye of the one
 Over the railway lines at Anahorish –
 So intimate in there, the tremor-drip

⁷⁵ Sarah Churchwell, 'Secrets and Lies: Plath, Privacy, Publication and Ted Hughes's "Birthday Letters,"' *Contemporary Literature* 42, no. 1 (2001): 103, doi:10.2307/1209086.

⁷⁶ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 393.

⁷⁷ Seamus Heaney, 'A Wounded Power Rises from the Depth: Seamus Heaney Celebrates the "Undertruths of Sadness and Endurance" in Ted Hughes's Elegy for Lost Love,' *IrishTimes*, January 31, 1998.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

And cranial acoustic of the stone
 With its arch-ear to the ground, a listening post
 Open to the light ... (ll. 7-14)

The tunnel is personified to emphasise the feelings engendered by reading the 'letters' to Plath. Auditory imagery is used to convey this as more akin to listening than to reading. The 'cranial acoustic' of the tunnel walls show being inside the tunnel as metaphorically being inside the head of Hughes as he addresses his final thoughts to Sylvia Plath, but as an eavesdropper rather than a participant in the dialogue. This is reinforced in the following line with the 'arch-ear to the ground' and 'a listening post.' While 'Audenesque' becomes a poetic dialogue between generations of poets, in this section of 'On His Work' we are reminded that *Birthday Letters* was primarily a 'breaking of bread' between Hughes and Plath.

In his conflation of art and suffering in 'On his Work,' Heaney writes into the ongoing debate amongst twentieth-century poets about the place of 'passive suffering' in elegy. Heaney's defence of Hughes's right to describe passive suffering can be understood as a way of reshaping public perception and collective memory; Heaney suggests that Hughes has earned the right to present another perspective on Plath's death. In the second section of the poem Heaney had been an outsider and eavesdropper, but in the third section he creates a conversation between major poets of the twentieth century. This section begins with a direct allusion to Yeats's criticism of Wilfred Owen: 'Passive suffering: who said it was disallowed / As a theme for poetry?' ('On His Work' ll. 20-1) By invoking Yeats, Heaney 'breaks bread with the dead' as he enters the debate on a poet appropriating the suffering of another for a poetic work. He also draws on Hughes's interest in the poetry of Wilfred Owen. Heaney follows his rhetorical question with a reference to *Beowulf*, which he was translating at the time. In these sections Heaney echoes Hughes's style through the use of alliteration in 'the stunt and stress / the hurt-in-hiding' (ll. 22-3). In this section of *Beowulf*, King Hrethel grieves the death of one son killed by another. Heaney describes the King's response in terms of entrapment – 'the grief-trap' and the father 'constrained by love and blood / to seek redress from the son who had survived' (ll. 27-8). This imagery of constraint might be a reference to the factors that

influenced Hughes's silence, not least of which was that Plath was the mother of his children.

In 'On His Work' Heaney engages with ideas about poetic representation developed by Hughes in *Birthday Letters*. He uses a personal memory of Hughes to allude to the unreliability of memory in Plath's work. In the second stanza of Part 3 he describes the poet drawing 'from his word-hoard a weird tale / Of a life and a love balked' (ll. 29-30). This is linked to the recollection of a night walk on Dartmoor with Ted Hughes when they felt tremors beneath the earth:

The power station wailing in its pit
Under the heath, as if our night walk led
Not to the promised tor but underground
To sullen halls where encumbered sleepers groaned. (ll. 32-5)

The final line is an unattributed paraphrase of lines from Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting.' In Owen's poem the lines describe the passageway into hell. This is alluded to in Heaney's suggestion of the underground, though it is significant that he does not use the word 'underworld,' with its literary connotations of meeting with the dead. These lines echo the final lines of 'A Picture of Otto' from Hughes's *Birthday Letters*: 'Under the battle, in the catacomb, // Sleeping with his German as if alone.' ('A Picture of Otto' ll. 24-5). This poem is addressed to Plath's dead father and Hughes imagines himself meeting Otto in the underworld when he goes to search for his wife. Hughes acknowledges that he and Otto have become intertwined through Plath's poetry in the metaphor 'your ghost inseparable from my shadow.' The conflation of husband and father foregrounds the issue of representation: both men have been rendered symbolically in Plath's poetry.

In the earlier published version of Heaney's poem to Hughes, the lines following 'under the heath' were substantially different. The change acknowledges Hughes's death in the interim, and directs attention to his descent into the underworld. In the version published while Hughes was alive, the allusion is to *King Lear*:

Under the heath, as if Lear's breaking heart
 And Cordelia's breaking silence called to you,
 Chooser of poem light, ploughshare of fields unsunned.
 ('On First Looking into Ted Hughes's *Birthday Letters*' ll. 31-33)

This draws on the resonance of the original title, which references Keats's 'On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again.' The allusion to Keats is significant because it draws on Keats's view that art could integrate beauty and truth, and because Keats liked to 'feast upon'⁷⁹ the work of Shakespeare, Homer and Milton. Greg Kucich argues that in this sonnet Keats affirms the benefits of suffering, which can be transformative: Lear's identity is shaped through his suffering.⁸⁰ In Heaney's poem this suffering is represented in 'Lear's breaking heart' and 'Cordelia's breaking silence.' In the play Cordelia chooses truth and silence rather than the hyperbolic declarations of love made by her sisters. Heaney suggests that this is equivalent to Hughes's refusal to participate in the critical debate about his relationship with Plath, even though it might have been to his advantage to do so. The final phrase, 'ploughshare of fields unsunned,' shows that Hughes is breaking new ground with his *Birthday Letters* by bringing to light new information about his relationship with Plath on his own terms.

The fourth section of 'On His Work' is an extract from Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*. He uses this to explore feelings of complicity after the death of a family member. In this excerpt King Hrethel watches 'his son's body / Swing on the gallows.' He emphasises the king's suffering after the execution:

'Such were the woes
 And griefs endured by that doomed lord
 After what happened. The king was helpless
 To set right the wrong committed ...' (ll. 55-8)

⁷⁹ Cited in Greg Kucich, 'Keats and English Poetry,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 186, Cambridge ebook.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 195. In the concluding lines Keats writes of the desire for 'Phoenix wings,' to be reborn after his death.

The use of the passive voice underscores the suffering of the king and, by extension, of Hughes. He is represented as a bystander rather than an agent in his own tragedy, and his sadness had to be 'endured ... after what happened.' By aligning Hughes with the 'helpless' king, Heaney reinforces the view that he was not responsible for 'the wrong committed.' By implication, the suffering that Hughes has made his 'own' is that of his wives. Six years after Plath's suicide, Assia Wevill used the same method to kill herself and the daughter she shared with Hughes. Henry Hart argues that in this allusion to passive suffering Heaney is sympathising with 'Hughes's fate of looking on in impotent grief and silence while he was punished for the deaths of Sylvia Plath and Assia Wevill.'⁸¹

In this poem we see a different type of elegiac transnationalism. While the dialogue that emerged from 'Audenesque' was about poetry, this conversation is about culpability and solidarity. In 'On His Work' Heaney suggests that Hughes should not be remembered, or forever judged, for his relationship with Sylvia Plath. He celebrates and affirms Hughes's decision to present his 'side':

Soul has its scruples. Things not to be said.
 Things for keeping, that can keep the small-hours gaze
 Open and steady. Things for aye of God
 And for poetry. Which is, as Milosz says,
 'A dividend from ourselves,' a tribute paid
 By what we have been true to. A thing allowed. (ll. 59-64)

The 'things not to be said' were, for Heaney, quite different from the issues that silenced Hughes, but there is a sense in which the moral dilemmas faced by both poets are addressed. By citing Milosz, Heaney's moral yardstick in matters of poetic responsibility, he frames the dilemma in terms of what is ultimately 'allowed.' The use of the collective pronoun in the final line draws the three poets together in their experience.

⁸¹ Henry Hart, 'Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes: A Complex Friendship,' *Sewanee Review* 120, no. 1 (2012): 83, doi:10.1353/sew.2012.0011.

Communion with Czeslaw Milosz – ‘Light has gone out but the door stands open’

‘Out of this World,’ a striking elegy for Czeslaw Milosz, draws on a number of the elements Heaney had developed in earlier *tombeaux*, particularly allusions to the poet’s own work and experimentation with elegiac conventions. Rather than elegising Milosz by highlighting his views on poetic responsibility, which Heaney had addressed in his prose criticism and obituaries, in this poem sequence he draws on a shared Catholic identity to establish solidarity and to achieve a different type of ‘communion’ with the dead, one associated with the Catholic sacrament. Milosz’s work had significantly influenced Heaney’s view on artistic responsibility, and Michael Parker describes him as ‘a constant literary and ethical point of reference in Heaney’s writings.’⁸² Milosz had a complicated relationship with Catholicism throughout his life, and at times struggled to reconcile his faith in God with the strictures of the church. He wrote in 1982: ‘the decision to be Catholic does not properly concern one’s faith but the submission to or the revolt against authority.’⁸³ He continued to engage with this conflict in his poetry and prose for the remainder of his life, and it is a preoccupation of his final collection, *Second Space*. It is this aspect of his work that Heaney chooses to bring to the centre of his elegy.

Heaney has described Milosz’s life as ‘a twentieth century pilgrim’s progress.’⁸⁴ Heaney shapes public memory of Milosz by celebrating his belief in the power of poetry as a force for good, even in the face of harsh realities. Milosz was born into a Polish family in Lithuania in 1911, and was living there when the Soviets invaded in 1939. He worked for the Polish resistance during the war and served as a Polish diplomat for the communist government in the late 1940s. In the 1950s, he defected while living in Paris and began working at the University of California

⁸² Michael Richard Parker, "Past Master: Czeslaw Milosz and His Impact on the Poetry of Seamus Heaney," *Textual Practice* 27, no.5 (2012):15.
doi:10.1080/0950236X.2012.751448.

⁸³ Czeslaw Milosz, ‘Catholicism,’ *New Republic*, March 16, 1982,
<https://newrepublic.com/article/79180/catholicism>.

⁸⁴ O’Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 302.

in 1960. He remained in the United States until 2001, when he returned to Poland to live in Krakow. Milosz experienced at first-hand many watershed moments of twentieth century history. Although he spent his final years in Krakow, Clare Cavanagh observes that he 'refused to be a well behaved bard.'⁸⁵ Among his offenses was his public defence of the right of lesbians and gays to hold a parade in Krakow. Milosz was buried in Krakow in 2004, although his funeral was delayed by right-wing Polish protestors who opposed his burial in the Skalka Monastery on the basis of 'his numerous hostile declarations towards national and Catholic values.'⁸⁶ A planned disruption of the funeral cortege was only averted by the release of a telegram to the poet from the Polish Pope, John Paul II: 'your concern was ensuring that you do not abandon the Catholic orthodoxy in your creative work. I am certain and confirm that you have succeeded.'⁸⁷

Milosz's complex relationship with Catholicism directs Heaney's elegy which, like Milosz's 'The World' and 'Treatise,' is presented as a poem sequence. Each of the three poems in Heaney's elegy engages with the Catholic faith, and the first poem, 'Like everybody else,' is about the sacrament of communion. The poem, which is presented as a monologue, has an unnamed speaker – presumably Heaney himself – ruminating on transubstantiation. This is a faith unquestioned, 'like everybody else' the speaker believes '(whatever it means) that a change occurred.' The blend of colloquial language and the language of Catholicism reinforces the idea that the speaker has never questioned the rituals of the faith – the 'consecration of the bread and wine,' 'raised host and raised chalice' are presented as a common experience. The second stanza opens with the speaker taking communion at the altar rail, and accepting 'the mystery' on his tongue. The first two stanzas represent an unexamined faith and an unquestioned belief that Catholics can eat the body and blood of Jesus Christ in communion. In his discussion of 'breaking bread with the dead' Auden used the word 'communion' to refer to a connection with dead poets. 'Like everybody else ...' is an attempt to

⁸⁵ Clare Cavanagh, 'Chaplain of Shades: The Ending of Czeslaw Milosz,' *Poetry* 85, no. 5 (2005), 383, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20606901>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Cited in Eli Lederhendler, *Jews, Catholics, and the Burden of History* (Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, 2005), 79.

establish a spiritual connection to Milosz, but this connection is established through the alternate definition of the word, the Eucharist.

Catholicism as an identity, if not a faith, is what binds Heaney and Milosz. The final stanza explores this distinction through the loss of faith. It is significant that no reason is given for this change:

‘There was never a scene
When I had it out with myself or with another.
The loss occurred off-stage. And yet I cannot
Disavow words like “thanksgiving” or “host”
Or “communion bread”. They have an undying
Tremor and draw, like well water far down.’ (ll. 9-14)

The observation that the loss of faith ‘occurred offstage,’ without any internal conflict or debate with others, suggests the performativity of faith: the practice of Catholicism is inextricably linked to participation in ritual. The poem suggests that self-examination can reveal the participation in ritual and ceremony to be a substitute for genuine faith. This realisation is not, though, a renunciation of Catholicism. The concluding lines of the poem show the deep and primal aspect of Catholic identity. The word ‘disavow’ implies a complete separation from the faith, and the fact that the speaker of the poem cannot commit to this indicates that a Catholic identity goes beyond religious belief. These lines indicate a link between language and identity: it is not the rituals of the faith which the speaker holds on to, but the words used to describe them. The concluding simile of the well calls to mind an earlier poem in which Heaney wrote of his poetic vocation using the symbol of a well. In ‘Personal Helicon’ (1966) he concludes:

To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring
Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
To see myself, to set the darkness echoing. (ll. 19-20)

The well symbolises poetic inspiration and his ability to understand himself through the act of writing. He draws upon these connotations of self-knowledge

through language in the concluding image of 'Like everybody else' By enclosing the monologue in quotation marks, Heaney introduces some ambiguity about the identity of the speaker. The 'I' of the poem might be the voice of Milosz rather than the autobiographical 'I' of other Heaney poems. This ambiguity is enhanced by the use of the second person in the following poem, '*Brancardier*,' which does describe Heaney's own experience.

The second poem in the sequence is about a pilgrimage to Lourdes. Heaney uses this poem to reshape public memory of Milosz's late conflicts with the Catholic Church. The title, '*Brancardier*,' refers to the name for those who helped invalids on the pilgrimage to Lourdes, a role Heaney had fulfilled as a teenage altar boy. The poem recounts the journey to Lourdes and the ritualistic aspects of the procession towards the shrine: the 'sodalities with sashes, poles and pennants,' the 'mantillas and rosaries' and the incantation of the '*unam sanctum catholicam* acoustic' (ll. 33-5). There is an oblique allusion to Milosz's 'Treatise on Theology,' a poem sequence about his views on Catholicism and poetry, concluding with a poem addressed to the Virgin Mary. In 'A Beautiful Lady' Milosz describes a pilgrimage he made to Lourdes to see the site where Our Lady of Fatima appeared to children.

Lady, I asked you for a miracle, though at the time I was acutely aware

That I come from a country where your sanctuaries serve

To strengthen a national illusion and provide the refuge

Of your pagan goddess's protection against the invasion of enemies.

My presence in such a place was disturbed

By my duty as a poet who should not flatter popular imaginings.⁸⁸ (ll. 12-17)

⁸⁸ Czeslaw Milosz, 'A Theological Treatise,' Trans. Robert Hass, *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 2, no. 2 (2002), doi:10.1353/scs.2002.0038.

The implied criticism of the national monuments named for the Virgin Mary was offensive to many Poles.⁸⁹ Heaney draws on this in the enjambment of the sixth and seventh stanzas of 'Brancardier':

Not gone but not what it was meant to be,
The concrete reinforcement of the Mystic-

al Body, the Eleusis of its age. (ll. 37-9)

By referring to the site in Athens where the ancient Greeks worshipped Demeter and Persephone, he reinforces Milosz's point about the disparity between the object of worship and the practice. This disparity can also be seen in the observation that the shrine is 'not what it was meant to be' and the breaking of the word 'Mystic-al' over two stanzas. The poem concludes with a description of the tourist souvenirs Heaney brought home from Lourdes: a canteen of holy water, the Virgin Mary in a snow globe, and a certificate for serving as a brancardier. The objects underline the hollowness of the experience and foreshadow the loss of faith that was to follow.

In the final poem in the elegiac sequence, 'Saw Music,' he explores a form of faith that transcends the superficiality of the pilgrimage to Lourdes. His inversion of pastoral codes in 'Out of this World' demonstrate a way to engage with pastoral elegy without repudiating it. Heaney's title indicates that it is a response to Milosz's 'naive' poem sequence, 'The World,' written in Warsaw in 1943. Milosz's poem begins with pastoral images of 'a green valley,' 'the first spring cuckoo' and 'children returning home from school.'⁹⁰ Although written during the Nazi occupation of Warsaw, this lyric sequence presents a series of impressions of an idyllic world of a home in the countryside and children with loving parents. Heaney argues that what this poem achieved 'at a moment when brutality and atrocity were the daily reality, was to create a picture of the very opposite state of

⁸⁹ Cavanagh, 'Chaplain of Shades,' 382. Cavanagh notes that Radio Maryja is 'the mouthpiece of Poland's most extreme Catholic right wing' and that the 'nation's most venerated icon,' 'Black Madonna of Czestochowa,' is reduced to a 'pagan goddess' in this poem.

⁹⁰ Czesław Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems, 1931-2001* (London: Allen Lane, 2001), 36.

affairs.’⁹¹ This way of understanding ‘The World’ provides a framework for reading the oppositions in ‘Saw Music’: between dark and light, night and day, high and low art. This work of Miłosz’s was, in Heaney’s opinion, equal to the ‘integrity, consonance and radiance’ of Virgil’s *Eclogues*.⁹² ‘The World’ represented for Heaney the best of the pastoral, ‘imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality.’⁹³ By naming his elegy ‘Out of This World’ Heaney engages in a dialogue with Miłosz’s pastoral, though the urban, winter setting of ‘Saw Music’ owes more to the modern elegy than the pastoral elegy.

‘Saw Music’ is a poem that relies upon oppositions. In the opening stanza the visual contrast between darkness and light is used to suggest an opposition between religion and everyday life. The poem opens with an epigraph from the Catholic baptism:

Q. Do you renounce the world?

A. I do renounce it.

This is followed by an allusion to the ‘godbeams’ painted by the artist, Barrie Cooke. This juxtaposition introduces the idea which will conclude the poem – the suggestion that art must be renounced. Heaney describes the chiaroscuro effect of Cooke’s oil paintings using religious imagery. The beams of light that emerge from cloud in Cooke’s work are described with a religious metaphor linked to a more quotidian simile: ‘vents of brightness that make the light of heaven / look like stretched sheets of fluted silk or rayon / In an old-style draper’s window’ (ll. 48-50). Heaney contrasts the bright columns of light with ‘his actual palette,’ which is ‘ever sludge and smudge’ (ll. 51-2).

The visual imagery used to describe the ‘godbeams’ is enhanced by auditory imagery in following stanzas. Heaney compares Cooke’s works to the memory of a man playing a saw blade on a winter night in Belfast. The onomatopoeic ‘flop-

⁹¹ Seamus Heaney, ‘Seamus Heaney on Czesław Miłosz’s Centenary,’ *The Guardian*, April 7, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/apr/07/seamus-heaney-czeslaw-milosz-centenary>.

⁹² Seamus Heaney, ‘Eclogues in Extremis: On the Staying Power of Pastoral,’ *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 103C, no. 1 (2002): 7, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25506182>

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

wobble grace note or high banshee whine' describes the sound made as he 'pressed light or heavy as the tune requires' (ll. 62-3). The atonal sound of the saw music and the wintry, urban setting of it can be read as an inversion of the pastoral conventions of springtime, of shepherds playing pipes in an idyllic rural setting. While Auden's elegy for Yeats was anti-pastoral, in 'Saw Music' the city is a place of beauty. The man stands in a shop doorway in the rain, but is illuminated by 'light from a display / of tinselled stuff and sleigh bells blinking neon' (ll. 57-8). The unlikely beauty of the setting is enhanced by the music he makes: 'the saw's greased teeth his bow caressed and crossed' (l. 67).

The comparison established between Cooke's paintings and the busker's music suggests a contrast between the sublime and the quotidian. Heaney undermines this reading by using the saw music as a celebration of the creative instinct. The description of the busker is juxtaposed with a statement about the purpose of art:

'The art of oil painting –
Daubs fixed on canvas – is a paltry thing
Compared with what cries out to be expressed.' (ll. 68-70)

Heaney paraphrases the same statement in his obituary for Milosz, published in *The Guardian*. In this context he interprets it as 'yearning for a more encompassing form of expression than is humanly available.'⁹⁴ Although Milosz believed in the 'insufficiency of all art,'⁹⁵ Heaney suggests that his own poetry was more than equal to the task. This is reinforced in the following stanza, where the saw music is used as a simile to show how Milosz embraced ordinariness:

'The poet said, who lies this god-beamed day
Coffined in Krakow, as out of this world now
As the untranscendent music of the saw
He might have heard in Vilnius or Warsaw

And would not have renounced, however paltry.' (ll. 71-5)

⁹⁴ Seamus Heaney, 'In Gratitude for All the Gifts,' *The Guardian*, September 11, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/sep/11/featuresreviews.guardianreview25>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

The reference to the 'untranscendent' saw music is followed by the observation that it was an art form that Milosz would not have renounced, suggesting that he was able to find beauty in the experience of everyday. The image of the artist at work coalesces with the art of the saw music, illustrating how Milosz brought poetry 'beyond the chalk circle of significant form and opened it to big vistas and small domesticities.'⁹⁶ The day of Milosz's funeral is described as a 'god-beamed' day, alluding to the transcendence of art in the Barrie Cooke paintings. Although the poem has loosely rhymed quatrains, the final line is set apart. It refers to both the interrogative epigraph that opened the poem, and Milosz's statement on the limitations of art. This draws attention to the concluding idea, that Milosz was a poet who embraced rather than renounced the world. In this, Heaney finds transcendence and consolation.

The conclusion of this elegy extends and amplifies the image of transcendence introduced in his first elegy for Milosz, published in *The New York Review of Books* in 2004 as an occasional poem. 'What Passed at Colonus' develops an analogy Heaney had made in his obituary in *The Guardian*, that the elderly Milosz dying was like the death of the protagonist in *Oedipus at Colonus*: 'the old king who had arrived where he knew he would die. Colonus was not his birthplace but it was where he had come home to himself, to the world, and to the otherworld; and the same could be said of Milosz in Kraków.'⁹⁷ In 'What Passed at Colonus' the king contemplates the entrance to the underworld and his daughters prepare him for burial:

No god had galloped
 His thunder chariot, no hurricane
 Had swept the hill. Call me mad, if you like,
 Or gullible, but that man surely went
 In step with a guide he trusted down to where
 Light has gone out but the door stands open.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Seamus Heaney, 'What Passed at Colonus,' *The New York Review of Books*, October 7, 2004.

⁹⁷ Heaney, 'What Passed at Colonus.'

⁹⁸ Ibid.

The choice of this passage to mark the death of Milosz is guided by the principle of gratitude. In an obituary published in *The Guardian*, Heaney explains that being thankful allowed Milosz to resolve his reservations about faith: 'Ultimately, Milosz declared, "one can believe in God out of gratitude for all the gifts."' Heaney's tributes to Milosz provide a clue as to how he, himself, would like to be remembered. In a documentary made to mark his seventieth birthday, Heaney turned to the same lines: when asked by an interviewer what he would like as an appropriate epitaph for himself, a clearly uncomfortable Heaney responds (after demurring): 'Wherever that man went, he went gratefully ... something like that ... It's the kind of epitaph that would work, I think. Would do.'⁹⁹

Conclusion

Heaney uses these elegies to 'break bread with the dead,' to continue conversations and to preserve the memory of the subjects. They are a self-conscious intervention into a literary dialogue with past poets; the choice to publish these elegies, and the choice to include them in his collected works, was made by a poet who fully understood his place in the public sphere. Heaney operated within a transnational literary sphere in which reputations are created and maintained by fellow writers. He embraced this literary milieu, and the elegies can be seen as a means of claiming a solidarity with other writers based on shared sensibilities rather than national or ethnic affiliations. For the contemporary writer, these relationships also serve as a balm to the trauma of local and global violence. When Heaney was asked to present the annual lecture for the Irish Human Rights Commission in 2009, he discussed the relationship between poetry and human rights and spoke at length about the contribution of by Milosz, Brodsky, Auden and Hughes. In the conclusion of the speech he claims that great art can cause people to recognise common humanity:

The work will strike them, as John Keats said poetry should strike its readers, as a remembrance, and as it begins its obscure pilgrimage through memory

⁹⁹ Charlie McCarthy, *Seamus Heaney: Out of the Marvellous*, (RTE Television, 2010), DVD, 1:14:02.

and conscience, the human condition will be registered at a private personal level, yet the experience will involve a sense of common human belonging. And at that moment the art and the artist become allies in the great work of 'saving nations and peoples.'¹⁰⁰

By citing Milosz's claim that poetry should save nations and people, Heaney reinforces the importance of the group of poets that he had elegised. While the elegies arose from personal relationships, and featured personal remembrance, their publication is for posterity. By elegising them, Heaney is helping to secure their – and his own – place in literary history and memory.

¹⁰⁰ Seamus Heaney, 'Writer and Righter: Fourth IHRC Annual Human Rights Lecture,' ed. Irish Human Rights Commission (Dublin: Irish Human Rights Commission, 2009).

CHAPTER 5: TRANSNATIONAL MEMORY IN *DISTRICT AND CIRCLE*

nothing resettles right

Seamus Heaney – ‘Anything Can Happen’

In this chapter I examine the role of poetry in the production of a transnational memory of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre. Poetry opens up new perspectives on an event that has most often been commemorated within a national frame. As one of the earliest literary commemorative forms, poetry is a transcultural form particularly well suited to transnational circulation. Generations of poets have borrowed and adapted poetic forms, structures, figures and preoccupations from earlier cultures and traditions. I use Seamus Heaney’s contribution to the literature of 9/11, ‘Anything Can Happen,’ to trace the circulation of a transnational 9/11 memory. This literary translation by an internationally recognised poet has been further translated, adapted and used, making it an apposite example of how poetry oscillates between shifting scales of memory. I also consider the oscillating scales of memory in other poems in *District and Circle*. In ‘Helmet,’ ‘Out of Shot,’ ‘Rilke: After the Fire’ and ‘District and Circle’ he draws on texts from different cultures and language traditions to convey the collective anxiety of living through an ‘age of terror.’

In ‘Anything Can Happen,’ first published as ‘Horace and the Thunder’ in *The Irish Times* on November 17, 2001, Heaney translates and adapts a Horatian ode. Multiple social scales have shaped the remediation and reframing of ‘Anything Can Happen’ in the years since its first publication. It has since been republished in a range of periodicals, translated into 23 languages for an Amnesty International publication, and adapted as a piece of choral music by Arab-American composer, Mohammed Fairouz. Literary translations can be an important mnemonic device to foreground the remediation of memory. The translation of a Latin ode and the later appropriations of the text, the Amnesty translations in 2004 and the musical adaptation, disrupt the national memory frame that has circumscribed 9/11.

Although 9/11 was a transnational event, the commemorative culture has largely been shaped within a nationalist frame, which remembers the traumatic event in terms of national identity. The attack on the World Trade Centre in Manhattan had a global reach, however, and the collective memory of the event cannot be contained within national borders. As Michael Rothberg observes: 'In its preconditions, in its mass media unfolding, and in its deadly repercussions, September 11 was a global event. It demands a literature that takes risks, speaks in multiple tongues, and dares to move beyond near-sightedness.'¹ 'Anything Can Happen' and Heaney's other 9/11 poems foreground the intersecting transnational and transhistorical dimensions of 9/11 memory. I draw on concepts and approaches from transnational memory studies to develop readings of these poems that identify their contribution to a transnational memory culture of 9/11.

A number of recent approaches to memory studies have examined the complex relationship between national and transnational frames of memory. Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney's idea of 'scales of memory' presents 'a dynamic operating at multiple, interlocking scales and involving conduits, intersections, circuits and articulations.'² This approach recognises the significance of national frames of memory, but also that different types of memory production can both 'reinforce and transcend them.'³ 'Anything Can Happen' illustrates the 'interlocking scales' of memory by travelling across national, temporal and linguistic boundaries. Moreover, the reception of the poem has occurred on multiple scales: the immediate repercussions of this poem were evident in its local and national reception, while the long-term reverberations have had global implications. De Cesari and Rigney write of a past which can be understood 'within shifting social frames operating at different scales and across different territories.'⁴ I aim to show that 'Anything Can Happen' provides new possibilities for interpreting the memory of 9/11 by considering the adaptation and circulation of the text in a transnational literary sphere.

¹ Michael Rothberg, 'Seeing Terror, Feeling Art: Public and Private in Post 9/11 Literature,' in *Literature after 9/11*, ed. Anne Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn (New York: Routledge, 2008), Kindle Edition.

² Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney, *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, (Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), Ebrary edition, 6.

³ Ibid., 4.

⁴ Ibid., 6.

The national collective memory of 9/11 has been shaped by political speech and mass media representation. This national memory of the 9/11 attacks, which circulated transnationally, tended to shut out other perspectives. From the beginning, the military actions that followed were framed in terms of oppositions between good and evil, Christianity and Islam. In his address to the nation on September 20, 2001, George W. Bush set the agenda for public discourse: 'They hate our freedoms.'⁵ In *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* David Simpson outlines the ways in which the commemoration of this event was used to serve a political agenda:

... the forms of commemoration have been correspondingly urgent and perhaps untimely, hurried along and even hijacked by the tide of secondary events whose connections with 9/11 are to say the least open to dispute. In less than two years we went from the fall of the Twin Towers and the attack on the Pentagon to the invasion of Iraq, a process marked by propagandist compression and manufactured consent so audacious as to seem unbelievable, except that it happened.⁶

Simpson's discussion of the link between public discourse and military retaliation highlights the 'near-sightedness' that Rothberg warns we must move beyond. The identification of the compressed nature of political rhetoric highlights the danger in oversimplifying complex issues in public discourse. The connection between the commemoration of 9/11 and the subsequent military action shows how political discourse serves a national agenda, but also how this form of memory production contributes little to an understanding of the global repercussions of retaliation.

⁵ George W. Bush, 'President Bush Addresses the Nation,' *The Washington Post*, September 20, 2001, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html.

⁶ David Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 4.

The poetry of 9/11 – ‘I must not claim false intimacy or summon an overheated heart glazed just in time for a camera’

While poetry is also a compressed form of response, it is one that invites a broader range of responses than political speech and mainstream journalism. Poems are not confined by national borders and can become what Ann Rigney describes as a ‘portable monuments.’ As ‘artifacts,’ she explains, literary texts have a durability that makes them appropriate for memory, but as they are not anchored to a particular site they can be ‘recycled’ in different places and times.⁷ The brevity of the form lends itself to circulation. In the days after 9/11 in New York poetry became a popular medium for the expression of grief. On October 1, 2001, Dinitia Smith wrote in *The New York Times*:

In the weeks since the terrorist attacks, people have been consoling themselves – and one another – with poetry in an almost unprecedented way. Almost immediately after the event, improvised memorials often conceived around poems sprang up all over the city, in store windows, at bus stops, in Washington Square Park, Brooklyn Heights and elsewhere.⁸

Smith notes that poetry was being widely circulated through email networks. She identifies particular poems as having a resonance for the moment: Shelley’s ‘Ozymandias,’ Auden’s ‘September 1, 1939’ and Seamus Heaney’s choral ode from *The Cure at Troy*. The popularity of these poems highlights the transcultural nature of poetry, a genre that has always borrowed from other cultural traditions. In *A Transnational Poetics* Jahan Ramazani explains that ‘because poetry is such a long-memored form, it is enmeshed – even when stridently nationalist in ideology – by a complexly cross-national weave in its rhythms and tropes, stanza patterns and generic adaptations.’⁹ This ‘enmeshment’ can be seen Shelley’s use of the sonnet form and the symbolism of an Ancient Egyptian relic to reflect on the

⁷ Ann Rigney, ‘Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans,’ *Poetics Today* 25, no. 2 (2004): 383, doi:10.1215/03335372-25-2-361.

⁸ Dinitia Smith, ‘In Shelley or Auden, in the Sonnet or Free Verse, the Eerily Intimate Power of Poetry to Console,’ *The New York Times*, October 1, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/01/books/shelley-auden-sonnet-free-verse-eerily-intimate-power-poetry-console.html>.

⁹ Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 13.

transience of human power, and in Heaney's use of the choral ode from Greek tragedy to represent the challenges of working toward reconciliation after violent conflict. The appropriation of these texts by grieving New Yorkers further highlights the ease with which poetry can travel across time and space, a process Ramazani describes as 'geopoetic oscillation.'¹⁰

Immediately after 9/11, there was a demand for well-known American poets to produce new work in response to the attack. The resulting poetry represents a different form of poetic transnationalism. American poets tended to take a broader view of the geopolitical and historical context than was evident in mainstream media. According to Laurence Goldstein, three anthologies of 9/11 poetry by American poets were published in 2002. He observes that the immediate challenge for poets was to 'recover a form' that would 'refresh the reader's understanding of the radically reconfigured (dis)continuity of past and present,' a form that he argues was 'most often found in literary and religious traditions.'¹¹ Jeffrey Gray reports that in a wide range of works by American poets the 'overwhelming response ... was guilt,' something he felt counter-balanced the outrage being expressed in the media.¹² The 9/11 works of Galway Kinnell and Amiri Baraka represent this pattern. In 'When the Towers Fell' Kinnell draws upon the violent history of the twentieth century to find 'not a comparison but a corollary' (l. 76) for the 9/11 attacks: the lynching of African Americans in the South, the holocaust, 'atomic blasts wiping cities off the earth, firebombings the same, / death marches, starvations, assassinations, disappearances, / entire countries turned into rubble, minefields, mass graves' (ll. 86-8). Amiri Baraka's 'Somebody Blew Up America' draws on a range of atrocities, encompassing the 'trail of tears,' British colonisation, the Armenian genocide, apartheid and the assassinations of Dr King and the Kennedys. Jeffrey Gray argues that Baraka presents September 11 as 'part of a much greater, many layered continuum'

¹⁰ Ibid., 58.

¹¹ Laurence Goldstein, 'The Response of American Poets to 9/11: A Provisional Report,' *Michigan Quarterly Review* 48, no. 1 (2009): 54, <http://search.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/docview/232307800/abstract/9D1D3A58EE849BBPQ/1?accountid=8330>.

¹² Jeffrey Gray, 'Precious Testimony: Poetry and the Uncommemorable,' in *Literature after 9/11*, ed. Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansby Quinn (New York; London: Routledge, 2008), Kindle edition, ch. 14.

rather than as a singular event.¹³ What some of this poetry has in common is the tendency to understand global atrocities in relation to a 'national' tragedy. Suheir Hammad's 'first writing since,' on the other hand, moves across and beyond and looks forward in time rather than backward. As an American of Palestinian descent she worried about how the event would impact on Muslims, recalling that her first response was 'please god, after the second plane, please don't let it be anyone / who looks like my brothers' (ll. 15-6). As she states: 'if there are any people on earth who understand how new york is / feeling right now, they are in the west bank and the gaza strip' (ll. 93-4). Hammad originally emailed the poem to 50 friends, who then circulated it through their email networks.¹⁴ Michael Rothberg first encountered the text on the listserv Professors for Peace, but notes that within months of the attack it could be found on over 150 websites. He describes Hammad's poem as 'a multi-layered work of mourning and an ethico-political call for justice.'¹⁵ The 9/11 work of American poets was not confined by borders or boundaries as it circulated through traditional literary and evolving digital networks.

The demand for 9/11 poetry was not confined to the United States; there was a corresponding demand for prominent international writers to commemorate the 9/11 attack. Seamus Heaney's response can be seen, in part, as the articulation of his responsibility as a Nobel Laureate, a role which elevates and consecrates the recipient and ensures a global audience. The Nobel Prize in Literature is often awarded to writers who represent local or national literary communities, but the conferral of the prize grants a global prestige. The Nobel has long been understood as a quasi-humanitarian award, and its criteria specify works that have 'conferred the greatest good upon mankind' and point in an 'ideal direction.'¹⁶ Rebecca Braun explains that 'the recipient experiences an overnight

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Natalie Hopkinson, 'Out of the Ashes, Drops of Meaning: The Poetic Success of Suheir Hammad,' *The Washington Post*, October 13, 2002, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/out-ashes-drops-meaning-poetic-success-suheir-hammad/4173>.

¹⁵ Michael Rothberg, "'There Is No Poetry in This': Writing, Trauma, and Home,' ed. Judith Greenberg, *Trauma at Home: After 9/11* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), Kindle edition.

¹⁶ James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), Kindle edition, ch. 3.

transformation in both their public standing and personal circumstances.¹⁷ This transformation brings with it the expectation to speak on matters of global significance. Having received the Prize in 1995, Heaney was now culturally authorised to speak about 9/11.

After 9/11 Heaney's fellow Nobel Laureates Wislawa Szymborska and Toni Morrison published new poems that grapple with the challenges of representing atrocity. As Nobel Laureates, they were endowed with the authority to write for a global audience and to shape the collective transnational memory of 9/11. Toni Morrison's poetic response, 'The Dead of September 11,' dated September 13, 2001, identifies the victims as 'those children of ancestors born in every continent / on the planet: Asia, Europe, Africa, the Americas...;' (l. 4-5). The last half of the poem is addressed directly to these victims:

To speak to you, the dead of September 11, I must not claim
false intimacy or summon an overheated heart glazed
just in time for a camera. I must be steady and I must be clear,
knowing all the time that I have nothing to say – no words
stronger than the steel that pressed you into itself; no scripture
older or more elegant than the ancient atoms you
have become (ll. 23-29).

Morrison's poem conveys wariness that her public profile might be used to stake a claim on the event, knowing all the while that there are 'no words / stronger than the steel that pressed you into itself.' The unwillingness to 'claim false intimacy' or 'summon an overheated heart glazed / just in time for camera' reveals the difficulty of being in a position where some form of public response is expected. This reticence is echoed in Szymborska's 'Photograph from September 11,' which describes the press photographs of bodies falling from the Twin Towers: 'The photograph halted them in life, / and now keeps them / above the earth toward the earth' (l. 3-6). In the final stanza she concludes:

¹⁷ Rebecca Braun, 'Fetishising Intellectual Achievement: The Nobel Prize and European Literary Celebrity,' *Celebrity Studies* 2, no. 3 (2011): 321, doi:10.1080/19392397.2011.609340.

I can do only two things for them –
 describe this flight
 and not add a last line (ll. 16-18).

The poem seeks to freeze the victims in time 'still within the air's reach' and the refusal to add a last line amounts to a refusal to represent the atrocity of inevitable outcome.

Heaney's adaptation of Ode 1.34 – 'Anything Can Happen'

Heaney avoids 'false intimacy' by mediating the events of 9/11 through a Horatian ode. The adaptation of a canonical text draws out the transnational by foregrounding the usually invisible process of translation and giving a text from a 'dead' language a new transnational life. By 2001, when 'Horace and the Thunder' was first published, adaptation and translation had become central to Heaney's work. His use of Horace in 'Anything Can Happen' has parallels to the way that Horace had raided the metres and forms and themes of earlier Greek poets to represent Augustan Rome. In an introduction to a new translation of the odes Kaimowitz writes of Horace 'making his connection with earlier literary traditions at the same time as he is staking out new literary territory for himself.'¹⁸ The adaptation of work from another literary tradition exemplifies the process Astrid Erll describes in her description of the 'literary afterlives' of texts: over decades and centuries they are 'received, discussed, used, canonized, forgotten, censored, and re-used.'¹⁹

'Anything Can Happen' is a representation of the violence of the planes striking the Twin Towers. The poem registers the shock of a sudden attack 'across a clear blue sky' and represents the power imbalance in global politics. Heaney shifts the focus of the original text by deleting the first stanza of Horace's ode, one

¹⁸ Jeffrey H Kaimowitz, *The Odes of Horace* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), Muse ebook, xxiii.

¹⁹ Astrid Erll, 'Traumatic Pasts, Literary Afterlives, and Transcultural Memory: New Directions of Literary and Media Memory Studies,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 3 (2011): 3, doi:10.3402/jac.v3i0.7186.

that is generally agreed to describe a religious conversion.²⁰ The second stanza of Horace 1.34 becomes the first stanza of Heaney's translation. It opens with the metaphor of Jupiter's 'thunder cart' shaking the earth, the underworld and the 'Atlantic shore itself' ('Anything Can Happen' l. 4-7). The enjambment of the lines across the second and third stanzas suggests a causal chain:

Anything can happen, the tallest towers

Be overturned, those in high places daunted,
Those overlooked regarded (ll. 8-10).

The implication is that toppling 'the tallest towers' can 'daunt' those in high places and cause them to 'regard' the 'overlooked,' perhaps for the first time. The third stanza foreshadows the cycle of revenge and retaliation that was to follow through the graphic imagery of fortune as a bird of prey who can tear the crest from the 'daunted' and give it – 'bleeding' – to another:

... Stopped-beak Fortune
Swoops, making the air gasp, tearing the crest off one
Setting it down bleeding on the next. (ll. 10-12).

The personification of the natural elements, 'making the air gasp,' reinforces the shock of the sudden attack. The metaphor of fortune as a bird of prey conveys the brutality of historical change, but also allows for the swift reversal of fortunes. In 'Horace and the Thunder' the lines were rendered: 'tearing off / Crests for sport, letting them drop wherever.' The minor change in 'Anything Can Happen' changes the way the violence is represented. Instead of arbitrary killing for 'sport,' with no regard for the aftermath, Fortune deliberately places the 'bleeding' crest on the next bird of prey. Zumwalt observes that in Horace's poetry Fortuna is often associated with uncertainty in political events and that in Horace's ode the final

²⁰ N. K. Zumwalt, 'Horace C. 1.34: Poetic Change and Political Equivocation' (paper presented at the Transactions of the American Philological Association, 1974): 436, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2936101>.

statement is 'an observation that high political power is subject to the whims of Fortune.'²¹

In his adaptation Heaney took 'the liberty' of adding a final stanza that modifies the view of Fortune presented in the third stanza.²² The stanza describes an event that has shaken the earth to its very foundations, using the geological impact as a metaphor for the political consequences. The imagery in the final stanza shows that the repercussions of 9/11 are ongoing:

Ground gives. The heavens' weight
Lifts up off Atlas like a kettle lid,
Capstones shift, nothing resettles right.
Telluric ash and fire-spores boil away (l. 13-16).

This rending of heaven and earth has resulted in everything resettling slightly off kilter. In the earlier version of the poem the final line is 'Smoke furl and boiling ashes darken day,' a metaphorical description of the ash cloud that blanketed New York in the days and weeks following the attack on the Twin Towers ('Horace and the Thunder'). In later versions Heaney made the decision to change this to 'Telluric ash and fire spores boil away.' This change shows that even after the 'smoke furl' has cleared there is still anger boiling beneath the surface. While Horace's ode ends with the image of rapacious fortune, Heaney's poem ends with the long-term consequences of these shifts of fortune.

A Horatian ode is an apt choice for a 'public' poem as it highlights the intersection of the deep past and the present. Temporality can be understood as another type of scale, one which is dynamic and non-linear. David Simpson argues that decisions about public commemorative monuments are 'often and ideally the products of slow time.'²³ He describes how the attacks have been presented as 'an interruption of the deep rhythms of cultural time, a cataclysm simply erasing what

²¹ Ibid., 464.

²² Seamus Heaney, *Anything Can Happen: A Poem and Essay by Seamus Heaney with Translations in Support of Art for Amnesty*, (Dublin: Townhouse, 2004), 19.

²³ Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, 2.

was there rather than evolving from anything already in place.’²⁴ Heaney disrupts this narrative of exceptionality by adapting an ode by Horace, who himself lived through a period of transition. Paul Allen Miller writes of Horace’s odes: ‘Historically speaking, they are poems of transition. Caught between the worlds of the republic and the empire, they negotiate a middle path between public engagement and private withdrawal.’²⁵ This identification of the unpredictability of historical change makes Horace an apposite choice for Heaney, writing at another moment of transition. In his study of 9/11 poetry by American poets, Jeffrey Gray argues that ‘much of poetry’s power resides precisely in its atemporal slippage’ and that it is most powerful ‘when it least imitates the reportorial illusion of access to prior realities.’²⁶ The adaptation of an Horatian ode effects this type of slippage by placing the reader at a distance from the incendiary rhetoric of retaliation. The ‘untimely’ commemoration that David Simpson wrote of is suspended; the ode provides an opportunity to pause and reflect upon what has happened.

The circulation of ‘Anything Can Happen’ and the remediation of 9/11 memory – ‘ongoing civic service’

Heaney has made the poem available to a broader readership by extending the life of what began as an occasional poem. The publication history demonstrates how the poem was able to ‘travel’ across national boundaries by reappearing in British and American publications with global readerships. After its first appearance in *The Irish Times* in 2001, ‘Anything Can Happen’ was revised and reprinted in the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Harpers Magazine* and *Irish Pages* in 2002 and collected in *District and Circle* (2006). In *Irish Pages* it was accompanied by ‘Reality and Justice,’ an essay describing his response to the 9/11 attacks. In 2004 Amnesty International published a series of translations of ‘Anything Can Happen’ with an introductory essay by Heaney. Because he has chosen to

²⁴ Ibid., 4.

²⁵ Paul Allen Miller, ‘Horace, Mercury, and Augustus, or the Poetic Ego of Odes 1-3,’ *American Journal of Philology* 112, no. 3 (1991): 365, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/294738>.

²⁶ Jeffrey Gray, ‘Precocious Testimony: Poetry and the Uncommemorable,’ ed. Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn, *Literature After 9/11* (New York; London: Routledge, 2008), Kindle edition, ch. 14.

commemorate 9/11 with an adaptation of a classical ode Heaney is writing for an implied reader who understands the cultural references, and these essays serve to 'translate' the translation for the reader who does not. In *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders explains that making the relationship with the source text explicit 'depend[s] upon a complex invocation of ideas of similarity and difference' and 'can only be mobilized by a reader or spectator alert to the intertextual relationship.'²⁷ For the reader who may not be alert to these intertextual links, Heaney's essays on the adaptation provide a framework for reading the poem.

The explanatory essays have been used to shape the readers' response not just to the poem, but also to the 9/11 attacks. Heaney makes specific reference to the international military campaign that was the outcome of the war on terror and warns of the folly of entering a cycle of retaliation. 'Reality and Justice: On Translating Horace Odes, 1, 34' focuses on early theories that Al Qaeda attacks were based on justice for Palestinians. Heaney explains:

Obviously there was an eerie correspondence between words 'valet ima summis mutare ... deus' (the god has power to change the highest things to/for the lowest) and the dreamy, deadly images of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre being struck and then crumbling out of sight; and there was an equally unnerving fit between the conventional wisdom of the Latin 'obscura promens' (bringing the disregarded to notice) and the *realpolitik* of the terrorist assault, in that the irruption of death into the Manhattan morning produced not only world darkening grief for the multitudes of victims' families and friends, but it also had the effect of bringing to new prominence the plight of the Palestinians and much else in and about the Arab world.²⁸

Heaney's identification of Palestinians as 'the disregarded' provides an interesting example of how the memory of 9/11 evolved in the years that followed. In 2002, when 'Reality and Justice' was written, Heaney's identification of the 'plight of the

²⁷ Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), Kindle edition, 21.

²⁸ Seamus Heaney, 'Reality and Justice: On Translating Horace Odes, 1, 34,' *Irish Pages* 1, no. 2 (2002): 52.

Palestinians' reflects the view that addressing this plight was an essential factor in addressing the threat of terrorism. Instead, the US government shaped public opinion by focusing on a more generalised threat and used this to legitimise military action in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Anything Can Happen: A Poem and Essay by Seamus Heaney with Translations in Support of Art for Amnesty was published two years later, at a time when the United States had invaded Iraq, ostensibly because they believed that Saddam Hussain had supported Al Qaeda and was stockpiling weapons of mass destruction. Heaney's introduction to this collection of translations reframes the poem in terms of the invasion of Iraq and reshapes the memory to incorporate a change in circumstances. He reprises the sentence he had used in 'Reality and Justice,' modifying the final clause:

... the irruption of death into the Manhattan morning produced not only world darkening grief for the multitudes of victims' families and friends, but it also had the effect of darkening the future with the prospect of deadly retaliations. Stealth bombers pummelling the fastnesses of Afghanistan, shock and awe loosed from the night skies over Iraq, they all seem part of the deadly fallout from the thunder cart in Horace's clear blue afternoon.²⁹

This modification acknowledges the developments in US foreign policy in the intervening years. The essay encompasses the military response to 9/11 and alludes to the widespread global disapproval of the war on Iraq, which was contemporaneous with the preparation of this publication. Heaney does not position himself as a disinterested observer: his description of the 'pummelling' of Afghanistan and 'deadly fallout' of the attacks emphasises the scale of the violent response. Heaney speaks about the many incarnations of 'Anything Can Happen' as 'ongoing civic service,' an expectation that arises because of his public profile.³⁰ These essays about 'Anything Can Happen' stand as a public statement of his opposition to the 'war on terror' as he adds his voice to the chorus urging restraint

²⁹ Heaney, *Anything Can Happen: A Poem and Essay by Seamus Heaney with Translations in Support of Art for Amnesty*, 18.

³⁰ Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), Kindle edition, 424.

in response to 9/11. David Antoine Williams regards the poem and essay as an affront to the victims of 9/11 attacks. He argues that 'it allies Heaney more to the victims of retaliatory violence than those who died in the Twin Towers' and is 'uncouth' in the 'alliances it makes and the lessons it imparts, or imposes.'³¹ This criticism highlights an impasse within the United States, where discussion of the implications of 9/11 has been circumscribed. Too often, consideration of the historical and political context is seen to devalue the suffering of those directly affected and the preferred narrative is the 'clash of civilizations' between East and West.

Michael Rothberg argues that there is an ethical dimension to these types of comparison and observes that 'an ethics of transcultural memory ... would ask both how and why histories are imagined in relation to each other.'³² He suggests that the range of reasons runs the continuum from 'competition to solidarity'³³. Rothberg suggests that rather than an ethics of memory, scholars should move to 'the *politics* of memory'; to do this, he suggests, they should consider the 'material conditions in which ethical approaches to the past become possible.'³⁴ By placing the events of 9/11 within a historical continuum, Heaney disrupts the narrative of exceptionalism.

The Amnesty publication deflects attention from the 'war on terror' as the primary source of conflict in the world. The process of translation allows the poem to move across national borders and to cross linguistic boundaries. Although the attacks happened in New York, the reverberations have been felt across the world. By presenting translations of a translation, the publication foregrounds the idea that collective memory is always mediated and remediated. This invites readers to reconsider their own understanding of the war on terror and reject the idea that the 9/11 attacks belong to one nation or language. In the Amnesty collection translations of 'Anything Can Happen' have been paired on facing pages in

³¹ David-Antoine Williams, *Defending Poetry: Art and Ethics in Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, and Geoffrey Hill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 151.

³² A. Dirk Moses and Michael Rothberg, 'A Dialogue on the Ethics and Politics of Transcultural Memory,' ed. Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson, *The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), Ebrary edition, 33.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

'languages of conflict.'³⁵ These pairings represent many of the major global conflicts of the twentieth century: the first two translations are English and Irish, followed by Xhosa and Afrikaans, Hebrew and Arabic, Serbian and Bosnian, Chinese and Tibetan, Spanish and Basque, Hindi and Urdu, Turkish and Greek. The arrangement of the collection highlights ancient conflicts and rejects the idea that they are intractable. This was emphasised at the book launch, which took place in November of 2004 at the Irish Centre for Human Rights, located at the National University of Ireland, Galway. At the launch Heaney presented the centre with a copy of the text signed by Nelson Mandela.³⁶ The endorsement from Mandela underlined the message of the publication: that political violence is transient and reconciliation is possible.

Musical Adaptation – 'The world has to exist in counterpoint'

One of the more recent uses of 'Anything Can Happen' is as a piece of choral music by Mohammed Fairouz. This adaptation of the poem brings two different cultural traditions into counterpoint. While this is not the first musical adaptation of 'Anything Can Happen,' Fairouz's oratorio is the first that involves collaboration with Heaney. Fairouz, an Arab-American composer, has also written a symphony based on Art Spiegelman's 9/11 graphic novel, *In the Shadow of No Towers* and another, *Poems and Prayers*, which brings together the poetry of the Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, and Israeli poet, Yehudi Amichai. Fairouz believes that 'the world has to exist in counterpoint ... instead of each individual melody losing anything by being combined as a whole, it becomes like a wonderful tapestry, a tapestry where each of these individual threads doesn't lose its meaning, doesn't lose its identity, doesn't lose its own *raison d'être*, its own reason for being, but contributes to the whole tapestry of counterpoint.'³⁷ This counterpoint exists in 'Anything Can Happen' through the interweaving of poetry by Seamus Heaney and verses from the Arabic *Injeel*.

³⁵ Heaney, *Anything Can Happen: A Poem and Essay by Seamus Heaney with Translations in Support of Art for Amnesty*, 19.

³⁶ NUI Galway, 'Seamus Heaney Launches "Anything Can Happen" at NUI Galway,' <https://www.nuigalway.ie/about-us/news-and-events/news-archive/2004/november2004/seamus-heaney-launches-anything-can-happen-at-nui-galway.html>.

³⁷ Krista Tippett, 'Transcript for Mohammed Fairouz – the World in Counterpoint,' *On Being* (2015), http://www.onbeing.org/program/transcript/7517#main_content.

Heaney's collaboration with Fairouz on this project demonstrates a willingness to translate his work in myriad ways and also to use a range of genres to frame a response to the poem itself. The grouping of Heaney poems with the composer's own translation of the Arabic *Injeel* shows the interdependence of East and West. In a letter to Fairouz, Heaney proposed that the poem could be used as the final part of a triptych with two other poems from *District and Circle*: 'the first two being ominous, the third catastrophic – the omen fulfilled, as it were.'³⁸ The first poem, 'In Iowa,' describes a blizzard and signals the dangers posed by climate change. This impression is reinforced in the following poem, 'Hofn,' which portrays a melting glacier. Heaney's suggestion that the three poems could make a triptych implies a world in danger of self-destruction. Fairouz decided that there were parallels to the Arabic *Injeel* in the three poems, and in the oratorio Heaney's three poems are separated by the composer's own translation of the first *sura* and second *sura* of the *Injeel*. The final poem, 'Anything Can Happen,' is preceded by the second *sura*, in which: 'the dragon, banished from Heaven attempts to drown the mother of humanity by drowning her and her children in a flood which it unleashes. In failing the dragon vows revenge on the woman and future generations.'³⁹ The juxtaposition of the dragon's vow of revenge and Heaney's 'Anything Can Happen' underlines the misgivings about retaliation and revenge Heaney has expressed in his own prose essays about the translation.

This adaptation of Heaney's 'Anything Can Happen' highlights the ongoing consequences of the attack that came 'across a clear blue sky.' The 'travels' of 'Anything Can Happen' – its transnational and transtemporal movements – serve as a reminder that the memory of 9/11 is not fixed, and that the future can be re-imagined. The premiere of 'Anything Can Happen,' performed by the Back Bay Choral Singers, took place at Harvard in the week of the tenth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq and, as one reviewer noted, 'seemed to match a baleful mood in this country as it reflects on loss of life and of innocence during the past decade.'⁴⁰

³⁸ Mahommed Fairouz, 'Anything Can Happen,' 2012, <http://mohammedfairouz.com/anything-can-happen/>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ David Wright, 'Back Bay Chorale Muses on Last Things with New Fairouz Work, Mozart Requiem,' *Boston Classical Review* (2013),

David Simpson claims that ‘the event we call 9/11 has a past that we can discover, a present that we must monitor, and a future we can project.’⁴¹ This discoverable past was buried in the political rhetoric and media coverage that followed the destruction of the World Trade Centre, leading to a present in which the consequences of the ‘war on terror’ are playing out on the global stage.

Multi-scalarity in *District and Circle* – ‘like one with a doubtful tale to tell, / Turned to the others present, at great pains / To make them realize what had stood so’

In *District and Circle*, ‘Anything Can Happen’ is the first in a sequence of poems which present a range of perspectives on the 9/11 attacks and engage with the event through different language traditions. This series highlights shifting scales of memory by moving across territories, folding together images from different time periods, and foregrounding the process of translation. This collection is marked by a sense of menace and by military imagery, but it is not defined by this. Tobias Hill, in a review for *The Observer*, writes that the collection describes ‘a world overshadowed by war, a place in which both the power and the horror of violence seem inescapable.’⁴² He suggests that, while the military imagery and representation of violence has occurred before in Heaney’s work, ‘what is new is the breadth of Heaney’s territory, the global jurisdiction he claims.’⁴³ Hill feels that the academic difficulty and allusiveness of Heaney’s work ‘allows him to study a worldful of wars, and to do so on his own terms.’

Seamus Heaney considered ‘Anything Can Happen’ and another poem from *District and Circle*, ‘Midnight Anvil,’ as the defining poems of the collection. In ‘Midnight Anvil’ the local blacksmith, Barney Devlin, hammers the anvil twelve times to ring in the new millennium:

<http://bostonclassicalreview.com/2013/03/back-bay-chorale-muses-on-last-things-with-new-fairouz-work-mozart-requiem/#sthash.osAjZxHb.dpuf>.

⁴¹ Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, 13.

⁴² Tobias Hill, ‘Arms around the World,’ *The Observer*, April 2, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/apr/02/poetry.seamusheaney>.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

The blow struck on the local anvil and the strike against the twin towers are the tuning forks for poems that appear in the early pages of the book that I would eventually call *District and Circle*. To begin with, I even thought that "Midnight Anvil" might be a good overall title, in so far as its suggestions of hammering force and ominous dark matched the mood of the new age of anxiety. But there was something too heroic in the phrase, something that might seem to be approving the manifest deadliness of the retaliatory attacks on Afghanistan and (later on) Iraq.⁴⁴

The metaphorical 'tuning forks' evoke the resonance of the two poems, the potential of a new millennium and then, less than twelve months later, the new world order introduced by the attacks on the World Trade Centre. Heaney's reluctance to use this as the title may be linked to the military operation in Afghanistan in 2002 that involved task force Hammer and task force Anvil. The consistent element of his poetry and prose responses to 9/11 and the aftermath is his concern about military retaliation as an appropriate response.

In *District and Circle* 'Anything Can Happen' is immediately followed by 'Helmet.' A firefighter's helmet, given as a gift by a Boston firefighter many years previously, is used as a symbol of gallantry. The rapacious bird of fortune of 'Anything Can Happen' is alluded to in the first stanza, with the 'fantailing brim' (l. 3) of the helmet and again in the third stanza with Heaney's insistence that the helmet be called the crest 'for crest it is' (l. 7). The helmet is described as 'the headgear / of the tribe,' a reference to the strong Irish-American community in Boston (ll. 12-13). The intimacy of this poem is a stark contrast to the detached observer in the previous poem. While 'Anything Can Happen' places the reader at a distance from the event, as an observer, the specific detail and concrete imagery of 'Helmet' brings the reader to into the twin towers.

In both poems Heaney has found the past in the present through allusion to canonical texts. In this poem Heaney appropriates the language and imagery of *Beowulf* in order to honour the bravery of the 9/11 first responders. In an interview from 2003, before the publication of this collection, Heaney discusses

⁴⁴ Seamus Heaney, "One Poet in Search of a Title," *The Times*, March 25, 2006.

the process of writing 'Helmet.' He refers to some lines from *Beowulf* ('that were at the back of my mind always') in which the hero is presented with the gift of a helmet by King Hrothgar after defeating Grendel:

An embossed ridge, a bent rod lapped with wire
 Arched over the helmet: protective headgear
 To keep the hard ground cutting edge
 From damaging it when danger threatened
 And the man was battling wild behind his shield.⁴⁵

He talks of the significance of the accoutrements of battle in Anglo Saxon poetry, especially the shield wall that was 'the line of battle'⁴⁶ and the 'shoulder companion' of soldiers. The language of *Beowulf* reverberates through 'Helmet':

In right heroic mood that afternoon
 When the fireman-poet presented it to me
 As 'the visiting fireman' –

As if I were up to it, as if I had
 Served time under it, his fire-thane's shield
 His shoulder awning, while shattering glass

And rubble-bolts out of a burning roof
 Hailed down on every hatchet man and hose man
 There
 Till the hard-reared shield-wall broke. (ll. 14-23)

The metaphor of the 'fire-thane's shield' evokes images of the feudal warfare described in *Beowulf* and reinforces the militarism in the earlier image of the crest. This is reinforced in the final line with the 'hard-reared shield wall.' Despite

⁴⁵ Dennis O'Driscoll, 'Readings and Conversations: Seamus Heaney with Dennis O'Driscoll,' Lannan Foundation, Podcast Audio, October 1, 2003, <http://www.lannan.org/events/seamus-heaney-with-dennis-odriscoll>. Heaney quotes from another translation of *Beowulf* rather than his own. Although the differences are insignificant, he refers to 'the poet' without discussing his own prior translation.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

their valour in battle and the steeliness of their resolve the 'hard reared' wall 'broke' and the warriors are defeated. The strength of the firefighters is emphasised in the metaphor 'his shoulder awning,' in which the body of the firefighter forms a protective barrier against the 'rubble-bolts' that rain down from the roof. The use of kenning, a convention in Anglo Saxon poetry, in the final stanzas, the 'fire-thanes' shoulder awning,' 'rubble-bolts' and 'shield-wall,' suggest the bravery of medieval warriors. The final stanzas evoke the collapse of the towers on the World Trade Centre, trapping firefighters inside. This close focus on the firefighters moves across and beyond the national frame of 9/11 memory. The representation of the intimate, specific and sited deaths inside the World Trade Centre intersects with the fealty and honour of a medieval warrior through an old English epic poem.

The ways that memories travel and circulate can be seen in the following poems in the sequence, which also adapt and appropriate texts from other language traditions. In these poems the local intersects with the global, and the deep past meets the present. In 'Out of Shot' Heaney brings together the worlds of a serene Irish farmyard and a mortar attack in a bazaar in Iraq, linking them with an allusion to a medieval Irish poem about a Viking raid. He uses the sonnet form to comment on the 'out of the blue' nature of an attack. The octave of the sonnet alludes to the 'distant' Vikings, reminding the reader of *North*, and to the scriptorium, the workspace of monastic scribes in medieval times. His reference to the 'Norse raids, night-dreads' in 'that fierce raiders poem' (l. 7) refers to a ninth-century poem written by a monk: 'Bitter the wind tonight, combing the sea's hair white: from the North, no need to fear the proud, sea-coursing warrior.'⁴⁷ This line, which appears directly before the volta, positions the reader to recognise the contrast between the benign warrior and the 'attack / in the small hours' (ll. 8-9) which arrives 'out of the blue or blackout' (l. 10). The use of the word 'scriptorium' is a reminder of the 'The Scribes' from *Station Island*, in which he refers to the process of scribes inserting marginalia ('they scratched and clawed'). The image of the donkey 'loosed from a cart that had loosed five mortar shells' who staggers across the television news and wanders 'out of shot' evokes the marginalia of the

⁴⁷ Version by John Montague. Cited in Ciaran Carson, *The Star Factory* (London: Granta Books, 1997).

scribes (l. 12). As well as the pun on 'out of shot,' getting out of the line of fire, the line reinforces the importance of what happens beyond the lens of the TV cameras. As with the other 9/11 poems, there is a strange and dreamlike quality to the description of the stunned animal.

This strangeness is reprised in the following poem, a translation which deals explicitly with the witnessing of atrocity. 'Rilke: *After the Fire*' describes a boy who tries to make the bystanders understand what has been destroyed. The character 'like one with a doubtful tale to tell, / Turned to the others present, at great pains / To make them realize what had stood so.' These lines convey the boy's bewilderment. It reinforces, though, the element of 'shock and awe' that was so much a feature of the earlier poem:

'For now that it was gone, it all seemed
Far stranger: more fantastical than Pharaoh.
And he was changed: A foreigner among them.'

Heaney discusses this element of the poem: 'It's about trauma, really, and about a kind of trauma that's suffered universally now. Even in Belfast it was the shock of something that was there blown up and gone away overnight, and it has been seen on a grand scale recently everywhere in the world ... there's that slightly traumatized, agog quality to the boy's perception. I thought it was a poem for our moment, also, in a different way.'⁴⁸ The comparison of the attack to a bombing in Belfast during the 'Troubles,' the unsettling experience of seeing a landmark suddenly obliterated by violence, preceded by the different sites of 'Out of Shot,' demonstrates the multidirectional nature of memory. De Cesari and Rigney write that transnationalism allows us to understand the 'multi-scalarity of socio-cultural processes' and the interdependence of the local, national and global. In this sequence of poems the oscillation between past and present, local and global allows us to rethink 'imagined topographies of verticality.'⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The Book Show, 'Nobel prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney at the Edinburgh International Book Festival,' ABC Radio, Podcast audio, September 29, 2006, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bookshow/nobel-prize-winning-poet-seamus-heaney-at-the/3348670#transcript>.

⁴⁹ De Cesari and Rigney, *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, 17.

In 'District and Circle,' a sequence of five irregular sonnets, Heaney returns to the present, to the 'age of anxiety'⁵⁰ that has resulted from the global 'war on terror.' Although the poem describes a journey on the London tube in the aftermath of the 7/7 attack, the poem does not address this event directly. The first and final sonnets were written prior to the London bombings, with the remaining three written in the aftermath.⁵¹ The apparent clash of form and content is interesting here, although Heaney has long experimented with the sonnet. As well as sonnet sequences to elegise his mother ('Clearances' in *The Haw Lantern*) and to reflect on the role of the poet ('Glanmore Sonnets' in *Field Work*), he had used the form for explicitly political poetry – 'Requiem for the Croppies' (1966) and 'Act of Union' (1975) in particular. The 'District and Circle' sequence subverts the conventions of the form in a number of ways: in the irregular rhyme, in the use of half lines in the final sonnet, and in the content, though it follows the Petrarchan structure with each poem in the sequence demonstrating a rhetorical shift in the final sestet. Helen Vendler has written that Heaney experimented with the sonnet throughout his writing life,⁵² and Thomas O'Grady observes that Heaney is 'completely at ease ... bending and breaking the rules with absolute awareness of the effects of doing so.'⁵³ The 'bending' of the form in this sequence might be read as a way of underlining the contrast between two states of mind: the anxiety engendered by living through a time of terror attacks, and the openness to strangers described in the journey on the Underground.

Heaney has spoken about his wish to convey the general feeling of anxiety in the aftermath of the terrorist attack, 'the strangeness of travelling underground' after this event. The speaker's descent into the underground underlines the importance of the mythical underground in Heaney's *oeuvre*. This poem sequence evokes Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Commedia*, and Eliot's *Four Quartets*, texts that all

⁵⁰ Seamus Heaney, 'Robert Lowell Memorial Lecture: Seamus Heaney,' YouTube video, 1:09:14, posted by Boston University April 8, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emuYwWT7s4A>.

⁵¹ Michael Parker, 'Fallout from the Thunder: Poetry and Politics in Seamus Heaney's *District and Circle*,' *Irish Studies Review* 16, no. 4 (2008), doi:10.1080/09670880802481213.

⁵² Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), Kindle edition.

⁵³ Thomas O'Grady, 'The Art of Heaney's Sonnets,' *The Dalhousie Review* 80, no.3, (2000). <http://hdl.handle.net/10222/63442>.

maintain a ghostly presence throughout his corpus. While in earlier work he had used the underworld as a space to debate the responsibility of the writer,⁵⁴ in 'District and Circle' it becomes a site of human solidarity. In the three central sonnets the speaker descends into the London Underground and rides the District and Circle Line. The journey becomes an act of faith in common humanity.

In 'District and Circle' the London underground is synonymous with the mythical underworld. In the five linked sonnets he moves through the different levels of the underworld. In the first he descends from the street, passing a figure who is part Charon, the ferryman ('a hot coin / Held at the ready' ll. 10-1) and part Orpheus, ('music larked and capered' l. 9). In the second sonnet he moves through the 'dreamy ramparts' of escalators, suggesting a place of safety rather than danger. In the volta he draws out the contrast between the 'cooler tunnels' underground and the light of the summer day above. He imagines the scene in the London park above as 'a resurrection scene minutes before / the resurrection, habits / Of their garden of delights' (ll. 27-30). The scene evokes the Catholic catechism and the promise that the righteous will be resurrected and raised to Heaven on the judgement day. The Underground becomes a waiting place. The visual imagery used to depict the different levels contains the implication of rebirth. This is reinforced by the provenance of this poem, which began as a part of another sonnet sequence in *District and Circle*. In 'The Tollund Man in Springtime' Heaney reanimates the figure from his most well-known bog body poem, sending him on a journey through contemporary London. This sequence, though, is more concerned with the damage humans have wrought on the environment, and Heaney made the decision to 'detach' the poems which dealt with his descent into the Underground to make a new poem.

In the third poem in the sequence Heaney reinforces the interdependence of all humankind. His description of the crowd on the platform emphasises a form of solidarity with others. The crowd becomes a means of protection, like the escalators in the previous poem:

I re-entered the safety of numbers,

⁵⁴ Especially the 'Station Island' sequence of 1984, based on Dante's *Purgatorio*.

A crowd half straggle-ravelled and half strung
Like a human chain ... (ll. 31-33)

The crowd represents comfort in the face of the terror of the underground after 7/7. The train approaching through the tunnel, announcing its arrival with 'a first tremor,' arrives with the pomp of the 'now-or-never whelm' (l. 41). The fourth sonnet describes the journey underground:

Stepping on to it across the gap
On to the carriage metal, I reached to grab
The stubby black roof-wort and take my stand
From planted ball of heel to heel of hand
As sweet traction and heavy down-slump stayed me.
I was on my way, well-girded, yet on edge, (Ll. 43-48)

The act of stepping onto the train 'across the gap' (evoking the iconic 'mind the gap' public announcements on the underground) is presented as an act of faith, of stepping into the unknown. Taking a stand is imagined as the leaning against the force of the moving train ('from planted ball of heel to heel of hand / As sweet traction and heavy down-slump stayed me'). The speaker is metaphorically 'rooted' and 'planted.' In 'Weighing In,' in *The Spirit Level*, taking a stand had been a source of self-doubt and anxiety; here it is a comfort. The fourth sonnet concludes as the train pulls out of the station: 'I was on my way, well-girded, yet on edge' (l. 48). This has the double implication of gird – being prepared for action, being surrounded. In 'District and Circle' a new threat has emerged and a new accommodation needs to be made to his own responsibility.

The steadying comfort of the train's movement is revisited in the final poem of the sequence. This poem foreshadows the central themes and motifs of Heaney's next collection, *Human Chain*. This is principally achieved using the Underground, or underworld, as a place where past, present and future can be folded together. In the first quatrain the speaker sees his dead father's face in his own reflection as the train passes through the tunnels. This fleeting glimpse, representing a wish to revisit the past, is a feature of several poems in *Human Chain*. The sequence

concludes with the idea that we must all place our faith in others. In the final lines he writes of being taken 'through the galleried earth with them, the only relict / Of all that I belonged to' (ll. 66-7). These lines suggest again the interdependence of all humans, with whom the speaker will be 'hurtled forward' into the future. The concluding image of 'blasted weeping rock-walls. / Flicker lit' (ll. 69-70) evokes the 'awareness of the potential danger of a journey nowadays on a London tube train and awareness of the mythical dimensions of all such journeys underground, into the earth, into the dark.'⁵⁵

The following poem, 'To George Seferis in the Underworld,' is written in memory of the Greek Nobel Laureate. In 'To George Seferis' Heaney reconsiders the responsibility of the poet by reflecting on Seferis's moral dilemma about the place of the poet in politics, and his decision finally to speak out on the Greek military junta in the late 60s. It opens with an epigraph taken from the concluding pages of Roderick Beaton's biography on Seferis and recalls an experience on the Greek National day in 1971, shortly before his death, when Seferis sees gorse at the temple to Poseidon:

The men began arguing about the spiky bushes that were in brilliant yellow bloom on the slopes: Were they caltrop or gorse? ... 'That reminds me of something,' said George. 'I don't know ...'⁵⁶

Heaney opens the poem by entering the debate about the name of the plant: 'why do I think *seggans*?' (l. 3). His reference to *seggans*, an Irish plant name, draws a connection to Seferis's *apstholai* and foregrounds the translatability of the poet's experience.

In this poem *apstholai*, or *seggans*, symbolises the political speech of a poet. Seferis was reminded of an episode in Plato's *Republic* where a tyrant is condemned to an underworld punishment of having his skin flayed by gorse (or *aspatholoi*), which inspired his final poem, 'Epi Aspalathoi' ('On Gorse'), which Heaney quotes in this poem:

⁵⁵ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 411.

⁵⁶ Roderick Beaton, *George Seferis: Waiting for the Angel: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 403.

'They bound him hand and foot,
 They flung him down and flayed him,
 Gashing his flesh on thorny *aspatholoi*
 And threw him into Tartarus, torn to shreds.' (ll. 22-25)

In the lines that immediately follow Heaney reflects upon the strategy, one used by both Seferis and himself⁵⁷, of looking to the classical underworld to find an analogy for contemporary political events:

As was only right
 for a tyrant. But still, for you, maybe
 too much I' the right, too black and white,
 if still your chance to strike
 against his ilk,
 a last word meant to break
 your much contested silence.

And for me a chance to test the edge
 of *seggans*, dialect blade
 hoar and hoarder and more hand-to-hand
 than what is common usage nowadays:
 sedge – marshmallow, rubber-dagger stuff. (ll. 26-37)

The idea of punishment in the underworld for the sin of tyranny of this world, introduced by Seferis and developed by Heaney, demonstrates an awareness of the problems of literary translation. Heaney explores silence as a strategy for dealing with political conflict and the potential to 'test the edge / of *seggans*.' The 'dialect blade' becomes a metaphor for political speech as a form of combat. The emphasis on the brutality of the punishment by gorse revisits the 'word-hoard' and 'hand to hand' combat of *Beowulf*, concluding that in the contemporary world language has become 'marshmallow, rubber-dagger stuff.'

⁵⁷ Heaney had used Dante's *Purgatorio* as a model for the exploration of poetic responsibility in 'Station Island'

For both poets it represents the problems of public statement. Seferis exemplifies Heaney's own dilemma as a poet. When this poem was first published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 2004 he wrote about Seferis's 'elected' silence, a line which changed to 'much contested,' a phrase that seems to apply equally to Heaney himself.⁵⁸ The addition of the clause 'too black and white' is also a change from the original published version. In the same chapter of the biography from which the epigraph is taken, Roderick Beaton explains that Seferis was reluctant to be 'used by any political party or faction' because 'to make a direct political statement as a poet would run counter to everything he had always believed about the nature and role of his art.'⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in spite of his own significant reservations, Seferis released his 'Statement' against the junta of colonels ruling Greece shortly afterward. In 'Homage to George Seferis' Heaney speaks of the tension between poets 'desire to speak to and to speak for the common plight' and the danger that doing so would 'vitate their art and be deleterious to their soul.'⁶⁰ As with much of his critical prose, this homage to Seferis is a way of showing his own approach as to political commentary.

In the Western tradition it is conventional to see a combination of *katabasis*, the descent into the underworld, and *nekuia*, the conversation with ghosts.⁶¹ In 'District and Circle' the speaker descends into the underworld, but there is no dialogue with the ghosts waiting there. In 'Station Island' Heaney had sought wisdom, specifically on how to manage his public responsibilities as a poet, one with 'no mettle for the angry role' (l. 115), by speaking to the shades of Irish poets and victims of the 'Troubles.' In 'To George Seferis' he looks beyond the borders of Northern Ireland, and considers poetic responsibility from a transnational perspective.

The underworld becomes increasingly important in Heaney's final works. Heaney draws on a range of literary texts, and uses the underworld as a site of

⁵⁸ Seamus Heaney, 'To George Seferis in the Underworld (Poem),' *Times Literary Supplement*, TLS, no. 5268 (2004).

⁵⁹ Beaton, *George Seferis: Waiting for the Angel: A Biography*, 397.

⁶⁰ Seamus Heaney, 'Homage to Seferis,' *Harvard Review*, no. 20 (2001): 37.

⁶¹ Michael Thurston, *The Underworld in Twentieth-Century Poetry: From Pound and Eliot to Heaney and Walcott* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

memory as well as a space in which he could examine his responsibility as a poet. Rachel Falconer explains that 'katabatic texts also represent time as cut off from historical development, and compressed into repeatable patterns, paradigms, and mythic forms.'⁶² She argues that this compression and distillation is only possible because it is a 'memorious genre'; that is, every *katabasis* contains the echoes of earlier descents.⁶³ Heaney's descents contain echoes of Dante's descent in *Inferno*, that of Oedipus in Oedipus at *Colonus* and, most significantly in his final works, *Aeneid* Book 6. Falconer goes on to argue that Heaney 'will not allow the terrorist context to overwhelm the genre memory of the *descensus* as a journey toward self-knowledge and wisdom.'⁶⁴ As in so many of his late poems, Heaney uses texts and genres from the past to re-evaluate the present. In his final collection, *Human Chain*, he would use the *katabasis* journey to re-evaluate his family relationships.

Conclusion

The adaptation of an ode raises questions about the implications of bringing the deep past of the classical world into the present. Does Heaney, as David Antoine Williams argues, 'speak through the old masters, as if they could never be wrong about suffering' and rely upon 'the ageless, universal wisdom of the ancient, culturally authorized artwork'?⁶⁵ Or does he concede, as Richard Rankin Russell fears, 'the inevitability of violence'?⁶⁶ What is the reader to make of this translation? To some extent, Heaney certainly defers to the wisdom of the 'old masters.' On the other hand, like many other contemporary writers, he uses the classical text as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. By translating 'Anything Can Happen' Heaney does not suggest that Horace can solve the problems of the modern world, but that the past can reveal something about the present.

⁶² Rachel Falconer, 'Heaney, Virgil, and Contemporary Katabasis,' in *A Companion to Poetic Genre*, ed. Erik Martiny (Malden and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), Proquest ebook, 409.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 405

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 412

⁶⁵ Williams, *Defending Poetry*, 151.

⁶⁶ Richard Rankin Russell, *Poetry and Peace: Michael Longley, Seamus Heaney, and Northern Ireland* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 285.

In its many iterations 'Anything Can Happen' is a poem that 'speaks in multiple tongues.'⁶⁷ Through translation, adaptation and appropriation the many versions of the text expand the transnational memory of 9/11. While registering the scale of the attack and the ongoing tremors – 'nothing resettles right' – Heaney does not present the 9/11 attacks as a historical rupture. Rather, by drawing on a classical ode he has identified a continuity across time. Furthermore, his translation is not constrained by national boundaries of remembrance. He has allowed further adaptations and translations of his work to draw attention to the 'overlooked,' highlighting the asymmetry of memory discourses. Heaney's contribution to the cultural memory of 9/11, an event for which there is a proliferation of commemoration, illustrates the 'multiple, interlocking' scales of memory.⁶⁸ The sequence that follows 'Anything Can Happen' demonstrates the 'conduits, intersections, circuits and articulations' of memory. By drawing on an Old English epic, a Medieval Irish poem, a Bohemian poet, and the sonnet form and *katabatic* genre, Heaney writes across borders and across time. These movements demonstrate the transnational solidarity that marks his later work.

⁶⁷ Rothberg, 'Seeing Terror, Feeling Art: Public and Private in Post 9/11 Literature.'

⁶⁸ De Cesari and Rigney, *Transnational Memory*, 17

CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIVE NOSTALGIA AND FAMILY MEMORY IN *HUMAN CHAIN* AND *AENEID VI*

...a thank-offering for one

Whose long wait on the shaded bank has ended

Seamus Heaney 'Route 110'

In his final collection, *Human Chain*, Seamus Heaney revisits the preoccupation with family lineage that had been a feature of his earliest work. In a series of poem sequences he blends past, present and future to create opportunities for encounters between different generations of his family. This intergenerational connection is the most significant 'human chain' in a collection that begins with memories of his parents and concludes with a poem dedicated to his granddaughter. The poems for his parents in *Human Chain* draw on archetypal representations of mothers and fathers by linking them to broader cultural representations of the family, dovetailing personal recollection with collective memory. Heaney's mediation of personal family memories in *Human Chain*, and in his *Aeneid 6*, can be understood in terms of Svetlana Boym's concept of 'reflective nostalgia,' which is marked by a longing to revisit a lost home.

Heaney writes his family into the literary canon through allusion, adaptation and translation. The poems fall into the interstitial space between individual and collective memory, as personal memories are filtered through canonical texts. The most important people from Heaney's past and present are viewed through the prism of other texts: Virgilian epic, medieval Irish poetry, and the poetry of Pascoli. By appropriating and adapting these texts, in *Human Chain* Heaney creates a sense of fluidity between past, present and future. Renate Lachmann observes: 'Literature inscribes itself in a memory space into which earlier texts have inscribed themselves. It does not leave these earlier texts as it finds them but transforms them in absorbing them.'¹ While in earlier adaptations of canonical texts Heaney had found parallels to contemporary events, in his final works he transforms them by inscribing family memories.

¹ Renate Lachmann, 'Cultural Memory and the Role of Literature,' *European Review* 12, no. 02 (2004): 172-3, doi:10.1017/S106279870400016X.

Rather than simply repeating earlier representations of family, in *Human Chain* individuals are transfigured through memory. While the poet could not have known that *Human Chain* would be his final published collection, he reprises important themes and motifs from earlier collections, circling back on his own work as he did in *District and Circle* and *The Spirit Level*. Many critics interpreted *Human Chain* as a work in which the poet comes to terms with his own mortality.² Sean Lysaght argues: 'In *Human Chain*, the poet enters the space of his own mortality—where he too will be absent one day—and discovers a new consolation, not in terms borrowed from Christianity, where the accent is on redemption, but in pagan, classical terms where the poet hands over to posterity and is guaranteed an afterlife in the esteem of others.'³ Heaney told the BBC in late 2010: 'I didn't have such a strong sense of mortality running through the book until the reviews began to appear. It daunted me. I thought, this sounds like he's writing his own obituaries.'⁴ Rather than seeing it as a collection that looked forward towards his own death, he felt that there was 'an element of reprise' in *Human Chain*, and that if there were to be an epigraph for the collection it would be from Eliot:

"... See, see they depart (sic)

The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,

To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern"⁵

These lines are taken from a stanza of 'Little Gidding' which Heaney had initially planned to use as the epigraph for *North*. Anthony Cuda describes this excerpt as a

² Troy Jollimore, 'Seamus Heaney: An Aged Poet, Addressing Mortality with a Sure and Strong Voice in "Human Chain,"' *The Washington Post*, 21 September 2010, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/seamus-heaney-an-aged-poet-addressing-mortality-with-a-sure-and-strong-voice-in-human-chain/2013/08/30/e50039d8-1180-11e3-85b6-d27422650fd5_story.html?utm_term=.e373ffa5e780; John Banville, 'Living Ghosts,' *The New York Review of Books*, 11 November, 2010, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/nov/11/living-ghosts/>.

³ Seán Lysaght, 'Human Chain: Poems (Review),' *New Hibernia Review* 15, no. 1 (2011): 254, doi:10.1353/nhr.2011.0006.

⁴ Eimear Flanagan, 'Seamus Heaney: "I Live in Panic over the Next Poem,"' *BBC News*, 23 September, 2010. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-11400255>

⁵ Michael Laskey, 'Seamus Heaney in Conversation with Michael Laskey,' *Poetry Foundation*, podcast audio, November 16, 2010, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/features/audio/detail/75876>

'deeply personal touchstone for him,' one that he returned to many times in the years that followed.⁶ The stanza begins with the lines:

This is the use of memory:
For liberation – not less of love but expanding
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
From the future as well as the past. ('Little Gidding' ll. 157-160)

In a 1993 essay Heaney explains that Eliot was describing memory 'not as an escape mechanism' but instead as 'readjustment and repossession of the ability to understand experience.'⁷ The poems for his parents, in particular, represent a 'readjustment' of his ability to understand their experience. He maintains that memory can be used to negotiate the gap between public and private: 'Between the allure of inherited affections and inexplicably meaningful memory, on the one hand, and on the other, the command to participate intelligently in the public world of historical process.'⁸ Memory becomes a means of integrating his public and private roles. Heaney's identification of Eliot's lines as an appropriate epigraph for *Human Chain* provides a frame for reading the collection as a work of memory, renewal and transfiguration.

In *Human Chain* Heaney builds upon earlier representations of his parents. The poems of his first collection, *Death of a Naturalist*, were focused on his childhood in rural Derry, the labour of his parents, and his own decision to become a poet rather than follow the family tradition. In this early work he emphasises the continuity of family traits by drawing out similarities between manual labour and poetry. The 'living roots' of tradition are acknowledged in the representations of his grandfather digging turf, his father ploughing and his mother churning butter. In *Human Chain* he returns to the motif of physical labour and family tradition, although in this collection the memories are recorded for the benefit of the next

⁶ Anthony J Cuda, 'The Use of Memory: Seamus Heaney, TS Eliot, and the Unpublished Epigraph to *North*,' *Journal of Modern Literature* 28, no. 4 (2005): 159.
http://search.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/citedreferences/MSTAR_201671388/20079FE394D64482PQ/1?accountid=8330

⁷ Seamus Heaney, 'The Sense of the Past,' *History Ireland* 1, no. 4 (1993): 229.

⁸ Seamus Heaney, 'For Liberation: Brian Friel and the Use of Memory,' in *The Achievement of Brian Friel*, ed. Alan J. Peacock (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Ltd, 1993), 230.

generation. In the first major monograph on Heaney, published in 1982, Blake Morrison claims that early critics of Heaney's first collections misrepresented the poetry by categorising it as 'post-1945 nature poetry' which 'set the terms for subsequent critical discussion.'⁹ He argues that the early work is more concerned with the complexity of 'belonging to a silent ancestry,'¹⁰ one he claims is defined by silence – 'the gag of place.'¹¹ In a definitive study of his early poetry, Neil Corcoran argues that at 'the root' of much of Heaney's work is his relationship to 'his first community,' but that the 'affectionate family memories' of *Death of a Naturalist* are complicated by a sense that the network of loyalties and attachments ... can be as much confinement as consolation.'¹² In *Human Chain* Heaney continues to work through these affiliations and attachments and the transfiguration of the 'places and faces' can be understood as part of a larger poetic project. In this volume it is not only the subjects who are transformed, but also the speaker, and the silence that Morrison identified as a 'gag' has been recast as a form of love.

Heaney expands and develops the representations of his parents which had been established in earlier collections. The use of Virgil's *Aeneid* to commemorate his dead father is introduced in the final two poems of the 'Album' sequence and threads through the remainder of the collection, particularly in 'The Riverbank Field' and 'Route 110.' In these poems he revisits the poetry he wrote after the death of his father, first collected in *Seeing Things* (1991). *Seeing Things* is framed by translations of the golden bough section of Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's Charon from the *Inferno*. This reinforces the importance of 'crossing over' and finding the way back from the underworld. In a later interview Heaney confessed that the *Aeneid* was a 'seminal and founding text' for him – 'the golden bough, Charon's barge, the quest to meet the shade of the father.'¹³ In his translation of 'The Golden Bough' he writes: 'I pray for one look, one face-to-face meeting with my dear father' (l.13). This line encapsulates the preoccupations of both *Seeing Things* and *Human Chain*. In 'District and Circle' (2006) he travels to the underworld to meet

⁹ Blake Morrison, *Seamus Heaney*, (London; New York: Methuen, 1982), 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Corcoran, Neil. *Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) 10-11.

¹³ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 390.

with the shade of the father. The speaker descends into the carriage of an underground train in London to re-enter 'the safety of numbers, / a crowd half straggle-ravelled and half strung / like a human chain' (ll. 31-3). These lines are reprised to provide the title for the final collection. Rand Brandes contends that for Heaney, titles 'serve as emblems capable of calling forth the essence of the book.'¹⁴ This reunion with the father is the essence of the *Human Chain* collection.

This reunion is signalled by his decision to reprise formal elements from earlier collections. The poem sequences of *Human Chain* recall the 'squarings,' poems composed of four tercets, he developed after the death of his parents. He describes the composition of those poems in terms of his childhood memories of 'taking squaring' while playing marbles, a process of preparing to take a shot that involved 'anglings, aiming, feints, squints' as well as 're-invisagings.'¹⁵ Helen Vendler has observed that 'each of his volumes ambitiously sets itself a different task from its predecessors; each takes up a new form of writing; and just when one thinks one knows all of Heaney's possibilities of style, he unfurls a new one.'¹⁶ The unrhymed tercets used in this collection also evoke the version of Dante's *terza rima* that he had used in 'Station Island.' Colm Toibin describes the verse structure used in these 4 tercet poems in *Human Chain* as 'a sonnet without the couplet' and suggests that there is a 'particular pathos' to this structure, a 'refusal to close and conclude.'¹⁷ This refusal can also be read as a means of perpetuating the human chain of family memory. Richard Rankin Russell identifies in Heaney's late work an 'evolving formal tendency toward the tercet and his sense that it is the proper form for shades crossing over to the spirit region.'¹⁸ Russell links Heaney's 'essentially trinitarian thinking' to a Catholic childhood, and to his admiration of Dante's *Commedia*. It might also be linked, particularly in *Human Chain*, to Virgil's 'periodic structure, the development of meaning through three

¹⁴ Rand Brandes, 'Seamus Heaney's Working Titles: From "Advancements of Learning" to "Midnight Anvil,"' ed. Bernard O'Donohue, *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Kindle edition, 19.

¹⁵ O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 321.

¹⁶ Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), Kindle edition, Introduction.

¹⁷ Colm Toibin, 'Human Chain by Seamus Heaney – Review,' *The Guardian*, 21 August 2010. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/aug/21/seamus-heaney-human-chain-review>

¹⁸ Richard Rankin Russell, *Seamus Heaney's Regions*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), Ebrary edition, 365.

lines in a series of linked sentences.’¹⁹ Understood in this way, the blank verse tercet is an apposite form in which to reimagine his relationship with his parents.

Family memory and Reflective Nostalgia – ‘I had a strong sense of the lineage from grandparent to grandchild at this time of my life.’²⁰

Human Chain oscillates between individual and collective memories of family. In memory studies there has been relatively little attention to the family as a site of memory. Marianne Hirsch’s work on post-memory situates generational memory within a framework of trauma. In *Family Frames* she traces the ‘intersection of private and public history’ through family photographs.²¹ She proposes that this intergenerational memory be called ‘post-memory,’ which is defined as ‘second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences.’²² Hirsch’s interest is in ‘how the multiple ruptures and radical breaks introduced by trauma and catastrophe inflect intra-, inter- and trans-generational inheritance.’²³ While the concept of ‘post-memory’ permits a productive approach to intergenerational memory, it is primarily concerned with family memories grounded in traumatic loss. Heaney’s family memories are shaped by love rather than trauma, and other approaches to the family as a frame of cultural memory provide more productive ways to navigate the waters between individual and collective memory. Aleida Assmann observes that the family becomes one ‘social frame’ that implies ‘an implicit structure of shared concerns, values, experiences, and narratives.’²⁴ She argues that writing makes individual memories available to ‘those who do not live within spatial and temporal reach.’²⁵

¹⁹ K. W. Gransden, *Virgil: The Aeneid*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Ebrary edition, 54.

²⁰ Pat Kenny, ‘A Brush with Mortality,’ RTE Archives, podcast audio, September 3, 2010, <http://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1982-seamus-heaney/1991-21st-century-heaney/607322-human-chain/?page=2>.

²¹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 13.

²² *Ibid.*, 22.

²³ Marianne Hirsch, ‘The Generation of Postmemory,’ *Poetics today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 111, doi:10.1215/03335372-2007-01.

²⁴ Aleida Assmann, ‘Re-Framing Memory: Between Individual and Collective Forms of Constructing the Past,’ in *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, ed. Karin Tilman, Frank van Vree, and Jay M. Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 37.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

I am interested in the way that this process is amplified when memories are recorded by one of the most widely read poets of his generation. Because publication brings the memories into the public domain, and because of Heaney's celebrity, these private family memories become a part of the collective memory. In *Human Chain* Heaney passes memories along his own family chain, and his renown will grant them a degree of permanence that most families do not have.

The longing for a lost home is at the core of many of the poems of *Human Chain*. Heaney's return to the regions of his earliest childhood can be understood as a form of 'reflective nostalgia.' In *The Future of Nostalgia* Boym contends: 'Nostalgia (from *nostos* – return home, and *algia* – longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed.'²⁶ She understands this home in terms of both space and time: One of the key constituents in Boym's nostalgia is a displacement in time and space. She argues that displacement and the irreversibility of time are 'at the very core of the human condition.'²⁷ In *Human Chain* time and space are represented as fluid, with Heaney's poetic speakers moving effortlessly between past, present and future, between the real world and the underworld.

To describe writers as 'nostalgic' suggests works that are unforgivably sentimental, the implication being that they present an idealised view of the past. While there is an idealistic dimension to Heaney's representation of home and family, it would be reductive to argue that it is the defining feature of these works. Critics have recognised a nostalgic dimension to Heaney's work and he has been described as 'the most astonishingly nostalgic poet of the twentieth century.'²⁸ On the other hand, most recognise an ambivalence in his work, leading Henry Hart to describe the 'bitter sweet nostalgia'²⁹ of *Death of a Naturalist*. Heaney's nostalgia is multifaceted and equivocal. Boym explains that nostalgia is sometimes understood as 'an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt free homecoming,

²⁶ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), Kindle edition, Introduction.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Adrian Frazier, 'Anger and Nostalgia: Seamus Heaney and the Ghost of the Father,' *Eire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies* 36, no. 3 and 4 (2001): 35.

²⁹ Henry Hart, *Seamus Heaney, Poet of Contrary Progressions* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 3.

an ethical and aesthetic failure.’³⁰ This form of nostalgia foregrounds the dangers of representing the past, of choosing what to remember. Boym addresses this by distinguishing between restorative nostalgia, which she argues is concerned with truth and ‘attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost past,’ and reflective nostalgia, which ‘dwells in the ambivalences of human longing and belonging.’³¹ The goal is not to recover the truth of the past, but to ‘distinguish between national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory.’³² She proposes that nostalgia is integral to modern life and ‘an intermediary between individual and collective memory.’³³ In *Human Chain* memory moves between the personal and cultural realms as Heaney’s personal past becomes interwoven with collective memory.

Heaney’s parents ‘renewed, transfigured, in another pattern’

Patrick and Margaret Heaney have always occupied a place in Heaney’s poetry. ‘Album’ is a poem sequence in which Heaney builds upon the foundation of memory established in earlier elegies for them. The title of the poem, with its implications of a collection of family photographs, establishes a framework for reading. Susan Sontag observes that through photographs a family constructs a ‘portrait-chronicle of itself – a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness.’³⁴ She sees photography as an ‘elegiac art,’ one which testifies to ‘time’s relentless melt’ and argues that ‘all photographs are *memento mori*.’³⁵ This poem sequence, a series of ‘snapshots’ of memory, performs this elegiac function and, at the same time, establishes the connectedness and continuity of family life. In *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* Annette Kuhn argues that in the process of selecting and ordering photographs for an album ‘the family is actually in the process of making itself.’³⁶ The family in ‘Album’ is constructed from

³⁰ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Introduction.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 53.

³⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977), 8.

³⁵ Sontag, *On Photography*, 15.

³⁶ Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London; New York: Verso, 2002), 19.

memory and one that has been reworked from his earlier representations of his parents.

Heaney has often written about his parents as individuals, but the shifting representation of his parents over time can be seen in 'Album,' one of the first poems in which they appear as a couple. His ability to 'understand experience'³⁷ in a different way leads to a reappraisal of their marriage, transfiguring earlier representations of his parents by showing their vulnerabilities. There is a sense that he only came to understand them after their deaths: 'Funny enough, for decades, I never thought of them as young people. They were always the parents. And I suppose you get to a certain stage yourself, you see things in another pattern.'³⁸ In 'Album' He considers their relationship from a fresh perspective. The poem sequence opens with Heaney speculating on the circumstances of his conception:

... I imagine them

In summer season, it must have been,
And the place, it dawns on me,
Could have been Grove Hill before the oaks were cut, (ll. 3-6)

The implication that the act was a furtive coupling in the woods is reinforced later in the description of a rushed, unhappy wedding. In this poem, though, the poet describes a childhood memory of standing with his parents in this location 'shin-deep in hilltop bluebells, looking out / At Magherafelt's four spires in the distance' (ll. 8-9). The reader is invited to look at Heaney's parents as he describes their gaze elsewhere, 'looking out' at the neighbouring village.

The motif of the gaze is important in this sequence as it represents the unspoken dimension of family relationships. Past and present are brought together in the final stanza which functions as a revelation for the adult speaker:

³⁷ Heaney, 'The Sense of the Past,' 229.

³⁸ PBS Newshour, 'In "Human Chain," Nobel-Winning Poet Seamus Heaney Digs into the Past,' Posted 24 October, 2011, online video, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment-july-dec11-poet_10-24/.

Too late, alas, now for the apt quotation
 About a love that's proved by steady gazing
 Not at each other but in the same direction. (ll. 10-2)

Heaney's decision to make the allusion to Saint-Exupéry's *Wind, Sand and Stars* explicit – in his reference to the 'apt quotation' – imbues the line with meaning from a text which explores the solitude of individuals and the need for human solidarity, the interdependence of human beings. This is an 'apt' description for his parents because it allows for their autonomy while celebrating the shared effort of raising a family. Heaney's additional modifier 'steady' suggests the security provided by this shared vision of family life, while 'alas' suggests that his understanding of the nature of their relationship has arrived too late. 'Alas' is also indicative of a longing to 'revisit time like space,'³⁹ to return to the lost home that Boym identifies as a defining feature of reflective nostalgia.

In the following poem, which recalls the day his parents delivered him to boarding school for the first time, he explores the displacement and loss that occurred as a result of his first separation from home. In this poem Heaney draws out the connection between individual memory and cultural memory through allusion to an early Irish poem:

I stood in the Junior House hallway
A grey eye will look back (ll. 19-20)

The italicised line alludes to a later poem in the collection, a translation of a poem generally attributed to Colum Cille, the 7th-century monk for whom Heaney's school was named.⁴⁰ In 'Colum Cille Cecinet' he writes:

Towards Ireland a grey eye
 Will look back but not see
 Ever again

³⁹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Introduction.

⁴⁰ But acknowledged, in *Human Chain*, as a poem written in the 11th-12th century.

The men of Ireland or her women. (ll. 17-20)

In this stanza Colum Cille looks back at the country from which he has been exiled. In the poem from 'Album' Heaney presents himself as the grey eye that looks back to his mother and father. Peter McDonald observes that he 'makes this also an exile from the man and woman who stand together at the start of memory, as at its end.'⁴¹ This first separation from them only becomes exile through memory – it is only in retrospect that he can see how the scholarship to St Columb's was the catalyst for a life almost entirely removed from that of his parents.

In the lines that follow he describes the vulnerability of his parents as they leave him:

Seeing them as a couple, I now see,

For the first time, all the more together

For having had to turn and walk away, as close

In the leaving (or closer) as in the getting. (ll. 21-4)

He represents their loss as something that brought them closer to each other, though this is an understanding that has only come with maturity. There has been a 'readjustment' of his understanding of what it cost them to leave him behind at boarding school.

He also describes this parting in 'The Conway Stewart,' a poem that uses a pen as the symbol the continuity between generations of a family, and also the continuity within his *oeuvre*. This poem alludes to the most well-known of all Heaney poems, 'Digging' (1966), in which he ruminates on his choice to become a poet rather than continue with the family tradition of farm labour. The speaker looks down from his window to see his father digging: 'By god, the old man could handle a spade / just like his old man' (ll. 15-6). The poem concludes with the observation that he has 'no spade to follow men like them' (l. 28) and so must 'dig'

⁴¹ Peter McDonald, 'Last and First,' *The Times Literary Supplement*, October 15, 2010. http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/reviews/literature_and_poetry/article711526.ece.

with his pen (l. 31). He circles back to this symbol in 'The Conway Stewart' through the memory of his parents purchasing a fountain pen for him before he begins boarding school: '14-carat nib, / three gold bands in the clip-on screw-top' (l. 1-2). The pen is personified as a diver embarking on 'its first deep snorkel / in a newly opened ink bottle' (ll. 8-9). This metaphor suggests the adventure of exploring new ground. The testing of the pen allows him and his parents:

To look together and away
From our parting, due that evening,

To my longhand
'Dear'

To them, next day. (ll. 14-18)

Heaney reprises the motif of gazes that he had introduced in 'Album.' As in the first poem in 'Album,' this is an image of the three of them looking not at each other but 'in the same direction,' in this case at the pen and away from his departure. The parting for school takes on special significance in *Human Chain*. It marks, ultimately, not only his first parting with his parents but the first step onto a fresh path. Like the diver, his departure marks the following of an uncharted course that led him away from Bellaghy, and towards Oxford and Harvard.

The third poem of the 'Album' sequence returns to a time before his birth. It opens up the space between individual and cultural memory through the representation of marriage. He imagines his mother and father at their wedding meal, himself 'uninvited, ineluctable' at the dinner table with them, presumably the reason for their marriage. He imagines 'stranded silence. Tears' (l. 29) as his parents are left 'to it' and to 'all the anniversaries of this / they are not ever going to observe // or even mention in the years to come' (ll. 32-4). This suggests the shame of the circumstances of the wedding, one that had perhaps defined his understanding of their relationship. In an earlier sequence in 'Clearances' (1987) he had described his father at his mother's deathbed: 'In the last minutes he said more to her / Almost than in all their life together' (ll. 1-2). The relationship between them is represented as one in which there was a distance and failure of

communication. It is one of the only poems prior to 'Album' in which he writes about his parents together (the other being 'Mid-Term Break,' which recounts the funeral of Heaney's young brother). The personal memory of a marriage marked by a lack of communication and a gendered division of roles can also be understood in terms of its ubiquity as an example of a particular type of Irish marriage. This view of the couple is reconfigured 'in another pattern' in 'Album' to show the complexity beneath the surface. In the final stanza the parents are driven back from their wedding meal and the speaker concludes with the comforting thought that 'by evening we'll be home' (l. 36). This poem opens at the seaside where 'they've gone' and concludes with the first-person pronoun, 'we'll'; the unborn Heaney has become a part of their family. As in the previous poems, they are represented as a group of three. Although he was the eldest of nine children, his siblings are not included in the album. Kuhn describes the process of making her own family album as a child as one in which she created the history 'of an individual in a family.'⁴² In 'Album' Heaney creates a series of 'snapshots' to place himself in relation to his parents – it is his own story as an individual in a family.

In the fourth poem of 'Album' Heaney alludes to the scene in *The Aeneid* when Aeneas meets the shade of his father on the banks of the River Lethe and tries three times to embrace him. The riverbank becomes a transitional zone between the world and the underworld, a space which allows the poet to move between past and present. In 'Man and Boy' (1991) he recalls fishing with his father on the riverbank:

On slow bright river evenings, the sweet time
Made him afraid we'd take too much for granted
And so our spirits must be lightly checked.

Blessed be down-to-earth! Blessed be highs!
Blessed be the detachment of dumb love
In that broad-backed, low-set man ... (ll. 5-10)

⁴² Kuhn, *Family Secrets*, 20.

Heaney reprises 'Man and Boy' in a memory of the summer before he left home for the first time:

Were I to have embraced him anywhere
 It would have been on the riverbank
 That summer before college, him in his prime,

Me at the time not thinking how he must
 Keep coming with me because I'd soon be leaving.
 That should have been the first, but it didn't happen. (ll. 37-42)

The tone of regret is tempered by two further attempts at an embrace, 'when he was very drunk and needed help / to do up his trouser bottoms,' and the third time just before his death when he needed help to walk. These embraces reinforce the significance of three in the poem: the tercet form, the threesome made by Heaney and his parents, that made by three generations of Heaney male, and finally the 'son's three tries / at an embrace in Elysium' (ll. 56-7). The conclusion of 'Album' seems also to allude to 'Boy Driving his Father to Confession,' an uncollected poem from the 1960s. While 'Album' recalls three attempted embraces, 'Boy Driving' identifies four times he 'found chinks in the paternal mail' and recognised his father's vulnerability.

The focus on subtle gestures – the last glance at boarding school, the decision to spend time fishing with the son who is about to leave – show an acceptance of the fact that Patrick Heaney was not a demonstrative man. In the final poem of the 'Album' sequence he concludes:

It took a grandson to do it properly,
 To rush him in the armchair
 With a snatch raid on his neck,

Proving him thus vulnerable to delight,
 Coming as great proofs often come
 Of a sudden, one-off, then the steady dawning

Of whatever *erat demonstrandum* (ll. 49-55)

In this description of a taciturn man proved capable of delight in an embrace, Heaney presents a new perspective on the character of his father. The 'great proofs' suggested in the sequence are not just of a father 'vulnerable to delight,' but also the slow dawning of understanding of the love shared by his mother and father. The use of the Latin phrase to reveal the truth links it to the self-evidence of mathematical proofs. This is paralleled with the three embraces:

Just as a moment back a son's three tries
At an embrace in Elysium

Swam up into my very arms, and in and out
Of the Latin stem itself, the phantom
Verus that has slipped from 'very.' (ll. 56-60)

In the final stanza the metaphor of the Latin stem 'verus' – or truth – metaphorically swimming in and out of his arms conveys the significance of the meaning of the embrace – a love that is true and absolute. The reunion with the shade of the father, the quest object in *Human Chain*, shows Heaney 'refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time.'⁴³ It exemplifies the longing that Boym identifies as the core component of reflective nostalgia.

In the following diptych, 'Uncoupled,' Heaney describes his parents completing their daily tasks. The 'uncoupling' represents a break in the 'human chain' of the title and highlights the finality of loss. His father, a cattle dealer, is represented in his professional domain, the cattle auction. In 'Uncoupled' the speaker watches his father at work, as he had in 'Digging' and 'Follower.' The poem describes a boy perched on top of a gate watching his father trade in the cattle pen. It is a recollection of a miscommunication – the father calls to him but he 'cannot hear / With all the lowing and roaring, lorries revving' (ll. 19-20) When the other dealers shout his father looks away from the speaker, who comes to know 'the pain of loss

⁴³ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Introduction.

before I know the term' (l. 24). Just as he was in the final poems of 'Album,' in memory his father is represented as an elusive figure who cannot be captured. Boym claims that reflective nostalgia does not seek to reconstruct the past, but is 'concerned with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude.'⁴⁴ These memory poems about his parents navigate between the poles of accepting the finality of loss and longing for a reunion.

In 'Uncoupled' Heaney draws on a dominant trope in Irish literature, that of Mother Ireland. The gap between individual and cultural memory is collapsed in this archetypal representation of his mother. If the timeless and transnational ghost of Virgil shadows the representation of his father in *Human Chain*, it is Yeats and Joyce who mark the representation of his mother. 'Who is this coming to the ashpit?' he asks at the beginning of the poem about his mother (l. 1). He describes her dumping ash from the stove 'walking tall, as if in a procession / Bearing in front of her a slender pan' (ll.2-3). This regal description of her everyday work recalls the admiration he had expressed in 'The Swing' (1996), where he describes her as 'majestic as an empress' as she soaks her swollen feet in the evenings. The motif of ash in the poem evokes the image Stephen Dedalus has of his dead mother in *Ulysses*: 'her breath, that bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes.'⁴⁵ In a public reading in 2013 Heaney identified this passage from Joyce as one that could be considered an inspiration for his work. Ash has specific connotations within the Catholic church as a symbol of penance, represented by the use of sackcloth and ashes, and is also used as a reminder of mortality in the Ash Wednesday service and funeral masses. The motif of ashes is also a reprisal of imagery developed in 'Two Lorries' (1996) which opens with an image of 'warm wet ashes' and is followed by one of his 'nineteen-forties mother' using 'black lead' and 'emory paper' to clean the ashes from the stove.

Nostalgia defines the representation of his mother. This poem draws on a specifically national cultural memory by alluding to Cathleen Ni Houlihan, a figure

⁴⁴ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁵ In a public reading in January 2013 Heaney chose this passage as one of ten that could be considered an inspiration. 'Seamus Heaney and Simon Armitage, Inspirations at the Tricycle Theatre,' *The Telegraph*, January 29, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/9832497/Seamus-Heaney-and-Simon-Armitage-Inspirations-at-the-Tricycle-Theatre.html?mobile=basic>.

who embodies Irish nationalism. In 'Uncoupled' he describes her proceeding 'unwavering' (l.9) in her mission until she is out of the sight of the speaker when she turns on the 'worn path' (l. 12) behind the henhouse. The image of his mother turning down the path seems to mirror the closing lines of Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*:

Peter: did you see an old woman going down the path?

Patrick: I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen.⁴⁶

The Mother Ireland archetype evolved with the nationalist movement in the eighteenth century and became what C. L. Innes describes as a 'potent social, political and moral force in Catholic Ireland.'⁴⁷ In this poem Heaney appears to draw on the social and moral potency, while eliding the political connotations of the figure. His representation of his mother clearly taps into quite deep-rooted ideas about motherhood in Ireland and evokes strong feeling because she represents an archetypal Irish woman.⁴⁸ Innes argues that the conflation of Mother Ireland and the Virgin Mother had become ubiquitous by the end of the nineteenth century: 'Both demanded the allegiance of men and women alike, but it was for women that they provided models of behaviour and ideals of identity.'⁴⁹ The idealised mother presented in earlier poems and reinforced in 'Uncoupled' demonstrates both remembering and forgetting; that is, the selective recollection of positive memories from childhood and the erasure of memories which do not conform with the idealised version of Irish womanhood. Svetlana Boym argues that nostalgia is a figurative return to 'the ideal home.'⁵⁰ The home that the speaker longs to return to is one that represents 'the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values.'⁵¹ This home, in Heaney's poetry, is found in the poetry for his parents and particularly for his mother. He also represents the

⁴⁶ William Butler Yeats, *Nine One-act Plays*. (London: Macmillan, 1937).

⁴⁷ Catherine Lynette Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880-1935* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 42.

⁴⁸ One of these, 'While All the Others Were Away at Mass,' has recently been voted 'Ireland's best loved poem of the last 100 years' in a competition conducted by Poetry Ireland and the national broadcaster, RTE: 'This campaign is about celebrating the wonderful canon of Irish poetry of the past 100 years and what it says about us as a people.'

⁴⁹ Innes, *Woman and Nation*, 42.

⁵⁰ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Introduction.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

home as a source of power and strength for his mother: In 'Album' and 'The Conway Stewart' when she is outside of her everyday world she is uncertain and vulnerable. In 'Uncoupled' she is returned to her own domain, where she reigns.

The Influence of Virgil in *Human Chain* – 'The quest to meet the shade of the father'

'The Riverbank Field' is a translation of the section in Book 6 of the *Aeneid* which describes the reunion of Aeneas and his father in the underworld. The quest object in the *Aeneid*, and in Heaney's translation and adaptation, is the reunion with his father. The meeting, which occurs in the penultimate poem of the 'Route 110' sequence, also brings Heaney's father and granddaughter into the same poetic space. The image of a riverbank as the site of his reunion with his father weaves through the collection and is finally enacted in 'The Riverbank Field.' Not only a space that demarcates the border between land and water, the riverbank becomes a liminal space between individual and cultural memory. Like the other family poems in *Human Chain*, 'The Riverbank Field' is written in tercets. Richard Rankin Russell argues that Heaney's tercets, which are derived from Dantean *terza rima* but do not employ full rhyme, are an 'in-between form' which is repeatedly used to represent 'liminal moments of insight into the spiritual world ... border crossing to the region we inhabit after death and the new life that babies experience.'⁵² This can be seen particularly in poetry Heaney wrote after the death of his father, in *Seeing Things* and in *Human Chain*.

'The Riverbank Field' is primarily concerned with the process of translation. The literary text becomes a portal to memory and allows the speaker to move between past and present as he moves between languages. The opening line establishes the speaker as a literary translator:

Ask me to translate what Loeb gives as
 'In a retired vale ... a sequestered grove'
 And I'll confound the Lethe in Moyola. (ll. 1-3)

⁵² Russell, *Seamus Heaney's Regions*, 367.

The River Lethe, the river of forgetfulness where souls must drink before they can be reincarnated, is transposed into rural Derry. The analogy is extended throughout the poem, with the speaker walking through his local village quoting both Virgil and the Loeb's translation, and considering how the translation must change in the new locale:

The *domos placidas*, 'those peaceful homes'
Of Upper Brough. Moths then on evening water
It would have to be, not bees in sunlight,

Midge vales instead of lily beds; but *stet*
To all the rest ... (ll. 7-11)

The emphasis on the process of translation is important because it presents the palimpsestic nature of the classical text – Heaney translates Virgil but also acknowledges the Loeb edition. Bringing the underworld to Derry – a translation of space – prepares the ground for his own translation of the sequence – 'in my own words' – and also for the longed-for reunion with his own father. Michael Parker maintains that by blending the locale of County Derry with the classical underworld Heaney 'prepares the ground for Route 110's multiple acts of translation – temporal, spatial, linguistic, intellectual, cultural, psychological, political.'⁵³ Hugh Haughton argues that this poem is 'anchored' in his 'first world,' calling it 'surely one of the most compelling poems about translation, and what might be at stake in reading poetry from the past – and about the presence of the past – that we have.'⁵⁴ Both Parker and Haughton identify one of the central strategies of Heaney's late work: the use of translations to navigate a course through memory.

The underworld is used to revisit, to 'renew' and 'transfigure' people and places from his past and to look to the future. As he had in 'The Riverbank Field,'

⁵³ Michael Parker, "'Back in the Heartland': Seamus Heaney's 'Route 110' Sequence in *Human Chain*," *Irish Studies Review* 21, no. 4 (2013): 376, doi:10.1080/09670882.2013.856171.

⁵⁴ Hugh Haughton, 'Seamus Heaney: First and Last Things,' *The Irish Review* 49, no. 49-50 (2015): 198.

Heaney draws attention to the limitations of language. In Poem XI of 'Route 110,' another version of the same scene from the *Aeneid*, the speaker has reunited with his father in the underworld. The poem develops a memory of them fishing together 'doubting the solid ground / of the riverbank field, twilit and a-hover / With midge drifts ...' (ll. 127-9), recalling the 'midge veils instead of lily beds' (l. 10) of 'The Riverbank Field.' In *The Aeneid* this scene allows Anchises to explain to his son that to some souls 'second bodies are owed by fate,'⁵⁵ before prophesying a line of descendants who will cover them with glory. Although this dialogue is central to *Aeneid VI*, in this poem Heaney and his father do not speak but just 'wait and watch / and fish' (ll. 121-2). Rachel Falconer explains that the aim of *katabasis*, a journey to the underworld, is the *nekyia*, or conversation with the dead.⁵⁶ Heaney subverts convention by providing a silent reunion for the speaker and his father. This fits the character of Patrick Heaney, who came from a family which saw speech itself as 'otiose and superfluous.'⁵⁷ In a late interview he elaborated on the relationship between father and son: 'One of my happiest memories is being on the riverbank the summer before St Columb's ... Just being together on the riverbank and not saying much is a form of communion that is very special.'⁵⁸ This reinforces the idea of familial love established earlier in the collection, one that is 'proved by steady gazing / Not at each other but in the same direction.' These lines are the culmination of twenty years of poetry moving towards this reunion.

This poem develops the 'human chain' of generational memory by bringing different generations of family into the same poetic space. In the final stanza he describes standing with his father on the riverbank, the transitional space between the living and the dead:

as if we had commingled

⁵⁵ From the Loeb edition: Virgil, *Aeneid VI*, translated by H. R. Fairclough, (Theoi Texts Library), <http://www.theoi.com/Text/VirgilAeneid6.html>.

⁵⁶ Rachel Falconer, 'Heaney, Virgil, and Contemporary Katabasis,' in *A Companion to Poetic Genre*, ed. Erik Martiny (Malden and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), Proquest ebook, 523.

⁵⁷ Henri Cole, 'Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry No. 75,' *The Paris Review* 144, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1217/the-art-of-poetry-no-75-seamus-heaney>.

⁵⁸ Maurice Fitzpatrick, *The Boys of St. Colomb's: 'They Would Banish the Conditional Forever, This Generation,'* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2010), 60.

Among shades and shadows stirring on the brink
 And stood there waiting, watching,
 Needy and ever needier for translation. (ll. 129-32)

Translation, in this context, might refer to the shades waiting on the riverbank to be reincarnated, or 'translated.' The souls who drink from the River Lethe go into the next life without memory or language. It is also self-referential as the text itself is a form of translation. In an interview Heaney speaks of this section of the *Aeneid*: 'Not only did this appeal to me because it was about getting ready to go down, but we've also had our first grandchildren in the last two or three years, so it's about getting ready to come back in.'⁵⁹ Instead of Anchises laying out a line of descendants for Aeneas, the poetic speaker and his father wait silently for the future generations. Through the form of the epic Heaney is able to bring to the same place the shades of his long dead father and his yet to be born granddaughter, making a fold in time where he can bring together two generations who will never meet in real time.

The final poem of the sequence describes the birth of Heaney's first grandchild, to whom the sequence is dedicated. The future generations of Heaneys are heralded by the opening line of the final poem: 'And now the age of births.' Heaney writes:

So now, as a thank-offering for one
 Whose long wait on the shaded bank has ended,
 I arrive with my bunch of stalks and silvered heads

Like tapers that won't dim
 As her earthlight breaks and we gather round
 Talking baby talk. (ll. 139-44)

⁵⁹ Susan Mansfield, 'Interview: Seamus Heaney, Poet,' *The Scotsman*, 12 March, 2010. <http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/culture/books/interview-seamus-heaney-poet-1-794576>

He and his father are linked to the child through the shared 'long wait on the shaded bank.' In this line, also, the 'human chain' of the title is imbued with another meaning – the connection between successive generations of a family. The extended metaphor of light used to represent the new life suggests the 'way back' from the underworld. The 'bunch of stalks and silvered heads' brought as an offering 'as her earthlight breaks' are like the armfuls of lilies that Anchises scatters over the unborn soul of Marcellus. The joyous occasion of the birth is presented as a communal experience where the family gathers round for 'baby talk.' The poem sequence 'for Anna Rose' also includes a collection of personal memories that will allow her to know her grandfather through his writing.

Poems for the next generation of the Heaney family – 'I saw you years from now'

The final poem of the collection, 'A Kite for Aibhin,' also brings Heaney's father and a different granddaughter into the same poetic space. The sense of a family line that stretches backward and forward is at the heart of this collection. The poem is a reworking of an earlier translation⁶⁰ of Giovanni Pascoli's 'L'Aquilone.' It also revisits a poem written for his sons, 'A Kite for Michael and Christopher' (1984), which deals with parenthood as inheritance and uses the kite as a metaphor for mortality. Heaney describes a childhood memory of his own father flying a kite, 'one of the more earthbound men on this planet it has to be said.'⁶¹ In the poem for his sons, he compares the weight of the kite to that of the human soul and concludes:

Take it in your two hands, boys, and feel
 The strumming, rooted, long-tailed pull of grief.
 You were born fit for it.
 Stand in here in front of me
 And take the strain. (ll. 19-23)

⁶⁰ Gabriella Morisco, 'Two Poets and a Kite: Seamus Heaney and Giovanni Pascoli,' *Linguae & Rivista di lingue e culture moderne* 12, no. 1 (2013): 36, doi:10.7358/ling-2013-001-mori.

⁶¹ 'Seamus Heaney – A Kite for Michael and Christopher,' Dailymotion video, 2:30, June 29, 2012, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xrucpc_seamus-heaney-a-kite-for-michael-and-christopher_creation

The inheritance of character traits is conveyed in the metaphor of the kite as the human soul anchored to earth – the ‘earthbound’ quality of his father is one shared by Heaney and, he writes, passed down to his sons.

In ‘A Kite for Aibhin’ he considers the alternative to being earthbound. The kite in this poem, which is released from the earth when the string breaks, represents a capacity for wonderment. In the opening of the poem he recalls the earlier kite with ‘air from another time and life and place’ (l. 1). This is reinforced in the following stanzas:

And yes, it is a kite! As when one afternoon
All of us there trooped out
Among briar hedges and stripped thorn,

I take my stand again, halt opposite
Anahorish Hill to scan the blue,
Back in that field to launch our long-tailed comet. (ll. 4-9)

These lines convey the return to site of the first kite flying expedition, though they foreshadow a different conclusion. Pascoli’s ‘long-tailed’ (l. 9) comet replaces ‘long-tailed pull of grief’ (l. 20) in the earlier poem. In ‘A Kite for Michael and Christopher’ the kite’s movements are described in terms of weight: ‘it dragged as if the bellied string / were a wet rope hauled upon / to lift a shoal’ (ll. 9-11). Aibhin’s kite, on the other hand, moves with more grace: ‘it hovers, tugs, veers, dives askew, / Lifts itself’ (ll. 10). The metaphor of a ‘thin-stemmed flower’ describes the kite climbing higher in the sky. The ‘kite flier’ on this occasion is longing for the string to break and the kite itself is personified in the closing lines:

Until string breaks and – separate, elate –

The kite takes off, itself alone, a windfall. (ll. 18-9)

In 'A Kite,' his translation of Pascoli, he translates the lines: 'Unspooling thread, the kite a thin-stemmed flower / Borne far away to flower again as windfall.'⁶² In 'A Kite for Aibhin' the string breaking releases the kite and makes it 'separate,' 'itself alone.' The transcendence of the kite's release, or 'windfall,' adds another aspect to the 'earthbound' qualities he celebrated in 'A Kite for Michael and Christopher.'

In 'Fosterling' (1991) he had written of waiting until he was nearly fifty 'to credit marvels' (l. 12), this knowledge coming in the aftermath of his parents' deaths. In the 'Lightenings' poem sequence of *Seeing Things*, he describes a ghost ship that appears to the monks of Clonmacnoise.⁶³ Like a kite, the ship is anchored to the altar rails until it is released by the monks and the crewman climbs back 'out of the marvellous as he had known it' (l. 12). In 'Frontiers of Writing' Heaney describes this poem in terms of 'two orders of knowledge,' stating that 'within our individual selves we can reconcile two orders of knowledge which we might call the practical and poetic.'⁶⁴ The tension between earth and air continues in 'A Kite for Aibhin,' and it can be read as a companion piece to 'Lightenings viii' as well as a sequel to 'A Kite for Michael and Christopher.' The implicit message in 'long-tailed pull of grief' in the first kite poem is that 'mortality involves weeping and you'd better ready yourself for it.'⁶⁵ By the time he wrote 'A Kite for Aibhin,' more than 25 years later, his view of mortality had changed. The message for Aibhin is that she should be prepared to 'elate,' to balance 'the two orders of knowledge.' This is the final poem in the collection, and Heaney's death meant that this poem marks the conclusion of his collected works. Michael Parker writes: 'By setting lyrics dedicated to his granddaughters at the centre and at the close of *Human Chain*, Heaney inscribes them within the ancestral line, and within a poetic corpus.'⁶⁶

'In Time,' a poem published posthumously for another granddaughter, revisits some of the concerns of 'Route 110' and 'Kite.' 'In Time' establishes Siofra's place

⁶² Morisco, 'Two Poets and a Kite,' 40.

⁶³ Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), Kindle edition, 136.

⁶⁴ Seamus Heaney, 'Frontiers of Writing,' *The Redress of Poetry*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1995), Kindle edition, 202.

⁶⁵ Charlie McCarthy, *Seamus Heaney: Out of the Marvellous*, (RTE Television, 2010), DVD, 1:14:02.

⁶⁶ Parker, 'Back in the Heartland,' 382.

in the 'human chain' of the Heaney family. *New Selected Poems: 1988-2013* is intended as a companion volume to *New Selected Poems: 1966-1987*. The only previously unpublished poem in this collection is one chosen by the late poet's family for inclusion. It is published with the date of composition – 18 August 2013 – less than a fortnight before his death. 'In Time' is a celebration of the continuity of family ties and marks the conclusion the two volumes of selected work, which begins with 'Digging,' a poem about taking a different path than his own father and grandfather. In the poem he imagines her in the future:

I saw you years from now
 (More years than I'll be allowed)
 Your toddler wobbles gone,
 A sure and grown woman. (ll. 3-6)

The poem serves as a missal for her when she comes to be a 'sure and grown woman.' The continuity emerges from the juxtaposition of her 'toddler wobbles' and his own memories of infancy. In the second stanza he writes:

Your bare foot on the floor
 Keeps me in step; the power
 I first felt come up through
 Our cement floor long ago
 Palps your sole and heel
 And earths you here for real. (ll. 7-12)

In 'Something to Write Home About' Heaney recounts his first memory, of the feeling of the kitchen floor beneath his feet. He describes the feeling of 'the whole reassuring foundation of the earth coming to you through the soles of your feet.'⁶⁷ The power of being earthbound, as he had previously described his father, is one that he sees as a family trait. In his seventieth birthday speech he spoke of how he

⁶⁷ Seamus Heaney, 'Something to Write Home About,' *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002), 55.

had always identified with the Greek god Antaeus, who ‘derived all his strength and prowess from contact with the earth.’⁶⁸

As he had in ‘A Kite for Aibhin,’ the speaker expresses a wish for ‘balance’ for Siofra. As well as remaining grounded, the family trait explored in the kite poems, he thinks that an oratorio would be ‘just the thing’ (l. 14) for her: ‘Energy, balance, outbreak / At play for their own sake’ (ll. 15-6). This recalls the elation at the release of the kite in the poems for Aibhin, and in the ability to ‘credit marvels.’ The final stanza presents the view that there is an ideal balance between practicality (or groundedness) and play (music and poetry). The poem concludes with the image of grandfather and granddaughter walking or dancing together: ‘but for now we foot it lightly / in time, and silently’ (ll. 17-8). The emphasis on the present – ‘for now’ – suggests that the speaker understands that the future is unknown and so appreciates the opportunity to keep step ‘in time’ with the child, to practice balancing ‘play’ and remaining ‘earthed.’ The pun in the title encompasses both the practice of keeping time musically and the expression as a reference to the future. As the poem which concludes his literary career, ‘In Time’ makes an apt bookend for ‘Digging’: both deal with family lineage and, specifically, the connection between grandparents and grandchildren.

Posthumous publication of Heaney’s translation of *Aeneid VI* – ‘Let me take your hand, my father. O let me, and do not / Hold back from my embrace.’

Heaney’s translation of *Aeneid VI*, published in 2016, might be considered the text that he had been moving toward through the later years of his poetry. The translation is described in an *Irish Times* review as ‘a miraculous return from the literary afterlife and a brilliant capstone to the imposing edifice of his writing.’⁶⁹ The capstone is an apt metaphor in this case, considered as both a crowning achievement and as the stone piece that seals a tomb. In the ‘Translator’s note’

⁶⁸ Seamus Heaney, *Heaney at 70: Seamus Heaney’s Birthday Speech*, (RTE 2009), http://www.rte.ie/heaneyat70/media/Heaney_Speech_13April09.pdf.

⁶⁹ Bernard O’Donoghue, ‘Aeneid Book VI: Seamus Heaney’s Miraculous Return from Literary Afterlife,’ *Irish Times*, February 27, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/aeneid-book-vi-seamus-heaney-s-miraculous-return-from-literary-afterlife-1.2548521>.

published in the Faber edition Heaney reveals that the impetus to embark on a translation of the whole of Book 6 'arrived' in 2007 with the birth of his first grandchild.

In *Human Chain* Heaney's use of the epic form confounds convention by celebrating the 'down-to-earth' rather than the heroic. This is also a feature of his translation of *Aeneid VI*. In 'Route 110' the underworld is represented as an extension of the real world, peopled by familiar characters. Michael Parker observes that Heaney replaces epic heroes 'with humbler, down-to-earth characters,' and by doing so creates 'an afterlife in print.'⁷⁰ This approach to the epic, with the focus on simple language, can be seen in the reunion between Aeneas and Anchises in *Aeneid VI*:

'But seeing Aeneas come wading through the grass
Towards him, he reached his two hands out
In eager joy, his eyes filled up with tears
And he gave a cry: 'At last! Are you here at last?'
... And am I now allowed to see your face,
My son, and hear you talk, and talk to you myself?
This is what I imagined and looked forward to
As I counted the days: and my trust was not misplaced.' (ll. 923-32)

This style of translation is quite different to some earlier translations of Virgil. The literary translations of the Restoration, for example, privileged poetic form over direct translation. Dryden's translation of the same section, written in heroic couplets, features more dramatic language:

He, when Aeneas on the plain appears,
Meets him with open arms, and falling tears.
'Welcome,' he said, 'the gods' undoubted race!
O long expected to my dear embrace!

⁷⁰ Parker, 'Back in the Heartland,' 380.

Once more 't is giv'n me to behold your face!'⁷¹

Heaney's translation privileges diction over metre in the use of loose blank verse, which lies between pentameter and Virgil's hexameter. The colloquial language echoes the approach he had taken in 'Route 110,' a sort of quotidian Virgil. The natural rhythms of speech can be heard in Heaney's 'And now am I allowed to see your face, my son ...' as opposed to Dryden's 'god's undoubted race.' Heaney's translation has more in common with the 1984 Fitzgerald translation, one of the most important modern translations, where the lines are rendered: 'Am I to see your face, my son, and hear / our voices in communion as before?'

For Heaney the attempted embrace is the pinnacle of Book 6 of *The Aeneid*. In his translation this is presented differently than in the poems of *Human Chain*. As he had in 'Album,' he uses simple language in his translation:

'Let me take your hand, my father. O let me, and do not
Hold back from my embrace.' And as he spoke he wept.
Three times he tried to reach arms around that neck.
Three times the form, reached for in vain, escaped
Like a breeze between his hands, a dream on wings. (ll. 940-44)

What makes this a significant departure from his representation of this scene in *Human Chain* is the dialogue between Aeneas and Anchises. In 'Album,' 'The Riverbank Field' and 'Route 110' there is a silent reunion between father and son, foregrounding the significance of the attempted embrace. He maintains Virgil's imagery in the final clause: 'Like a breeze between his hands, a dream on wings' (l. 944).

In his 'translator's note' Heaney reinforced the importance of that reunion which is what draws him to Book 6 of *The Aeneid*. For classical scholars, though, the point of this reunion is so that Anchises can use the parade of heroes to show Aeneas his ancestors and descendants, and particularly Augustus, 'he whose coming you've heard foretold' who will establish 'a second golden age' (ll. 1069-

⁷¹ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. John Dryden (1697). Reprint of 1909 edition, Online Library of Liberty, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/virgil-the-aeneid-dryden-trans>

72). *The Aeneid* is often read as an epic which glorified the Augustan age. In the Dryden translation, when Aeneas asks his father about the parade on the riverbank he is told:

‘Long has my soul desir’d this time and place
To set before your sight your glorious race,
That this presaging joy may fire your mind
To seek the shores by destiny design’d.’⁷²

Heaney’s version is different. He makes the point that the first part of the text is ‘alive with poetic and narrative energy,’ but the parade held little interest for him as a translator and he moved ‘from inspiration to grim determination.’⁷³ He cites his granddaughter as a primary motivation for continuing with this part of the translation, perhaps a reason why he foregrounds the family relationships in Anchises’ response:

... For a long time now
I have looked forward to telling you about them,
Letting you see them face to face, but most of all
I wished to call the roll of my descendants, parade
My children’s children, so you could all the more
Share my joy at your landfall in Italia. (ll. 964-9)

By underplaying the parade of heroes in favour of the reunion with Anchises which precedes it, Heaney draws attention away from the political dimension of *The Aeneid*. Heaney modifies the epic, a form traditionally associated with poets writing great deeds into posterity, to memorialise his father.

In his *Aeneid* Heaney draws out an aspect of the text which has been the subject of critical debate. The tension between history and memory is central to his translation. Paul F. Burke notes that by bringing together figures from the future, the recent past and remote past together in the parade, Virgil is able to

⁷² Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. John Dryden.

⁷³ Heaney, Seamus. *Aeneid: Book VI*. (London: Faber and Faber 2016), ix.

'compress or telescope the long progression of history into a single moment.'⁷⁴ This aspect of the text – the compression of time – is fundamental to Heaney's translation. For the classical scholar Nicholas Horsfall, the 'Parade of Heroes' is central to the meaning of Book 6. He argues that Aeneas' own struggles 'form explicitly an integral part of the series of all Rome's struggles towards greatness.'⁷⁵ In his reading, Virgil sees history as something 'malleable.'⁷⁶ More recent scholarship reconsiders the role of history and memory in *The Aeneid*. Aaron Seider argues the text 'explores the movement between past and future and, above all, the question of how individuals and groups negotiate that perilous journey.'⁷⁷ As in *Human Chain*, Heaney's focus on the reunion falls into a liminal space between individual and group memory and his focus on family relationships rather than national history complicates the movement between past, present and future.

The meaning of Heaney's translation is enhanced in the paratextual features of the Faber edition. In addition to the aforementioned 'Translator's Note,' the edition also includes a 'Note on the Text' at the conclusion of the translation, written by Heaney's daughter, Catherine, and his editor. They reveal that Heaney may have intended to add an afterword to his translation. The provisional title 'Katabasis, Eschatological,' is strangely apposite for a text that was to become his final published work. This impression is reinforced by the choice of a quotation from Heaney which functions as the blurb: 'The great mythical stories of the afterworld are stories which stay with you and which ease you towards the end, towards a destination and a transition.' While it is unlikely that Heaney knew this would be his final published work, it does seem as though it is a destination he had been working towards in much of his late work.

⁷⁴ Paul F. Burke. 'Roman Rites for the Dead and "Aeneid 6,"' *The Classical Journal* 74, no. 3 (1979): 224, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3296855>

⁷⁵ Horsfall, Nicholas. *A Companion to the Study of Virgil* (Leide; New York; Koln: Brill, 1995), 144.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Aaron M. Seider, *Memory in Vergil's Aeneid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 14.

Conclusion

In the family poems of *Human Chain* private memories are transformed into collective memory in three key ways. Firstly, by writing poetry about his own memories, Heaney can pass down impressions of his own parents to succeeding generations of Heaneys. Secondly, the private memories of a Nobel winning poet published in the public domain become part of the cultural memory of the family in Ireland. Finally, by allusion to and adaptation of other texts Heaney writes his own family into the literary canon. This final collection draws Heaney's poetry back to the place it began in *Death of a Naturalist*: family lineage. Although the intervening poetry collections work through a range of other important affiliations – national, global and literary – it is the attachment to family that concludes his *oeuvre*. Heaney's role as a 'public' poet conferred on him the authority to write on matters of political and cultural interest. His focus on the family in his first and final works blends the divisions between the public and private spheres and reasserts the importance of small lives, everyday events and domestic spaces. Heaney's translation of *Aeneid VI*, and his earlier adaptation of the text in *Human Chain*, interweave private family memory and cultural memory, highlighting the importance of individuals lives.

CODA: REMEMBERING HEANEY – NATIONALIST OR ‘PORTABLE’ MONUMENTS?

This thesis has been concerned with Seamus Heaney as a poet of memory. Using approaches and concepts from memory studies, I have argued that Heaney was actively involved in shaping cultural memory in his poetry and translations. I have focused particularly on the oscillation between national, transnational and regional dimensions of memory in his later work. I have considered the ethical dimension of being a public poet of memory by considering how the transnational dimension of Heaney’s work has often been a means of finding common ground in situations of conflict, or of claiming solidarity with other individuals or groups. I have examined how he has used translation and adaptation for a range of purposes: as a means of providing a fresh perspective on sectarian conflict; as a way of commenting on global terrorism; and as a way of collapsing space and time in family memory. I have traced the ways that his later works revisit, retrace and sometimes revise concepts and imagery from earlier works. This strategy meant that, until his death, his own published works were always in a sense unfinished, always works in progress. Now that he has died, these later works become his final word, and his legacy will now be shaped by other people and institutions. In this Coda, I consider the legacy of the man. His death, in August of 2013, was recognised as a major loss for Ireland and for the broader world of letters. During his lifetime he navigated a careful path as a public poet, always conscious of the implications of speech and silence. Now that it has fallen to others to determine what his legacy will be, he has become a site of memory rather than a creator of memory. This shift has implications for further research on Heaney and memory. One of the most pressing issues is that of how an individual can function as a site of memory, and whether there is congruence or tension between the ways that he shaped memory and the ways that he is remembered.

The commemorative practices that have emerged since Heaney’s death can be broadly categorised as textual (obituary, public record, elegy, special journal editions), monumental (the creation of a museum and interpretive centre in his home village), and practices that encompass both (literary archives at the National Library of Ireland and Emory University). Given the focus of my research, I am

particularly interested in whether he will be primarily remembered as an Irish poet or as a cosmopolitan world poet. Heaney's posthumous memory will be defined by the commemorative practices that shape the public memory of him, practices which are subject to different factors than those that influence a living writer.

There are, of course, precedents for the commemoration of a famous writer. In Europe, memorials to writers have a significant cultural and economic value. In England, established heritage tourism sites are devoted to Shakespeare, Jane Austen, William Wordsworth, Virginia Woolf, and the character of Sherlock Holmes. The veneration of writers in Ireland is reflected in Dublin's designation as a UNESCO City of Literature. Oona Frawley maintains that the focus on a particular writer, rather than on literary texts more broadly, provides a unique perspective on cultural memory. She identifies James Joyce as a writer 'whose work has garnered increasing attention as forming a repository of cultural memory.'¹ Frawley's argument is significant for analysing the way that Heaney is remembered because she distinguishes carefully between the man and his work. For instance, she contends that "'James Joyce" exists not only in cultural memory through his texts but also – and arguably more prominently – through his image and the meaning extracted from it.'² It seems likely that a similar type of split between 'Heaney' and his work will define and shape the way that he is remembered. This division was already apparent when Seamus Deane published his *New Yorker* profile in 2000. Deane recalls watching Heaney accept the Nobel Prize in Stockholm and feeling that he was watching his friend 'recede into an abstraction.'³ He notes Heaney's awareness of 'the chemistry that alters a writer who has gained fame and transforms him from what he is to what his reputation is.'⁴ The divergence between the body of work and the image of the writer is likely to become more pronounced as a memory culture emerges around 'Seamus Heaney.'

¹ Oona Frawley, 'James Joyce, Cultural Memory, and Irish Studies,' *Memory Ireland*, no. 4 (2014): 2. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/30941>.

² *Ibid.*, 8.

³ Seamus Deane, 'The Famous Seamus,' *The New Yorker*, March 20, 2000, 79.

⁴ *Ibid.*

This memory culture will initially be shaped by people who knew Heaney in life. How he will be remembered in the longer term is yet to be determined. In *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move*, Ann Rigney considers the way that Scott functions as a site of memory and presents a case study of the way that memory is remediated in literary works over time. She observes that after Scott's death, in 1832, people were very quick to imagine 'how future generations would remember him and his achievements.'⁵ We see the same dynamic at work in the commemoration of Heaney. Rigney declares: 'The death of any author, since it makes the contours of his oeuvre definitive, inevitably calls for a critical assessment of his long-term significance and his chances of enjoying cultural longevity.'⁶ While the long view can be used to consider Scott's legacy, we don't yet know what Heaney's cultural afterlife will look like, and what factors will shape it. Will his work fall out of favour within a few decades? Or is his place in the canon secure? In his poetry there was a fluidity to time and space – he was able to cross borders and create folds in time. Will Heaney's legacy be as a Northern Irish poet of the 'Troubles,' or a cosmopolitan poet with a broad and varied *oeuvre*?

The immediate response to Seamus Heaney's death demonstrates his significance in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. There were comments of condolence from the Republic's president and prime minister, the Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, former SDLP leader and broker of the Good Friday Agreement, John Hume, and a range of other Irish statesmen, writers and celebrities. Even Ian Paisley, whose Protestant Telegraph once described Heaney as 'the well-known papist propagandist,' made a public statement of condolence. There was talk of a state funeral, and memorial books were placed in Derry Guildhall and Belfast Town Hall so that mourners could record messages. Statements of tribute were read in the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont and in the Dail, the lower house in the parliament of the Republic. These formal condolences, both in the corridors of power and from ordinary people, suggest that the loss was felt particularly by Irish people. All of this suggests that the initial instinct was to enfold Heaney into a national memory culture.

⁵ Ann Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 168.

⁶ Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott*, 168.

Portable Monuments – Textual commemoration

As befits the passing of any major literary figure, there were a range of commemorative events after Heaney's death. These events, though, served to acknowledge his contribution to the arts rather than to frame Heaney as a figure of memory. There were memorial lectures at Notre Dame University in Indiana, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and Trinity College, Dublin. In 2014 The Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queen's University, Belfast, hosted 'Seamus Heaney: A Conference and Commemoration,' featuring presentations from major poets and critics.⁷ There were memorial celebrations at both Harvard and Oxford, where Heaney taught during the 1980s and 1990s. In 2014 there was a public event at Dublin's National Concert Hall, featuring musical performances and readings of his poetry by a range of figures, including the President Michael Higgins.

Between 2014 and 2016, a number of special editions of literary journals were published to commemorate Heaney's passing. These special editions were conceived as a more permanent 'monument' than the public lectures and performances. *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Irish Review*, *Irish Pages* and *Journal of European Studies* all produced special issues. The different approaches taken by these journals signal the ways that the cultural memory of Heaney might develop.

The first to be released, in September of 2014, was *Poetry Ireland Review* (Issue 113). In this special edition Heaney is presented a significant influence on poets of subsequent generations. The editor, Vona Groarke, invited 50 'mostly younger' poets from Ireland, the United Kingdom and United States to write an essay on the Heaney poem that mattered most to them. She primarily invited younger poets because she wanted to develop a 'working gauge of the depth and breadth of his poetic heritage.'⁸ In this special edition there are fewer Irish

⁷ Including Neil Corcoran, Ciaran Carson, Peter McDonald, Jahan Ramazani, Edna Longley, Fran Brearton, Hugh Haughton, Paul Muldoon, Leontia Flynn, Carol Ann Duffy, Frank Ormsby, Paul Durcan, Medbh McGuckian, and Michael Longley.

⁸ Vona Groarke, 'Editorial,' in 'A Seamus Heaney Special Issue,' ed. Vona Groarke, special issue, *Poetry Ireland Review*, no. 113 (2014): 7.

contributors than those from the United Kingdom and United States, acknowledging Heaney's significance in an Anglophone literary tradition as much as an Irish tradition.

The Winter/Spring 2014-5 edition of *The Irish Review* is a collection comprising brief critical articles, anecdotal recollections, poetry. This commemorative edition has a stronger focus on critical scholarship, with most contributors specialising in contemporary Irish literature. The collection comprises of a range of critical approaches to Heaney's poetry, translations and prose. Alan Gillis's piece, 'Heaney's Legacy,' poses the question of how Heaney will be remembered in years hence. He observes that 'it is hard to think of any other artist who might have felt more assured than Heaney in this respect. Indeed, one would expect Heaney's legacy to take care of itself.'⁹ Gillis notes that Heaney was 'both over-praised and over-criticised,'¹⁰ arguing that his legacy should be shaped by a willingness to criticise and debate his work. Jahan Ramazani's 'Seamus Heaney's Globe' makes the case that critical attention should shift to the global dimension in Heaney's work.¹¹ Taken as a whole, this edition of *The Irish Review* can be seen to signpost future trends in Heaney scholarship.

In 2014 and 2015 *Irish Pages* dedicated two editions to Heaney's passing, 'Heaney' and 'After Heaney,' a decision that represents his death as a significant cultural milestone. It invites readers to imagine a world divided into periods of time before and after his death. The Heaney edition is composed of a range of texts: a series of poems, a portfolio of photographic portraits, 'a suite of obituaries,' a series of articles written in Gaelic, and a final section entitled 'global reminiscences.' The volume opens with four poems by Heaney and two articles by Helen Vendler, one an obituary and the other an account of his funeral. In the latter, she considers the impact of his death in Ireland, noting that 'the loss of the poet was felt everywhere.'¹² For instance, the funeral was televised live and his death was front page news for several days.

⁹ Alan Gillis, 'Heaney's Legacy,' *The Irish Review*, nos. 49-50(2014-5): 143.

¹⁰ Ibid., 145.

¹¹ Both Gillis's and Ramazani's papers are also published in 'After Heaney,' themed issue, *Irish Pages* 9, no. 1 (2015).

¹² Helen Vendler, 'Coda,' *Irish Pages* 8, no. 2 (2014): 19.

By contrast, 'After Heaney' suggests a way forward. This edition has a broader perspective than *Irish Review*, taking a critical look at the state of poetry in 2015, with articles on poetry and politics ('Bardic Voice'). It includes a varied range of issues, from Heaney's Catholicism to his collaboration with Dennis O'Driscoll to produce *Stepping Stones*, which is something greater than a series of interviews, and more like a form of life writing. While the *Irish Pages* 'Heaney' issue did not include an introduction, the editor of 'After Heaney' recalls that whenever he spoke to anyone of Heaney's death, they could recall exactly where they were when they heard; he compares this 'collective *frisson* of national loss' to the assassination of JFK.¹³ He concludes with the observation that while Heaney was 'a modern Nobel Laureate who never stopped travelling outwards from the always-close *omphalos* of Derry,' he retains a special significance at home, and 'will always be remembered and read, with especial power, for centuries and centuries, by the people of this island.'¹⁴ These two special issues take the broadest view of Heaney's significance as a poet and a critic, as an Irishman and a cosmopolitan, as a public figure and a private citizen.

The commemorative edition of *Journal of European Studies*, published in March of 2016, takes a significantly different approach. By locating Heaney within a European tradition, the journal signals some future trends in Heaney scholarship. The special edition includes essays on Heaney's interest in other language traditions: for example, his interactions with the Irish language, his engagement with Polish poetry, his uses of Latin, and his Scottish influences. This issue positions Heaney as a cosmopolitan writer, and provides a critical approach that encompasses the cross-cultural flows of influence and formal elements, the complexity of belonging in Heaney's later work, and what it means to be European in the twenty first century. These transnational networks are also explored in elegies written for Heaney.

¹³ Chris Agee, 'The View from the Lagan,' *Irish Pages* 9, no. 1 (2015): 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

Elegies

As elegiac writing was such an important part of Heaney's *oeuvre*, it is fitting to consider the ways he has been elegised. In Chapter Three I discussed Heaney's *tombeaux*, the elegies he wrote for other poets. The *Irish Pages* 'Heaney' edition contains a series of elegies arranged by nation and language: poems by Irish poets; Gaelic memorial poems with English translations; and poems from around the world. Many of these poems draw on Heaney's own elegiac writing. A number of poets appropriate imagery and stylistic devices from his own work, as he did in his elegies for Lowell, Brodsky, Hughes and Milosz. Ignatius McGovern recalls that he was writing a letter to Heaney when he heard of his death, and that he never had the opportunity to conclude the letter with 'the joke I knew you would enjoy':

But you were already beyant, like Gunnar
Sharing poems with The Greats
Milosz, Brodsky, Lowell, Auden, Yeats. (Ll. 12-4)¹⁵

McGovern chooses 'beyant,' an informal Irish variation on 'beyond,' to describe Heaney's passing. The elegy references Heaney's representation of ritual in 'Funeral Rites,' in the allusion to Gunnar, but more importantly to the poets he admired and elegised himself. In these three lines, McGovern draws together Heaney's passion for the Irish language, his interest in other language traditions, and his deep and abiding respect for funeral rituals.

Like McGovern, Paddy Bushe's poem is based on his recollection of where he was when he heard the news of Heaney's death. Bushe also draws upon language and imagery from Heaney's own poetry in his elegy. He was attending a poetry festival in Montenegro when he heard the news, and describes lighting a candle for Heaney inside a local church, while outside the day 'glared, baring its teeth at the dark / mountains that had darkened further at the news' (ll. 7-8).¹⁶ He recalls later hearing about Heaney's final text message to his wife, and these are

¹⁵ Ignatius McGovern, 'To Seamus Heaney in Heaven,' *Irish Pages* 8, no. 2 (2014): 37.

¹⁶ Paddy Bushe, 'A Candle in Montenegro,' *Irish Pages* 8, no. 2 (2014):30.

referenced in the concluding couplet¹⁷: '*Noli Timere*. Now we must, as ever, trust the words, / The hand that wrote, the heart blown forever open' (ll. 13-4).

Heaney's final words are juxtaposed with Bushe's paraphrase of lines from 'Postscript,' the concluding poem of *The Spirit Level*, which describes a moment of joy while driving through County Clare: 'As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways / And catch the heart offguard and blow it open' (ll.15-6). Paddy Bushe has used the allusion to 'Postscript' to emphasise Heaney's capacity for hope. This elegy reinforces the themes that emerge in Heaney's final poems, written for his young granddaughters, of finding a balance between being grounded and being able to 'credit marvels.'

Other elegies for Heaney in *Irish Pages* draw on intertextual links to write Heaney into memory. Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill's elegy, written in Gaelic and translated by the author, recognises Heaney as an important writer in both the Irish tradition and the global literary community. In the 'Clearances' sequence Heaney wrote for his mother, he focuses on the space left behind when a tree falls. The soul, 'silent, beyond silence listened for,' symbolises the loss. Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill appropriates this imagery in her memorial poem:

Just as if a tree fell in the heart
Of the forest. The crashing sound
It made could be heard
All the way to the Eastern World. (ll. 1-4)¹⁸

In this poem the absence is supplanted by a 'crashing sound' which reverberates across the world, emphasising the impact of Heaney's death. Ni Dhomhnaill opens with a reference to Heaney's global significance, and in the second stanza writes into the tradition of elegiac writing in Ireland with an allusion to 'The Lament for Art O'Leary,' which Heaney had described as the 'eye of the needle [he] passed

¹⁷ In a funeral oration, the Heaney's son revealed that his final words were *Noli timere* (which he translated as don't be afraid), texted to his wife before he went into surgery. 'This wasn't as portentous as it seems: he frequently used Latin as conversational shorthand.' Mick Heaney, 'My Father's Last Words,' *The Irish Times*, September 12, 2015.

¹⁸ Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, 'In Memoriam Seamus Heaney,' *Irish Pages* 8, no. 2 (2014):163.

through in order to re-enter the kingdom of Thebes'¹⁹ for his adaptation of *Antigone*: 'And as Eileen Dubh said long ago / in our hearts was a torn hole / of grief ...' (ll. 9-11). Ni Dhomnaill's elegy evokes the grief felt by a nation and shapes the public memory of Heaney by drawing on a text from the past, a strategy used by Heaney in so much of his work.

Sean Lysaght's elegy 'The Crossing'²⁰ is set in the underworld, a significant locale in *Seeing Things*, *District and Circle* and *Human Chain*. Lysaght, too, elegises Seamus Heaney by alluding to both his original poetry and translations. This elegy recalls the concluding poem of 'Seeing Things,' Heaney's translation from 'Canto III' of Dante's *Inferno*, also entitled 'The Crossing.' Like Heaney, Lysaght writes in tercets loosely modelled on Dante's *terza rima*; through versification, Lysaght acknowledges both Dante and Heaney's elegiac writing in *Seeing Things* and *Human Chain*. In recounting the crossing of the River Styx into the underworld, Lysaght's elegy reprises a number of images from poems in these collections. The poem opens with Heaney embarking on the crossing to the underworld, 'allowing his ash-plant / To clatter to the floor of the boat' (ll. 4-5). The ash-plant was an important motif in the poems Heaney wrote in memory of his father. 'The Ash Plant,' collected in *Seeing Things*, opens with the observation 'He'll never rise again but he is ready.' It describes his father dying in an upstairs room, the walking stick a 'phantom limb ... which steadies him' (ll. 14-5). It is followed in the collection by a haiku:

Dangerous pavements.
But I face the ice this year
With my father's stick. ('1.1.87' ll.1-3)

Lysaght draws on these connotations of the ash-plant in his elegy. He describes Heaney abandoning his walking stick when he enters the boat as he thinks he 'might pass on without support' (l. 9). He describes Heaney steadying himself on the 'thwart' as the boat begins to move. Lysaght echoes Heaney's language patterns in his choice of the word 'thwart,' a word from Middle English and Old

¹⁹ Seamus Heaney, 'Title Deeds: Translating a Classic,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 148, no. 4 (2004): 422, <https://amphilsoc.org/sites/default/files/proceedings/480401.pdf>.

²⁰ Sean Lysaght, 'The Crossing,' *Irish Pages* 8, no. 2 (2014): 34-5.

Norse, to describe the seat of the rowboat. The ferryman Charon rows him across, allowing him to disembark 'for ground that felt steadier than ever' (l. 33). The poem concludes on a riverbank in the underworld, the setting that was so important in the poems of *Human Chain*.

Paul Muldoon writes across space and time in 'Cuthbert and the Otters,' a poem commissioned for the Durham Book Festival and first published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in December of 2013.²¹ Muldoon's approach to elegiac writing is more oblique, playing with word association rather than direct allusion to Heaney's work. Through the 27 stanzas that constitute 'Cuthbert and the Otters,' he weaves the story of St Cuthbert, who is buried in Durham Cathedral, with his own recollections of acting as a pall bearer at Heaney's funeral. In 'Two Genealogical Elegies for Seamus Heaney,' Sally Connolly traces Muldoon's linguistic homage to Heaney through this poem, identifying a number of allusions in a 'dizzily associative welter and web of images, words, people, and places.'²² This approach to elegy is reminiscent of Heaney's own elegies for poets, and especially 'Audenesque.' Muldoon's elegy is dominated by sense of personal grief, best represented in the refrain 'I cannot thole the thought of Seamus Heaney dead.' The word 'thole,' which means to suffer, has been adopted from Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*. Heaney wrote about the significance of the word, which had gone through a 'multi-cultural odyssey' by travelling from England to Scotland, to Ulster with the planters, and thence to the American South in the 1700s.²³ Heaney's aunt would say of a family who had experienced a sudden bereavement, 'They'll just have to learn to thole.'²⁴ Muldoon draws on all of the connotations in his elegy. The word acts as a link between Heaney and St Cuthbert, and also describes his own mourning. By preceding 'thole' with 'cannot,' Muldoon emphasises his inability to accept Heaney's death. When it first appears, in the third stanza, the refrain is preceded by the lines: 'I'm at once full of dread / and in complete denial' (ll. 19-20). This denial is represented by the series of

²¹ Paul Muldoon, 'Cuthbert and the Otters,' *Times Literary Supplement*, December 20, 2013, <http://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/cuthbert-and-the-otters/>.

²² Sally Connolly, 'Two Genealogical Elegies for Seamus Heaney,' *Literary Imagination* 18, no. 3 (2016): 224, doi:10.1093/litimag/imw025.

²³ Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), xxv-xxvi.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, xxv.

disconnected images, at times juxtaposed with images of Muldoon bearing Heaney's coffin:

The wax moth lives in a beehive proper. It can detect sound
frequencies up to 300 kHz. The horse in the stable
may be trained to follow a scent.
What looks like a growth of stubble
has to do with the chin drying out. I straighten my
black tie as the pallbearer (ll. 51-6)

The disconnection between the moth, the horse, and the body in the coffin underlines Muldoon's sense of shock. In the twenty fifth stanza, an image of the body is directly followed by the refrain: 'As with the stubble, so with the finger- and toenails. I cannot thole the thought of Seamus Heaney dead' (ll. 174-5). Muldoon's identification of the parts of the human body that continue to grow after death signals his distress, his inability to accept that this life has come to an end.

Another recurring motif is the six otters bearing a fish for St Cuthbert's meal. The otters symbolise the six pall bearers at a funeral, and they are used to represent poetic inheritance. Muldoon had written of Heaney's elegy for Robert Lowell, and had interpreted the image of their final farewell 'under the full bay tree' as Heaney positioning himself as the 'natural heir' to Lowell. He now finds himself in the position of the younger poet elegising his mentor. In this poem the fish that appears 'garlanded with bay leaves' (l. 6) in the opening stanza suggests how words of the dead man might be modified in the guts of the living. With the symbolic fish, Muldoon foregrounds the way that elegy cannibalises its subject. The poetic mantle is passed on in the ninth and tenth stanzas:

... Halfway through what's dissolved into the village

of Bellaghy, this otter steps out from under the bier
and offers me his spot. It seems even an otter may subordinate
himself whilst being first in line to revolt.
He may be at once complete insider and odd man out.

In a review, John Lavin reads the otter's action as Heaney inviting Muldoon to 'take on the Yeatsian mantle of public poet,' later suggesting that Muldoon acknowledges that 'the mantle has now been passed onto him whether he wants it or not.'²⁵ Connolly, too, argues that 'the acquisition of influence here is unmistakable,' referring directly to the scene under the bay tree in Heaney's elegy for Lowell.²⁶ In 'Cuthbert and the Otters' the otter is offering Muldoon his place as a pall-bearer, and in the sixth stanza he had written: 'I see how they might balk / at their burden.' The tone of Muldoon's poem recalls Samuel Johnson's criticism of the mannered artifice of the pastoral elegy, and he seems to draw more from the raw grief of 'The Lament for Art O'Leary' than he does from the performative grief of pastoral elegy.

One factor common to many of these textual memorials is their limited audience. Apart from obituaries, which were published in newspapers and written for a general readership, many of the other textual forms are intended for limited circulation. The special memorial editions of journals are targeted at relatively small readerships, though Chris Agee notes that after the release of the first special edition of *Irish Pages* he was inundated with orders from beyond the usual market for the journal, and that Heaney had 'a wholly unique reach into ... the plain people of Ireland.'²⁷ Despite the unexpected demand for copies of the journal, the 'plain people' of Ireland are perhaps more likely to encounter other forms of memorials to Heaney.

Monumental Memory: Seamus Heaney HomePlace

There are a number of institutions actively involved with keeping Heaney's legacy alive, including The Seamus Heaney poetry Centre at Queens University in Belfast,²⁸ archives at The National Library of Ireland, and Emory University in

²⁵ John Lavin, 'Poetry: *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* by Paul Muldoon,' *Wales Arts Review*, May 17, 2015, <http://www.walesartsreview.org/poetry-one-thousand-things-worth-knowing-by-paul-muldoon/>.

²⁶ Connolly, 'Two Geneological Elegies,' 227.

²⁷ Agee, 'The view from the Lagan,' 7.

²⁸ In 2004 his alma mater, Queen's University, Belfast, created The Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry. As well as teaching creative writing, the centre hosts conferences, public readings and a Summer School. The three-million-pound poetry centre was established to

Atlanta. The place which will undoubtedly have the greatest popular appeal, however, is Seamus Heaney HomePlace, which opened in Heaney's home village of Bellaghy in September of 2016. HomePlace is a 2,000 square metre building constructed on the site of the former RUC Police Station.²⁹ The architects incorporated a basalt stone wall³⁰ from the original building into their design 'to symbolically show how a site which was once a fortress in the community was now peeling back the barriers and inviting the community in.'³¹ Seamus Heaney HomePlace reconfigures the site by being located on the former RUC site. A building which was the source of antagonism during the Troubles has been repurposed to commemorate another dimension of the Northern Irish experience, the cultural life of the province. *The New York Times* reports a family friend's observation: 'Some areas have spent money on memorials dedicated to people who have died in the Troubles ... But a celebration of poetry, well, that's pretty much unheard-of.'³² The sectarian violence of the 70s and 80s is supplanted by a different memory.



Figure 1.

promote links between poetry and criticism and to develop collaborative projects which might attract external funding. 'Heaney Centre Opens at Queen's,' *The Irish Times*, February 21, 2004.

²⁹ Interview with the architect Philip Hutchinson, *Northern Builder* 27, no.5 (2016), 48.

³⁰ See Figure 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

³² Roslyn Sulcas, 'Celebrating Seamus Heaney's Legacy, at His Birthplace,' *The New York Times*, 11 October 2016.

https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/11/arts/international/celebrating-seamus-heaneys-legacy-at-his-birthplace.html?_r=1

Seamus Heaney HomePlace features a 'fully interactive' permanent exhibition about Heaney's life and work, arranged over two floors.³³ 'Seamus Heaney: Man and Boy' features a re-creation of the study where he worked, as well as manuscripts, photographs and artefacts associated with specific works (a butter churn, his school satchel). The Seamus Heaney HomePlace website invites visitors to:

See and **hear** for yourself on our video wall and touch screens how he is remembered by his family and friends – and see and hear for yourself how his work and his friendship was valued by global and cultural figures. **Experience** the place in which he was rooted and from which he drew his inspiration, whether as a child on the road to Anahorish School – his school bag and school desk are here!³⁴

The promotional material focuses on the importance of audiovisual material in the display. A journalist who reviewed *HomePlace* for *The Guardian* writes: 'I will always feel that poetry "lives" (their word, not mine) in people rather than in buildings, on the page rather than in glass display cases or via audio guides. ... But this doesn't mean I have any argument with HomePlace. In our anxious, straitened times, who wouldn't be happy to see a poet so honoured in the place that built him, magnificent and true?'³⁵

Funded primarily by the Mid Ulster Council, the £4.25 million centre aims to attract 35,000 visitors to the region within the first year. Further funding has come from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Heritage Lottery fund for the 'Living Past' Project, which aims to establish the links between Heaney's poetry and the region (for example, by establishing a literary trail for tourists) and to

³³ Ibid. The exhibition uses touchscreen technology and comprises video interviews with a range of people, from friends to world leaders, and audio recordings of Heaney reading his own poetry.

³⁴ Seamus Heaney HomePlace, 'Step Into HomePlace,' <http://www.seamusheaneyhome.com/visit-homeplace/step-into-homeplace/>.

³⁵ Rachel Cooke, 'At Home in Heaney Country,' *The Guardian*, October 2, 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/02/seamus-heaney-homeplace-review-bellaghy-co-down>.

preserve the way of life that inspired Heaney's poetry.³⁶ As well as the permanent exhibition, there is a 189 seat performance space, education spaces, an annexe for community functions, and a library featuring books from Heaney's personal collection and translations of his work in 20 languages.³⁷ I contend that HomePlace will have a significant influence on how Heaney is remembered in the long term.

Heritage tourism is a growing industry, and there is a particular niche devoted to literary heritage. Liedeke Plate has written of the 'obsession' in Europe with retracing the steps of writers, identifying Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Marcel Proust as writers of particular interest. She describes literary heritage tourism as 'the marketing of space as "cultural Capital."' ³⁸ Using the example of the new memorial to Virginia Woolf in Tavistock Square in London, she argues that the memorial 'inscribes the space' with the memory of the writer.³⁹ The memorial becomes a *lieu de memoire*. Similarly, HomePlace inscribes the village of Bellaghy with the memory of its most famous son. Hoppen, Brown and Fyall argue that such sites attract both general heritage visitors and a 'niche segment of genuine literary pilgrims.'⁴⁰ HomePlace, therefore, has the potential not only to attract visitors who have an interest in Heaney's work, but also to introduce his poetry to people who may not otherwise have read it.

David Herbert also associates literary tourism with a much longer tradition of the literary pilgrimage, but notes that heritage tourism has transformed physical sites into 'social constructions, created, amplified, and promoted to attract visitors.'⁴¹ Herbert focuses on the importance of place: 'Places acquire meanings from imaginative worlds, but these meanings and the emotions they engender are

³⁶ Mid Ulster District Council, 'Almost £700K From Heritage Lottery Fund for Seamus Heaney Trail Development,' <http://www.midulstercouncil.org/Council/News/News-January-2016/Almost-%C2%A3700K-From-Heritage-Lottery-Fund-For-Seamus>.

³⁷ Ibid., 48.

³⁸ Liedeke Plate, 'Walking in Virginia Woolf's Footsteps Performing Cultural Memory,' *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (2006): 102, doi:10.1177/1367549406060810.

³⁹ Ibid., 103.

⁴⁰ Anne Hoppen, Lorraine Brown, and Alan Fyall. 'Literary Tourism: Opportunities and Challenges for the Marketing and Branding of Destinations?,' *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management* 3, no. 1 (2014): 38, doi:10.1016/j.jdmm.2013.12.009.

⁴¹ David Herbert, 'Literary Places, Tourism and the Heritage Experience,' *Annals of Tourism Research* 28, no. 2 (2001): 313, doi:10.1016/S0160-7383(00)00048-7.

real to the beholder.’⁴² Ann Rigney proposes that ‘locations offer the sensation of an authentic, embodied connection to the past,’ but they are always ‘synthetic’ in that they are the product of mediations. The result is a ‘very potent combination of authenticity and mediation.’⁴³ In her discussion of Abbotsford, Scott’s home, she contends that the site has become an anachronism, ‘the very materiality of the place’ preventing it from being able to ‘morph with the times’ in the way that his literary works can.⁴⁴

Rigney’s analysis of Scott’s home raises some fascinating issues for Seamus Heaney HomePlace. On the one hand, the fact of being located at the site of Heaney’s childhood has a materiality that might ‘fix’ in place some of the later poetry. The cosmopolitan Heaney who used his work to move across time and space has been anchored, albeit in the place that shaped him. On the other hand, unlike many other literary heritage sites, it is not a preservation of the author’s home. The first purpose built space to commemorate a writer in Ireland, HomePlace is not a museum; its mission is to be ‘forward thinking.’⁴⁵ To this end, a major feature of the centre is the performance space.

HomePlace is dedicated to the promotion of the arts. As of January 2017, the current programme includes theatrical adaptations of three of Heaney’s most popular poetry collections, *North*, *Field Work* and *Station Island*. HomePlace has commissioned theatre companies in Northern Ireland to present staged readings of these works, accompanied by ‘Illuminations’ lectures, which aim to ‘introduce each of Seamus Heaney’s poetry collections to a wide audience.’⁴⁶ The current production of *North* is presented by the Belfast based Kabosh Theatre company and introduced by the eminent Irish critic Declan Kiberd.⁴⁷ In February of 2017, a production of *Field Work* was presented by Field Day. This production was directed by Stephen Rea, who served with Heaney on the board of Field Day in the

⁴² Ibid., 318.

⁴³ Rigney, ‘The Afterlives of Walter Scott,’ 133.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁵ Pól Ó Conghaile, ‘First Look: Inside the Stunning New Seamus Heaney HomePlace,’ *Independent.ie*, September 30, 2016, <http://www.independent.ie/life/travel/ni-travel/first-look-inside-the-stunning-new-seamus-heaney-homeplace-35090726.html>.

⁴⁶ Seamus Heaney HomePlace, ‘*North*: An Illuminations Introduction Delcan Kiberd,’ <https://seamusheaneyhome.ticketsolve.com/#/shows/873568736>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

1980s and 1990s. In March, the Lyric Theatre of Belfast will present *Station Island*. The schedule also includes poetry readings by Ciaran Carson, Eilean Ni Chuilleanin, Nick Laird and Simon Armitage. The scheduled musical performances include traditional Irish music, folk rock, and classical, including a performance of the work of composer Sean O Riada, whom Heaney elegized in *Field Work*. There is an extraordinary breadth to the types of activities on schedule,⁴⁸ in line with the stated mission of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland: 'it's important that a centre such as this should be able to offer an artistic programme that has sufficient breadth to appeal to the widest of tastes. Heaney himself is, after all, one of the world's most read, most popular and most accessible poets.'⁴⁹ Just as the memory of Heaney is yet to be written, the future of the performance space at HomePlace will be determined by the types of events that prove popular in these early days. Heaney's son Christopher sees HomePlace as being about something more than preserving a memory of the man: 'It's important that people know it's not just a Seamus Heaney exhibition ... Yes, the exhibition is there but the arts now have their place in the community and there is a space for community arts to happen and I think that's a fantastic legacy.'⁵⁰

The Mid Ulster Council was quick to recognise Heaney's cultural and economic value to the region, as demonstrated in the speed with which the project was approved and completed. Seamus Heaney HomePlace capitalises on the popular appeal of the poet and exists to protect his legacy. This focus upon preservation is shared by The Seamus Heaney Poetry Centre, which has been engaged in an ongoing protest over the expansion of the A6 motorway in County Derry. The proposed road would bisect Anahorish and Mossbawn, areas of significance in Heaney's early life and in his poetry. There has been an outcry about the 'potential damage it might inflict on the legacy of the poet and his deep attachment to the

⁴⁸ Including classes on basket weaving and paper making.

⁴⁹ Seamus Heaney HomePlace, 'Across the Threshold: Season 2, January-March 2017,' (2017),

https://www.seamusheaneyhome.com/SeamusHeaney/media/SeamusHeaney/Publication%20Files/SHHP-Season-2-Programme-final-low-res-version-for-web_1.pdf.

⁵⁰ Freya McClements, 'Seamus Heaney HomePlace Opens: Son Moved by Voyage Round His Father,' *The Irish Times*, September 29, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/seamus-heaney-homeplace-opens-son-moved-by-voyage-round-his-father-1.2810592>.

landscape.⁵¹ Stephen Connolly, of the Seamus Heaney Poetry Centre, claims that the land is 'of great cultural significance if you believe that Heaney is a significant cultural figure in the literature of Ireland.'⁵² Fran Brearton, Director of the centre, observes: 'it is an imperative now, even more so than it was when [Heaney] himself protested against this development, to protect a legacy that exists, beautifully, both in physical form, and in the landscape of the poems that bring international visitors to this area.'⁵³ What they have identified is the value associated with a region because Seamus Heaney wrote about it, a value which means it is worthy of preservation. As well as having cultural value, this association also brings economic benefits to the region. In a sense, the world evoked in Heaney's poems about Mossbawn and Anahorish is a fiction: the prelapsarian County Derry he describes was always coloured by nostalgia, and the journey he embarked on in 'Route 110' was through a district that had already disappeared. In Chapter Six I discussed Heaney's final collection in terms of 'reflective nostalgia,' or a longing for a past and a home that has already disappeared. Nevertheless, this 'longing' does integrate individual and collective memories of the region. The way of life that Heaney described in his poetry is potentially disrupted by a dual carriageway, and those opposing it use the potential loss of tourism revenue as an argument against the project.

Heaney's global appeal is seen as a drawcard for international tourists to the region. The success of Seamus Heaney HomePlace will rest partly on its ability to draw return visitors to events in the performance space, and partly on the ability of the centre to attract international visitors. Although HomePlace fixes the memory of Heaney to the site of Bellaghy, the success of the project relies upon a continued transnational engagement with Heaney's poetry. For instance, in the first month the centre was open, the Northern Ireland tourist board hosted a group of journalists and bloggers from China in as part of a project to 'actively

⁵¹ Mark Hilliard, 'Row over €190m New Road through Landscape That Inspired Heaney,' *The Irish Times*, September 2, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/row-over-190m-new-road-through-landscape-that-inspired-heaney-1.2776075>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Adrian Rutherford, 'QUB Rift Grows as Seamus Heaney Centre Opens in Bellaghy,' *Belfast Telegraph*, September 28, 2016, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/qub-rift-grows-as-seamus-heaney-centre-opens-in-bellaghy-35085242.html>

pitch Northern Ireland' to the international market.⁵⁴ Tourism Ireland is actively marketing Seamus Heaney HomePlace to the 'culturally curious,' identifying Australia, India and the Middle East as emerging markets for Northern Ireland.⁵⁵ This is true, too, of the performance space. The Mid Ulster Council appointed directors who would arrange a programme that appealed to return visitors. One of the directors, Sean Doran, recognises that 'they haven't compromised in aiming for something that would be bold and attractive to international visitors.'⁵⁶

Other institutions also rely on this capacity to draw international visitors, though they aim to attract Heaney scholars rather than a general audience. These places are actively involved in maintaining and moulding a transnational memory of Seamus Heaney. In 2011 Heaney donated his papers to the National Library of Ireland. This considerable collection includes manuscripts of his poetry and prose. The National Library recognises that 'it is likely to attract many researchers, cultural tourists and other visitors to Dublin for many years to come.'⁵⁷ There is a second archive of Heaney papers (primarily correspondence with other writers) in the Stuart A. Rose Library at Emory University in Atlanta. Like the National Library of Ireland, Emory recognises the papers as an attraction that will draw international visitors to the Rose Library. This collection was opened to the public in 2016, and the expectation is that it 'will bring a new wave of students and scholars from many nations to the reading room of the Rose Library.'⁵⁸ In February of 2014 Emory launched the first major exhibition after the death of Heaney. 'The Music of What Happens,' curated by Geraldine Higgins, featured poems with early drafts, rare publications and audio recordings of Heaney's poetry. Higgins will take the exhibition to Dublin in 2017, and will supplement it

⁵⁴ Q Radio, 'Chinese Bloggers "Blown Away" by Bellaghy's HomePlace,' podcast audio, 2016, <http://www.goqradio.com/belfast/news/q-radio-local-news/chinese-bloggers-blown-away-by-bellaghys-homeplace/>.

⁵⁵ Tourism Ireland, 'Tourism Ireland Launches £7 Million Autumn Campaign (NI Version),' <https://www.tourismireland.com/Press-Releases/2016/September/Tourism-Ireland-launches-7-million-autumn-campaign>.

⁵⁶ Sulcas, 'Celebrating Seamus Heaney's Legacy.'

⁵⁷ National Library of Ireland, 'Heaney Donates Archive to the NLI,' <http://www.nli.ie/en/list/latest-news.aspx?article=8403d69b-332e-4004-959d-c363eb178c0f>.

⁵⁸ Elaine Justice, 'Emory Opens Seamus Heaney's Papers to Public,' Emory News Center report, February 29, 2016, http://news.emory.edu/stories/2016/02/upress_seamus_heaney_archive_opens/campus.html.

with archival material from the National Library of Ireland. These archives will be important in framing the way that Heaney is remembered by future generations of scholars.

Past and future: Remembering 'Seamus Heaney'

How the image and meaning of 'Seamus Heaney' will be remembered in the long term will depend upon a variety of factors, including continued scholarly interest in his work, his poetry maintaining a popular appeal, and the success of Seamus Heaney HomePlace. The commemorative practices which have emerged in the period since his death are interesting because of the potential to subsume the cosmopolitan Heaney within a national bardic memory. My interest is in the implications of these commemorative practices in terms of the national and transnational dimensions of Heaney's late work.

Within the Republic of Ireland, Heaney has been recognised and celebrated as a poet who can take his place alongside Swift, Wilde, Yeats, O'Casey, Joyce and Beckett in the pantheon of great Irish writers. There is an existing commemorative culture and infrastructure into which Heaney can be integrated: Dublin's designation as a UNESCO 'city of literature'; the Dublin Writers Museum; the National Library of Ireland; and the Abbey Theatre (where *The Burial at Thebes* was first performed). As the place where he lived for the last forty years of his life, and as the centre of literary commemoration in Ireland, the city of Dublin will have a role in shaping the memory of Seamus Heaney, and it is likely that they will privilege the national dimension of the memory.

It is worth considering, however, whether the national claim on Heaney is being surpassed by the local claim. The Mid Ulster Council acted quickly to stake a claim on the memory of its most famous son, recognising the benefits that literary heritage tourism might bring to the region. Bellaghy is, after all, where Heaney spent his childhood and where he chose to be buried, despite leaving the village in the early 1950s. Some areas become a 'country' based on the popularity of a

writer.⁵⁹ Mid Ulster has the potential to become 'Seamus Heaney country.' The region is his birthplace, his burial site, and the subject of much of his most loved poetry. How the local, the national, and the transnational claims to Heaney's legacy are negotiated and materialised remains to be seen.

In any case, Seamus Heaney HomePlace is likely to make a significant contribution to maintaining interest in his work and shaping the way that his life is remembered. What is less clear is whether the centre will be successful in attracting international tourism and, by extension, maintaining the transnational dimension of memory. The capacity to attract international guests is significantly affected by external factors. For instance, it is not yet known whether the decision to leave the European Union will have an impact on tourism in Northern Ireland, though there is considerable concern that a 'hard' Brexit might destabilise the region.⁶⁰ Because much of Heaney's later work has reached across and beyond borders, it would be unfortunate if the current fixation with borders in the European Union were to delimit the memory.

At the time of writing, it would seem likely that Seamus Heaney will be remembered as a poet of international significance. Since his death there has been a renewed critical interest in his work, though the attention never really waned, and a steady stream of new scholarly publications. In 'Seamus Heaney's Globe,' Jahan Ramazani makes a claim for Heaney's significance: 'His is a poetry of engagement with the complexly apprehended, layered, and imagined space of Irish locality and of cosmopolitan openness to wide-ranging traversals and translocations of language, culture and geography.'⁶¹ While literary commemoration does often bind writers to national memory cultures, I maintain that this complex engagement with the local, national and global should be recognised in the way that 'Seamus Heaney' is remembered.

⁵⁹ Hoppen et. al., 40.

⁶⁰ Deborah McAleese, 'Brexit "Most Dangerous Issue for Northern Ireland Since Partition,"' *The Independent*, February 17, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-latest-northern-ireland-dangerous-issue-partition-a7584761.html>.

⁶¹ Jahan Ramazani, 'Seamus Heaney's Globe,' *The Irish Review*, no. 49-50 (2015): 51.

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