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POLITICS, RELIGION AND THE WORK OF SEAMUS HEANEY

By

Sarah Steele

A Thesis Submitted for
The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
In
Politics and Government

University of Kent at Canterbury

May 1999

DEDICATION

To my husband Anthony Millett,

without whom this study would not have been possible.

'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...

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.'

Heaney, S., *The Cure at Troy,* 1990, pp. 77 – 78

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to examine Heaney's 'political' poetry and to demonstrate how the political, religious and social pressures of Ireland, since the outbreak of the Troubles in nineteen-sixty-nine, influence his work. Within these parameters a study of the changes in Heaney's work is undertaken, which develops in three well defined phases of his career. The thesis concentrates on the period prior to the Troubles in Northern Ireland, through the years of violence, to the current uncertain peace. Heaney's poetry reflects a general historical and political awareness of the conflict surrounding him. He is concerned about the role and responsibility of the poet in society, and in particular in societies fractured by violence. Heaney wishes to avoid restrictive discourses which recapitulate established agendas which fuel the cycle of internecine violence. Throughout the three phases of his career, his perception about the role of the poet and the function of poetry changes, reflecting the situation in Northern Ireland. Heaney examines his Irish heritage, he becomes disillusioned with the impotent, ideological preconceptions of both tribes, the empty rhetoric of politicians, and with the dogmatic, enervating Roman Catholic Church. Heaney is forced into the position of public spokesman by the political convulsions of his time. This creates an agonising self-division, an ongoing struggle between embracing poetic responsibility or accomplishing the tribal duty of political commitment. Heaney reaches some resolution in the third phase of his career. He accepts that art has limitations, but still believes in the efficacy of poetry. He enlarges his poetic scope by viewing Northern Ireland in relation to other areas of turmoil in the world. He finally resolves the dilemma of an artist in a tumultuous society by being artistically free and socially responsible, by encompassing the inter-dependency between the visionary and the actual.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is the product of a long interest in the politics of Seamus Heaney and in the politics of his poetry, and a need to tease out the implications of that poetry which have sometimes been called enigmatic. There is little agreement about Heaney among his critics or admirers. His liberal admirers accuse him of being too closely entangled with the Northern Ireland conflict and argue that he is a militant nationalist. His nationalist audience on the other hand accuse him of not being involved enough with the Troubles and argue that he fails to take a stance. Others again accuse Heaney of being ambivalent and ambiguous in his poetry and in his life.

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how the pressures of Ireland affect Heaney and his poetry, what developments and changes occur over time and how these are expressed in his work from the period immediately prior to the onset of the contemporary Troubles in Northern Ireland, through the years of escalating violence and atrocities to the present uneasy peace. The thesis will consider whether Heaney concedes to the influences and pressures of Ireland or whether he follows the demands of his own imagination. For the purpose of this study the influences and pressures of Ireland will include the Irish Roman Catholic Church and the Irish State, which since its inception has colluded with the Church in an attempt to realise their joint vision of a society that would be Catholic, conservative, patriarchal and dominated by strong family values. Those pressures also include Irish society, the tribes and the nets, Joyce's 'trolls' of nationality, identity, politics, religion, language, and in addition the pressures of Heaney's own conscience. Added to these are the pressures of the escalating conflict in Northern Ireland from nineteen-sixty-nine including the pressures created by the roles played out there by the British Army and the Paramilitaries, and finally the pressures caused by the need for, and the sense that, change must occur in Northern Ireland.

The thesis will consider Heaney's poetry in chronological order from his first volume published in nineteen-sixty-six to his latest volume published in nineteen-ninety-six, concentrating on the poetry that, in my view, deals with political, religious and social issues. There is never any intention to mine Heaney's work nor to reduce its variety, subtlety and complexity. My intention is to demonstrate how Heaney handles the dilemma of an artist in a tumultuous society and how he proffers trenchant political, social and cultural comment while honouring the aesthetic demands of art.

For the purpose of this study 'political' may be taken to mean a general historical and political awareness of a situation rather than any constricted perspective that often attends such a label. This definition is taken from Tom Paulin who explains his understanding of 'political' poetry 'as embodying a general historical awareness of ... rather than offering a specific attitude to state affairs'. (Paulin. T., 1986, p. 18).

Each chapter of this study will incorporate some explanation of the political and historical conflicts and personal background against which Heaney writes, because in my view an understanding of the backgrounds which give rise to the writer's art is important, irrespective of whether one agrees with the conflicts or the writer's responses or not.

The thesis will demonstrate that from the outset of his career, Heaney has been anxiously concerned about the role and responsibility of the poet and about the proper function of poetry; this central concern is consistently apparent throughout his work. Heaney's perception of what poetry should be changes over time, from his early concern about nature and the 'unregarded data of the usual life' in the first phase of his career, to the middle phase of his career when he believed that poetry could accommodate the political and the transcendent, to the latest phase when he comes to a realisation about the limitations of poetry/poets, acknowledging that the transcendence poetry offers is never more than tentative. (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The* Tongue, 1988, p. 8). However, Heaney's early belief in poetry remains steadfast because poetry is still in its own way, efficacious. From nineteen-sixty-nine with the onset of the contemporary Troubles in Northern Ireland, Heaney fretted over the role of the poet in and towards such a crisis; what was the poet's responsibility to the political situation in Northern Ireland? He agonised also over the conflict between art and life, song and suffering, as he strove to find an inclusive discourse that would avoid political dogmatism, and with which he could address the suffocating political discourses of Northern Ireland and their attendant violence. Heaney reached a resolution about these issues in the mid nineteen-eighties. The poet's duty was to be artistically free and socially responsible and the function of poetry as he explains in *The Redress of Poetry*, was 'to be a source of truth and at the same time a vehicle of harmony'. (Heaney. S., *The Redress of Poetry*, 1995, p. 193). From that time onwards, Heaney's aim was to achieve this balance in his poetry and this study will demonstrate that he finally does so in his latest volume *The Spirit Level*.

The thesis will identify three phases to Heaney's career to date. Phase one covers the period from the mid nineteen-sixties to the late nineteen-sixties, in which he published his first two volumes, *Death of a Naturalist* in nineteen-sixty-six and *Door into the Dark*, in nineteen-sixty-nine. These volumes are discussed in chapter one of this study which will argue that it was during this time that Heaney came to political awareness and to a realisation that the topic of Northern Ireland was a suitable subject for his poetry. These volumes are mainly personal, concerned with the private sphere, and see Heaney following the demands of his own imagination as he addresses personal history and begins to address national history; serving his community by preserving its sense of the past. These volumes also see Heaney making an attempt to address the politics of the domestic in drawing attention to the unequal condition of women in Ireland. These volumes contain only a small number of poems which advert to the situation in Northern Ireland, with a noticeable increase in the influence of politics and history on Heaney in the second volume, as the poet tries to shed light on current affairs by piercing through the past finding connections to contemporary society. Here he experiences the tensions, to which all artists are susceptible, the tension between art and life which from the outset leads to a duality in Heaney.

While the period prior to the nineteen-sixty-nine Troubles was relatively free of violence in Northern Ireland, pressures were mounting ominously as the Catholic population, many of them newly empowered by the benefits of the 1947 Education Act began demanding justice, equal opportunities and an end to Unionist supremacy. Phase two of Heaney's career, however, which covers the period from the late nineteen-sixties to the mid nineteen-eighties, saw the outbreak and escalation of violence in Northern Ireland and witnessed horrific atrocities which were perpetrated by both sides in the struggle.

During this time, Heaney published three volumes of poetry, *Wintering Out*, in nineteen-seventy-two, *North* in nineteen-seventy-five and *Field Work* in nineteen-seventy-nine, which are discussed in chapters two, three and four of this thesis respectively. Chapter two will argue that the radical change that occurred in Northern Ireland from nineteen-sixty-nine as bloody conflict broke out, effected a change in Heaney and his poetic vision as he faced the 'brutality of the historical onslaught' (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. 107). Poetry is not independent of the society which engenders it and there is a clear parallel between the onset and escalation of the Troubles and the change in focus in Heaney's poetry onto the public sphere and that conflict, as his view about the

poet's role changes and as he is influenced by Dante and attempts to encompass the political and the transcendent in his work. Heaney explains his changed orientation in *Preoccupations*, writing that 'from that moment on 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' (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 56). Chapter two will further argue that throughout the bleak *Wintering Out* Heaney struggles to avoid the pressures of taking a side, this struggle heightens Heaney's sense of conflict about his own position as a poet and highlights his painfully divided self. Throughout *Wintering Out* Heaney searches for the space he needs to manage both political concerns and narrative integrity, and on the whole, he succeeds in transcending the confinement of the narrow political arena in this volume. Also in this volume Heaney again comments on the deplorable condition of Irish women and highlights how State and Church collude in their repression in a male dominated society, which views them as second class citizens.

Chapter three of this study will argue that Heaney is at his most vulnerable at this time, particularly in *North*, where the duality caused by the ever increasing indices of war in Northern Ireland is agonisingly apparent, and where the attempt to achieve a delicate balance between the poles of social responsibility and self-exploration wavers. In *North* Heaney concedes to the influences and pressures of Ireland. The poet's confusion, despair and mental duality are apparent throughout this volume, which ends with the bleak, despairing 'Exposure' in which Heaney questions his reasons for writing and asks 'how did I end up like this?' (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 66). Chapter three will also argue that Heaney mistook his ground in this volume, and Heaney himself later admitted that he had doubts about it. It was, however, a necessary book for the poet to write at this particular period, it clearly highlights his oscillation between the obligation to speak for his community and the wish to perfect his art, and in addition his guilt and unease about the passivity of the poetic role. *North* is Heaney's most sustained meditation on the Troubles, at the end of which he was unclear of his direction, both poetically and personally, and admitted that he wanted to open 'a door into the light' (Randall. J., 1979, p. 7).

Throughout this time, in addition to Heaney's own need to address the crisis in his work, there was also a general expectation among his tribe that he would 'say something' about the Troubles. They expected him to take a side, their side, and there was much public

criticism by reviewers and critics alike who accused him of failing or ignoring to take a stance. The poet came under further heavy and sustained criticism at this period because of his move to the Republic in nineteen-seventy-two with his family. This move was perceived by many as a betrayal of the Northern crisis and as an escape from the conflict. The study highlights, and Heaney's work illustrates, that no escape is possible from such atrocities and violence in one's society, irrespective of whether one is physically removed from it or not because it lives on in one's consciousness.

Chapter four of this study will highlight that throughout *Field Work*, the fundamental conflict between embracing his poetic responsibilities or accomplishing his tribal duty of political commitment continues to torment Heaney. *Field Work*, however, is more balanced than *North*, there is a shift of focus here as he tries to follow his imagination and transcend the political responsibilities being imposed on him. Heaney here comes to a realisation that Art and Life co-exist and that song is most needed in times of suffering. Heaney does not quite achieve his 'door into the light' in *Field Work*, but he does manage to subtly move the balance away from the tribal to the poetic. He learns to trust in art's ability to confront conflicts between freedom and responsibility, although he continues to berate himself for a perceived evasion of commitment and failure to have an impact on the Northern situation.

Phase three of Heaney's career covers the period from the mid nineteen-eighties to the present time. During this period Heaney published *Station Island* in nineteen-eighty-four, *The Haw Lantern* in nineteen-eighty-seven, *Seeing Things* in nineteen-ninety-one, and *The Spirit Level* in nineteen-ninety-six. Chapters five and six of this thesis will discuss *Station Island* and *The Haw Lantern* respectively, while chapter seven will examine *Seeing Things* and *The Sprit Level.* This same period was characterised in Northern Ireland by sustained attempts by various individuals and groups to find an alternative to violence. Both tribes had become disillusioned by and saturated with the horrors of war and wanted to move away from the stalemate of sectarian atrocities towards inclusive peace.

Chapter five will argue that the 'Station Island' sequence continues the shift away from *North* that began in *Field Work*. This sequence is far more sceptical and searching than Heaney's work to that date and sees the poet critically questioning, re-examining and re-appraising his religious inheritance in particular and in addition his political, social, poetic

and cultural inheritance and the ideologies of his community. He is disillusioned with and critical of the dogmatic faith and unexamined habit of the Irish Church, of the drugged obedience and hollow conformity of the Irish tribe to Irish Roman Catholicism, and critical of the violence in his society. In the 'Station Island' sequence, Heaney reaches a sort of resolution, but not quite a destination He accepts that he must now transcend the Irish pressures, because these 'trolls' threaten his integrity as a writer. The conflict within Heaney's psyche is very evident and the pull of conventional piety still strong. Although it is unclear from the sequence whether Heaney will renounce or renew his faith, chapter five suggests the former in view of the poet's disillusionment with and scepticism towards the Irish Church. He will no longer submit blindly to the authority of a fallible Church which colludes in the subjugation of its people. The sequence closes with hope for, and the possibility of, freedom, renewed growth and inspiration if the poet can achieve a distancing from the Irish pressures. It was during this period that Heaney's perception about the role of poetry/poets changed again with his realisation that poetry has limitations. Heaney explains this new understanding in *The Government Of The Tongue*, 'here is the great paradox of poetry and the imaginative arts in general. Faced with the brutality of the historical onslaught, they are practically useless. Yet they verify our singularity, they strike and stake out the ore of the self which lies at the base of every individuated life. In one sense the efficacy of poetry is nil – no lyric has ever stopped a tank. In another sense, it is unlimited. It is like the writing in the sand in the face of which accusers and accused are left speechless and renewed.' (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. 107).

Chapter six will argue that *The Haw Lantern* is Heaney's artistic response to Joyce's challenge at the end of the 'Station Island' sequence, to 'strike' his own 'note'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 93). The private dominates this volume with a small number of poems adverting to Northern Ireland. There is a large movement towards the imaginative path in this volume, as Heaney concentrates mainly on the 'other things' of poetry. Heaney uses the ethical discourse of parable in this volume which allows him a space in which to have second thoughts about Ireland as he continues to critically assess the dualities and divisions of his society and of himself. His disillusionment and frustration with his tribe and with Ireland is apparent and he achieves a degree of objectivity and distance in this volume that has not been present before. This chapter will also argue that Heaney, in *The Haw Lantern* concentrates less on the actual issues of his own native territory that have occupied him up to now, and instead considers Northern

Ireland in the context of other areas of conflict in the world, thus broadening his political canvas. The influence of the Eastern European poets, Herbert, Holub and Milosz, is visible here and the effect of this is to make Heaney's poetry more abstract, thus broadening his artistic canvas. The thesis will argue that in *The Haw Lantern*, Heaney's interrogative register is attenuated, and from this volume on the questioning, self-reflection and guilt are less intense than in previous volumes. Heaney begins to achieve both artistic freedom and social responsibility in this volume as he continues to transcend the nets of Ireland and refuses to obscure truth or to indulge in 'papmongering' or propaganda.

Chapter seven will argue that in *Seeing Things* the poet achieves artistic freedom but loses sight of the actual. This volume is very different from anything Heaney has produced before or since. It seems to take flight from 'the usual life' entirely and concentrates solely on the marvellous of the visionary, and the private/personal sphere, and makes a point of ignoring the larger political and social issues, although Heaney himself had commented in nineteen-eighty-eight that 'poetry is like a break from the usual life, not an absconding from it'. (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. 108). Chapter seven will argue that Heaney was uneasy about not achieving the sought after balance between lyric freedom and social responsibility in this volume, and about ignoring the immediate political, historical and social world. Chapter seven will also argue that *The Spirit Level*, Heaney's latest volume, sees the poet returning emphatically to earth and to the topic of Northern Ireland. Heaney learned from the experience of *Seeing Things* that too great an embrace of the visionary can diminish the actual, just as too intense an entanglement with the actual can threaten to destroy the visionary. The visionary and the actual are, of necessity, inter-dependent, the poet achieves this balance in *The Spirit Level*, which is both artistically free and socially responsible, as he moves beyond the pressures of Ireland. In his latest volume, Heaney discovers his 'field of force' which encompasses the historic importance of the actual events of nineteen-nineties Ireland and which at the same time is faithful to 'the processes and experience of poetry' in being open to the possibility of perfected vision, in which the irreconcilables in Northern Ireland are finally, it would seem, about to be reconciled. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 56).

The conclusion of the thesis will demonstrate that Heaney and his poetry are profoundly effected by the pressures of Ireland. His view about the role and responsibility of the poet

and the function of poetry in and towards political crisis changes throughout the three phases of his career, as the Irish pressures impinge on him and force him to address them in his work. Finally, in his latest work, Heaney escapes the pressures of his native territory, where he has felt trapped between extremes, by transcending those pressures. He produces a poetry that is responsible to his society, to the immediate political, religious and social world, and which is at the same time 'sensitive to the inner laws of the poet's being'. (Heaney. S., *Crediting Poetry*, 1995, p. 16).

CHAPTER ONE

THE GESTATION OF A CONSCIOUSNESS

IN

DEATH OF A NATURALIST AND *DOOR INTO THE DARK*

'All a poet can do today is warn.
That is why true Poets must be truthful...'.

Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. XIV

INTRODUCTION

Chapter one of this thesis will focus on Heaney's first two volumes, *Death of a Naturalist* which was published in nineteen-sixty-six, and *Door into the Dark* which was published in nineteen-sixty-nine. Both of these volumes emphasise the private / personal sphere of life rather than the public sphere and contain but a small number of poems which advert to Northern Ireland, although the influence of history and politics on Heaney increases in *Door into the Dark* as political tension heightens in the North. For the purpose of this study, chapter one will concentrate on the public poems of these volumes, which were written prior to the outbreak of the nineteen-sixty-nine Troubles; when Northern Ireland was still relatively free of overt violence, although rank discrimination against Catholics was rife and justice and truth were generally absent from that society. Both of these early volumes see Heaney's first foray into his national past as he examines aspects of his historical, colonial, political, religious and social heritage with its attendant violence and sectarianism. These volumes also see Heaney begin to explore elements of the politics of the domestic, as he considers the unequal condition of women in Irish society, a theme which will be carried on into his next volume, *Wintering Out*. In these volumes Heaney digs back into his own and Ireland's past in an effort to understand and shed light on the contemporary situation in Northern Ireland, these investigations serve his Catholic Nationalist community by preserving their sense of the past.

My argument in this chapter is that Heaney's political and artistic consciousness gestated in this first phase of his career from nineteen-sixty-six to nineteen-sixty-nine, as he investigated his Irish heritage; and as his own Catholic tribe in Northern Ireland, newly empowered by the benefits of the 1947 Education Act, began agitating peacefully for freedom, justice and equal opportunities.

The result of Heaney's explorations was to raise his political awareness and simultaneously make him aware that such subjects were cogent topics for his verse. These investigations revealed that something was rotten in the State of Ireland, and they would force Heaney to confront the tension between Art and Life / politics, and would lead to painful dualities within the poet. From the outset of his career, Heaney has been concerned about what the role and responsibility of the poet should be and about the proper function of poetry. He was anxious not to exploit the situation in Northern Ireland in the name of Art, and was aware that the poet must take responsibility for what he or

she writes. One of his major concerns was and is that poetry should be ethical. Heaney admires the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam whom he praises in *The Government Of The Tongue* for; 'singing in the Stalinist night, affirming the essential humanism of the act of poetry itself against inhuman tyranny which would have had him write odes not just to Stalin but to hydro-electric dams'. (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. xix). Heaney was influenced by Mandelstam who sacrificed his life in the interest of truth, believing that the poet must never be in thrall to any Government, party or programme, but 'truly and freely and utterly himself'. (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue,* 1988, p. xix). For Heaney, poetry is 'secret and natural' even though it must operate in a world that is 'public and brutal'. (Heaney, S., *Preoccupations,* 1980, p.34). Almost from the start of his career he has found himself caught in the sectarian crossfire, with fellow Catholics pressing him to write political verse and liberal critics urging him not to take a side. In this early period of his career, Heaney believed that poets should concern themselves with the 'unregarded data of the usual life' and that the function of poetry should be to 'achieve the satisfactory verbal icon'. (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue,* 1988, p. 8). (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations,* 1980, p. 56). Heaney's first two volumes, as he embarks on his artistic and moral journey are, in the main, free of the agonising conundrums which will characterise his later work.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY BACKGROUND

Heaney makes the historical conflict between Ireland and England one of his major themes. Ireland is England's oldest colony and from earliest times was a rich source of plunder for English Kings and nobles. Although Ireland was often invaded, it wasn't finally conquered by England until the sixteenth century. The method of conquest was to plant English and Scottish people in Ireland, and to grant them special privileges and rights over the land and native people there. The English and Scottish planters were Protestants, while the native people of Ireland were Catholics. The first problem faced by the invaders was the transfer of land from the Catholics to the Protestants. The most effective way to do this was to kill Catholics. To support three centuries of land seizure, terror and enforced famine, 'the British devised the theory that the Irish were an inferior people'. (Curtis. L., 1996, p. 23). Heaney resents England's oppression of Ireland, that oppression takes many forms, from military victories to very successful efforts to

suppress Irish schools, and all traces of the Irish language, in today's phraseology, an ethnic cleansing.

By the seventeen-nineties the Penal Laws which denied Catholics the vote, education, ownership and the opportunity to enter the professions, had been largely repealed. However, in the state of Northern Ireland in the nineteen-sixties, their spirit was alive and well. If some of the economic and social discrimination against Catholics can be explained away as the historical consequence of their having been for many years a poor and exploited section of the population, this is no argument for condoning or for continuing the exploitation. Nor is it any justification for the other kinds of discrimination that have arisen directly from the siege mentality of the majority, from their fierce determination that is, to maintain their Protestant and Unionist faith and institutions against all comers.

Heaney, though not political by nature, could not but recognise how the contemptuous attitudes of the Protestant Parliament of Dublin in the early eighteenth century survived and thrived in the Stormont ruled over by Lord Brookeborough for most of Heaney's lifetime. There was rank discrimination in the political sphere, by means of gerrymandering and the disenfranchisement of Catholics, and in jobs and housing. In the years which preceded the publication of Heaney's first volume, there was little change and less progress in the political sphere in Northern Ireland. Lord Brookeborough's twenty year reign as Prime Minister ended in nineteen-sixty-three and Captain Terence O'Neill replaced him. O'Neill initially set himself not only to divert domestic energies away from internecine quarrels and towards constructive policies, but also 'to cultivate more amicable relations with the South'. (Beckett. J., 1975, p. 90). A new departure dramatised by his exchange of visits with Mr. Sean Lemass, the Irish Prime Minister, in nineteen-sixty-five. This style of Government did not mean that O'Neill had ceased to be a Unionist, and it emphatically did not imply any weakening of official determination to maintain the sanctity and integrity of the border. However, precisely because his regime had broken, or, more accurately was perceived to have broken, so radically with tradition, it re-ignited the deeply felt fears and antagonisms of old-style Unionism. This period also saw the rise of the Reverend Ian Paisley and his extremist 'Church Militant' movement. Paisley loudly warned his fellow citizens against the perils of Popery and the dangers of tampering with entrenched Protestant and Unionist positions. Paisley and his supporters did much to exacerbate the political situation in the North of Ireland in the late nineteen-

sixties. Many argue that he set 'the political and religious question back forty years'. (Lee. J. J., 1989, p. 426). Paisley is an exact and enduring symbol of the siege mentality, outwardly aggressive, but masking a deep sense of insecurity, which has distinguished the northern Protestant for most of his or her history.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

While the political sphere was stagnant, the cultural life of the province flourished in the nineteen-sixties, with a creative coming together of Catholic and Protestant. Much of the credit for this can be attributed to Philip Hobsbaum, a lecturer who had joined the English Department at Queen's University, Belfast. Hobsbaum was to become an immensely important figure in Heaney's development as a poet, acting as a literary 'father', as well as being a loyal and generous friend. Heaney describes Hobsbaum as 'one of the strongest agents of change' in a previously discouraging literary atmosphere. (Corcoran. N., 1986, p. 22). Hobsbaum arrived in Belfast in July nineteen-sixty-two, and his prophetic comment on arrival was that 'there was a rumble in the air'. (Parker. M., 'Interview with Philip Hobsbaum', 1986). Hobsbaum felt that Northern Ireland would explode sooner or later. Hobsbaum nurtured creative talent, he acted as a catalyst, bringing together from outside as well as within the University an outstanding gathering of talent. Between November nineteen-sixty-three and July nineteen-sixty-six, Hobsbaum supplied an exciting and controversial environment in which writers, critics and translators from very different backgrounds could meet together, test their work, and find confirmation, and consolation in the friendships formed. Heaney describes his time with the 'Group' as 'one of the most sociable and satisfying that I have experienced'. (Heaney. S., 'The Belfast Group: A Symposium', 1976, p. 63). The 'Group' provided neutral ground in which friendships and healthy rivalries developed across the sectarian divide. Centuries of distrust and years of separate development in segregated schools and divided villages could be temporarily forgotten as the individuals in the 'Group' fought over aesthetic issues. The 'Group' was also part of a larger movement among Northern Irish intellectuals in the nineteen-sixties towards the rehabilitation of Ulster's cultural traditions, there was a renewed interest in the preservation and definition of a disappearing culture. Heaney writes in *Preoccupations* 'what Hobsbaum achieved, whether people like it or not, was to give a generation a sense of themselves, in two ways: it allowed us to get to grips with one another within the group, to move from critical

comment to creative friendship at our own pace, and it allowed a small public to think of us as 'The Group', a single, even singular phenomenon'.(Heaney. S., *Preoccupations,* 1980, p. 29). It was against this background, on the one hand, of ignorant and ugly bigotry, a 'bigotry that had dumbed the life of the community for years', and on the other hand of a creative coming together, that Heaney wrote his first volume *Death of a Naturalist.* (Heaney. S., 'Out of London: Ulster's Troubles', 1966, p. 23).

DEATH OF A NATURALIST

In digging back into the past, Heaney uncovers layers of discrimination, fear and dejection. In 'The Early Purges', the Stalinist and Nazi associations of the title word 'purges' alert one to a political dimension in the poem. Heaney contrasts the bewilderment and terror of childhood with adult knowledge and 'sophistication'. The poem begins dramatically with the kill.

> 'I was six when I first saw kittens drown.
> Dan Taggart pitched them, "the scraggy wee shits",
> Into a bucket; a frail metal sound...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist,* 1966, p. 11).

This is the brutal reality of farm life, where superfluous animals are disposed of, cruelly and without sentiment. Here the primitive hostility of the world faces one across the millennia. The violence is justified by the Dan Taggarts who perpetuate it because, they argue that it is 'better for' their victims. Heaney senses that what has happened is wrong, he feels frightened but he remains silent. The mediation between speech and silence has been highlighted by Blake Morrison as a major theme in Heaney's work. Heaney is a farmer's son and grew up with a farmer's distrust of words. Taciturnity is a mark of proficiency amongst this community. 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing', was the folk wisdom Heaney's mother passed onto him. (Heaney. S., *North,* 1975,p. 51). In addition for a Catholic boy in Ulster there were practical reasons for keeping quiet. The outcome of this poem is disturbing and questionable. Legitimate 'liberal' sensibilities are affronted by Heaney's 'practical' countryman's conclusion.

'Still, living displaces false sentiments
And now, when shrill pups are prodded to drown,
I just shrug, "Bloody pups". It makes sense:..'

(Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist,* 1966, p. 11).

Heaney appears to be collaborating in the cruelty by dismissing the sentiments as false, instead of refuting the argument in support of 'justifiable violence'.

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

(Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist,* 1966, p. 11).

The sentiments of this final flat line are worthy of Beria or Himmler, but also of the British attitude to Irish Catholics. Michael Parker argues that the 'young and relatively unpolitical Heaney of this time did not consider sufficiently the freight borne by some of his images'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 67). I would argue, however, that one cannot be born and bred in Ireland without being 'political'. 'Politics is the staple diet of all Irish people'. (Breen. R., *et al.*, 1990, p. 26). The images in this poem remind one of the fate of thousands of Irish Catholics, over the centuries. There are parallels between the fate of the kittens on the 'well-run' farm and the fate of Irish Catholics in Britain's well-run province.

That objectionable final line brings to mind the words of Sir Arthur Chichester, who was Governor of Carrickfergus in fifteen-ninety-nine. Chichester summed up the 'civilising mission' of his first expedition into the hinterland as follows: 'I burned all along the lough within four miles of Dungannon and killed one hundred Catholics, sparing none of what quality, age or sex so ever, besides many being burnt to death. We kill man, woman and child, horse, beast and whatsoever we find'. (Foot. P., 1989, p. 4). I believe that Heaney was aware of the 'freight borne by his images', what he was not aware of, when writing in the mid nineteen-sixties, was the kind of political and human material which would before long challenge his imaginative digging. Any poet worth his salt in Ireland has inevitably at some juncture, and among whatever other preoccupations to define him or

herself in his or her writing in relation to inexorable co-ordinates of national and cultural history. 'The Early Purges' is an example of the type of utterance made by Ulster Loyalists in parabolic justification of the extirpation of the Catholics of Heaney's own tribal side from a well-run province. Heaney is neither justifying nor condemning the violence in this poem, he is merely stating it as it is, and as it has been for centuries. Violence is an everyday occurrence in the North of Ireland. People are exposed to it from an early age, they constantly hear the perpetrators from each side attempt to justify this violence. They are frightened and saddened by it but they become accustomed to it, they accept it. Outsiders may express 'civilized outrage' but it does not change the reality of the situation in the province. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 31). Heaney's meticulous observations are here in this poem together with his intimate truthfulness. What is also here is the divided self, the tension between the poet as poet and the poet as a human being like other human beings.

'Dawn Shoot' is a poem full of violence and macho imagery. At one level it can be read as describing Heaney's own first killing at a snipe hunt, the cruelty which he observed or participated in. He records no feelings when Donnelly 'emptied two barrels / And got him'. (Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist*, 1966, p. 17). The war imagery however alerts one to another dimension in this poem, a sectarian dimension. 'Dawn Shoot' boasts a 'bull's-eye', a corncrake who 'challenged' like a 'hoarse sentry'. A snipe which 'rocketed away on reconnaissance', hunters who were 'rubber-booted, belted, tense as two parachutists'. They had the 'holes under cover', the cock 'sounded reveille'. (Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist*, 1966, pp. 16 – 17). The figures in this poem are menacing and the imagery calls to mind the brutal and senseless killings by the paramilitaries in Northern Ireland, from both sides of the divide. The IRA and Loyalist 'snipers' who come out at night 'to coldly hunt down and kill' their innocent prey. (Gearty. C., 1997, p. 42).

Tony Curtis writes that he suspects that this poem was written 'earlier than the return-to-childhood poems' with which the book opens. (Curtis. T., 1982, p. 21). If this is indeed the case, the writing of the poem may well have coincided with the earlier IRA campaign of nineteen-fifty-six to nineteen-sixty-two. It was during that period that Heaney himself locates his coming to political consciousness. Heaney, along with the whole Catholic community became infuriated by the activities of the 'B' Specials, during that period, when they exploited every opportunity afforded to them to remind the Catholic minority

where power lay. Critics have argued that this is political poetry, but Heaney is not political in any doctrinaire sense here. This is a good example of the development of the general historical and political awareness that Paulin sees as comprising the vast territories of political poetry.

The poem 'At a Potato Digging' is a bleak evocation of a tragic history which penetrates the present. Here Heaney examines historical faults and wounds and stumbles upon mines left over from previous conflicts. This poem is about the Great Famine of eighteen-forty-five to eighteen-forty-nine, which opened an abyss that swallowed up over a million impoverished Irish people. This famine has been seen as a watershed in Irish history, creating new conditions of demographic decline, large scale emigration, altered farming structures and new economic policies, and in addition an institutionalised Anglophobia among the Irish at home and abroad.

By the eighteen-forties, the potato was a dietary staple in Ireland. From the 'autumn of eighteen-forty-five a fungus disease struck the Irish potato, operating with cruel rapidity and unpredictability in moist, mild conditions', and reducing the crop to rottenness. (Woodham-Smith. C., 1962, p. 35). The situation was exacerbated by the greed and callousness of absentee British landlords, supported by their Irish agents. The responses of the British Government were inept and inadequate. Famine, however, was an extremely useful way of keeping the natives in order, especially in the nineteenth century. Sir Arthur Chichester had warned, with characteristic sensitivity in sixteen-hundred: 'It is famine and not the sword that must reduce this country to what is expected'. (Foster. R.F., 1989, p. 70). The eighteen-forty-five to eighteen-forty-nine famine certainly delivered what was 'expected', it brought the Irish nation to its knees, and left the Irish psyche permanently scarred. 'Centuries / Of fear and homage to the famine god / Toughen the muscles behind their humbled knees'. (Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist*, 1966 p. 18). Heaney vividly recreates the savagery of the famine.

> 'Live skulls, blind-eyed, balanced on
> wild higgledy skeletons,
> scoured the land in 'forty-five,
> wolfed the blighted root and died'.

The images are like medieval emblems. The reader is struck by the pathos and bitter recall of the 'live skulls' starving to death, desperately scouring the land.

'Mouths tightened in, eyes died hard,
faces chilled to a plucked bird.
In a million wicker huts,
beaks of famine snipped at guts.

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

(Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist*, 1966, 1991 edn., pp. 19 - 20).

Historical memory breaks through, the phrases suggestive of the concentration camps and their victims, and the stark prints of Ireland's famine dead. These memorable, terrible lines recall the horrors of Irish history. Ireland has been marked visibly by its history, the wasting of the country by colonial exploitation and restriction still governs the condition of Ireland. In the years after the famine, Gaelic language and folk customs fell into disuse and decline and, 'the once proverbial gaiety and light-heartedness of the peasant people seemed to have vanished completely'. (Evans. E., 1957, p. 259). Little wonder Heaney comments that wherever 'potato diggers are / you still smell the running sore'. (Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist*, 1966, p. 20). This poem embraces the past in the present. Heaney commented that if Kavanagh's poem 'The Great Hunger' did not exist, 'a greater hunger would; the hunger of a culture for its own image and expression'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 126). Heaney, in this poem, is serving his community by preserving its sense of the past. Many, including the historian Edward Norman, have argued that the Irish are 'obsessed' with their history. (Norman. E., 1971, p. 8). Ireland's history is the heritage of all of the Irish people and terrible though it is, it reinforces a sense of national identity which is especially important for a people who have suffered ethnic cleansing. Heaney's truth telling stands in creative contrast to stereotypical judgements that so distort modern perceptions of the Irish and of the Troubles.

If the lessons of the past are learnt they need not be repeated in the future. While many nationalists have used Irish history to focus attention only on the negative aspects of that history, Heaney, though from a Catholic Nationalist background, does not use his art as a political weapon. He is attempting to heal the wounds of previous conflicts by literary devices. This poem has its own power of evoking history and connecting it with the present day, it suggests broader social and cultural themes. Heaney is trying to associate past and present and give historical suffering and dispossession a contemporary application. He is exploring the hidden Ulster. This poem is redolent not just of his personal life and observation but of the history of his people, disinherited and dispossessed. He probes the psychic roots of his community to discover an identity bound to immolation and propitiation.

The companion piece to 'At a Potato Digging' is 'For the Commander of the *Eliza*', which also recalls the famine of eighteen-forty-five. This poem tries to articulate what lies behind the 'sectarian problems' of the present day. Heaney is looking at the whole substance of Ireland here. The pressures of a deforming history have always constrained Irish poets to move from the personal towards larger issues, the issue in this poem is British Government policy. At least part of the analysis of the eighteen-forty-five famine must concern itself with Government policy. The British Government co-ordinated relief measures through public works and price control. Within both the British Government and the Treasury, humanitarian impulses came up against a violent disapproval of subsidised improvement schemes. There was also an attitude, often concealed, that Irish fecklessness and lack of economy were bringing a retribution that would work out for the best in the end. Robert Peel, Prime Minister for the second time, from eighteen-forty-one to eighteen-forty-six, was prudent in the distribution of patronage and vigorous in all aspects of his work. Under Peel's dispensation, food depots were set up and prices kept down by the distribution of Indian meal. However, obsessive contemporary theories about keeping private traders in business and only distributing food to the unemployable interfered with the system's effectiveness. So in a sense, did the Board of Works that oversaw everything. Its public works schemes were doggedly adhered to amid conditions whose severity made such expedients irrelevant. 'The famine roads' are poignant metaphors for a policy that was neither consistent nor effective, but which expressed beliefs held by the governing classes in both countries. The Government by and large adhered to their belief that 'private enterprise should provide the bulk of the food supply,

hardly anyone supported the idea that the Government itself should enter the market'. (Lyons. F.S.L., 1973, p. 19).

Heaney empathetically recreates a character who was involved in a crucial Irish historical event. The humane but hopeless decency of the commander who speaks in this poem, is brought home to us in the following lines:

> '... O my sweet Christ,
> We saw piled in the bottom of their craft
> Six grown men with gaping mouths and eyes
> Bursting the sockets like spring onions in drills.
> Six wrecks of bone and pallid, tautened skin...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist,* 1966, p. 21).

These lines carry with them an ineradicable memory of what it is to be literally starving to death. The living dead call out in Gaelic to the commander for food. 'Bia, bia, bia'. The English naval officer is sensitive to the group of desperate, starving natives but he refused to help them because he 'had no mandate to relieve distress'. (Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist,* 1966, p. 21). The officer's sympathy is mingled with his dutiful matter-of-factness and his self-concern, 'Less incidents the better'. (Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist,* 1966, p. 21). There is some validity in Edna Longley's view that the haunting images and figures here hint at 'something rotten in the state'. (Longley. E., 1986, p. 42). The officer was obliged by orders to withhold food from the starving men. However, obviously distressed by the incident, he reports all to the Inspector General.

> 'Sir James, I understand, urged free relief
> For famine victims in the Westport Sector
> And earned tart reprimand from good Whitehall.
> Let natives prosper by their own exertions;
> Who could not swim might go ahead and sink...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist,* 1966, p. 22).

This sentiment stands in stark contrast to any idea of social welfare, the emphasis is on self-reliance and enterprise. 'For the Commander of the *Eliza*', is specific to its compassionate moment in June eighteen-forty-six, yet it invites us to infer its wider circumstances in statecraft and politics. Heaney must have been aware that the final lines of this poem also reflected the pre-nineteen-sixty-eight Whitehall and Westminster response to Catholic cries of injustice, over one hundred years later policy was little changed, history was repeating itself yet again.

'Docker' addresses itself to the sectarian present. When interviewed in nineteen-seventy-seven by Seamus Deane, Heaney commented that 'Docker' was a 'very inept sort of poem but my first attempts to speak, to make verse, faced with the Northern sectarian problem'. (Deane. S., 1977, p. 61). Urban Protestantism in the shape of the docker clearly posed a physical threat to Catholics. This poem depicts a Protestant bigot, his obtuseness, inarticulate rage, and warped Calvinism are etched in the imagery of his only real religion, work. To understand this poem one needs to look back at least to the making of the state of Northern Ireland, which was accompanied by what the *London Daily News* described as 'five weeks of ruthless persecution by boycott, fire, plunder and assault, culminating in a week's wholesale violence probably unmatched outside the area of Russian or Polish pogroms'. (Foot. P., 1989, p. 22). Almost all the Catholics who worked in Belfast shipyards and engineering works, together with some fair-minded Protestants who were good enough trade unionists to defend them, were driven by force out of their jobs, never to return. This violence was supported by the British Government, and by the new Northern Ireland Prime Minister, who made speeches supporting the actions of Protestant workers in clearing Catholics out of workplaces. In the civil service, whose alleged impartiality is the hallmark of Parliamentary democracies elsewhere, the appointments were made strictly from religious bias. The Prime Minister, who was later made Lord Craigavon, set his own example. In a speech in nineteen-thirty-four he said: 'The appointments made by the Government are made as far as we can possibly manage it, of loyal men and women ...' (Lyons. F.S.L., 1973, p. 424). In the Orange vocabulary, loyal means Protestant. In other countries founded on bigotry and discrimination, the ban had hardly extended this far. Even in racialist South Africa it was considered reasonable for white people to employ black people in their houses. Nowhere in the world was bigotry taken quite to such extravagant lengths as it was in Northern Ireland.

'Docker' opens appropriately with dockland metaphors, 'a gantry's crossbeam', 'cowling', 'sledgehead', 'vice', 'rivets', the man personifies menace and prejudice, and his only language is violence.

> 'That fist would drop a hammer on a Catholic...
>
> Tonight the wife and children will be quiet
> At slammed door and smoker's cough in the hall'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist*, 1966, p. 28).

The moral vacuum of intolerance and hate turns in upon himself and his family. The most chilling line of the poem 'oh yes, that kind of thing could start again', makes it tempting to see 'Docker' as prophetic, because the Troubles did start again, three years later. Heaney has been much criticised for this poem. Thomas C. Foster accuses him of being 'inflammatory'. (Foster. T.C., 1989, p. 6). However, it needs to be remembered that here was a young and inexperienced Heaney making one of his first attempts at taking on a more public voice, and at addressing the sectarian cesspit in Northern Ireland in a society where truth and justice were not generally at work. Heaney accuses himself of being a 'slightly aggravated young Catholic male'. (Deane. S., 1977, p. 61). The docker is not a man but a symbol, of Protestantism and Orangeism. The year Heaney wrote this poem was the same year the Reverend Ian Paisley came to prominence. Paisley very publicly, crudely and loudly made his protestations about the Union Jack being lowered at Belfast City Hall as a mark of respect for the death of Pope John XXIII. Paisley, at all costs, wanted to keep Northern Ireland Protestant, there was to be no tolerance shown to Catholics. This poem is an attempt by the young Heaney to deal with the ugliness of bigotry. If the voice of his wounded sensibilities is heard here, it is silenced in his future work. Never again does he attempt this kind of direct confrontation. From now on, Heaney attempts to define and interpret the present by bringing it into significant relationship with the past. My own feeling is that Heaney, even in this embryonic stage, attempts to balance his view of the Troubles in his poetry, seeing both sides as victims of a situation not of their making. The Protestant worker in 'Docker' is just as obviously a victim of the system as the Catholics are.

'Poor Women in a City Church', the poem which follows 'Docker', appears on first glance to be a sympathetic, indeed sentimental, response to the women's devotion, but a closer reading precludes this impression. Heaney has complex and ambivalent attitudes towards Catholicism and Christianity. Despite his Catholic background one does not find in Heaney, what he himself refers to as 'simple faith'. While he may envy the 'simple faith' of these women, he cannot share their belief in eternal life. Throughout his poetry, one finds at most the desire for faith, rather than actual faith. This point will be developed further in chapter five on *Station Island.* When Heaney observes human life he offers no Christian salvation to give meaning to the brutality of life. There is a stark contrast in this poem between the wealth of the Roman Catholic Church and the poverty of its faithful flock. The Church contains 'bright / Asterisks on brass candlesticks', and 'Golden shrines, altar lace, / Marble columns ...', while the faithful are described as 'Old dough-faced women with black shawls'. (Heaney. S., *Death of a Naturalist,* 1966, p. 29). This description of Irish women fits that of thousands of urban and rural poor. These Catholic women are counterparts of the docker. They too are victims, of poverty and of a patriarchal, hierarchical, repressive Church, 'that did little if anything to alleviate distress, suffering, poverty, class divisions and deprivation'. (O'Toole. F., 1997, p. 72). The ideological effects of religion, according to Marx and Engels, are that it functions as a source of solace and compensation for the deprived and exploited, but for those who do the exploiting or benefit from such relations it serves the function of helping to maintain their social control. The Church as an institution in the North of Ireland failed to provide the social and political leadership the Catholic community needed and deserved, and in a sense, had collaborated with the Unionists' repression. This failure by the Church had far-reaching effects, as a result of which many Catholics, in the late nineteen-sixties, and early nineteen-seventies, turned regrettably, to the Provisional IRA to assert their sense of racial and religious identity.

Heaney's work recalls the full range of life and death in his native land. 'Even within his first volume he has begun to develop his own ways of saying, established his own patterns of perception'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 62). This first volume is mainly concerned with the familial and parochial past, with the occasional sortie into the national past. From the start, however, it is clear that Heaney is aware of the 'fall out' of his words, he believes in taking responsibility for the effect of his work. He also believes in 'dealing somehow with truth and justice'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 68). Established in this volume are

the poles of social responsibility and of self exploration, it is between these two poles that all of Heaney's subsequent work will oscillate.

INTRODUCTION TO *DOOR INTO THE DARK*

Heaney's second volume *Door into the Dark* registers an enlarging of his poetic focus and scope. It illustrates his increasing concern with Irish history, geography and archaeology and with the divided Ireland. Home now means something more than his childhood home in Mossbawn. Heaney, in this volume, seeks to articulate the identity of the whole of Ireland, and not merely his own. In this volume politics exerts more of an influence over the poet. Heaney becomes increasingly aware also of the intellectual, emotional and spiritual 'straight jacket' that is Irish Roman Catholicism. Heaney, in this volume, continues to try to shed light on current affairs by piercing through the past, finding connections to modern society.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY BACKGROUND

Heaney wrote this volume against the background of increasing unrest and rising tension in Northern Ireland. The rigid policy of discrimination and oppression of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, had to be carried out by force. It started with the violence of the street gang and the riot, but very quickly the Northern Ireland State voted itself powers to enforce its bigotry with its own 'law and order'. The Royal Ulster Constabulary was almost exclusively Protestant, although admittedly there were some efforts from the earliest days to make the force non-political and inter-denominational. To help the RUC enforce law and order against the 'lawless minority' there was the armed special constabulary, the 'B' Specials, no-one could be a 'B' Special who was not a Protestant. The 'B' Specials was made up of ten thousand men fully prepared for warfare. Heaney comments 'a lot of fellows I knew during the day were out at night as Specials, manning road blocks, and pretending they didn't know my name. I know that if I have been an equally innocent Protestant I would have been allowed to pass without any bother'. (Bell. B., 1971, p. 14). What remained of civil liberties, and there was very little, could be overturned at a stroke by invoking the Special Powers Act which was first passed, very rapidly, through the Northern Ireland Parliament in nineteen-twenty-two.

One member remarked at the time that the Bill, really only needed to have one clause; 'The Home Secretary shall have powers to do what he likes, or else let somebody else do what he likes for him'. (Harkness. D., 1996, p. 52). The regulations to which the Act opened the way covered a wide arena, it gave the Government the right to impose curfews, to ban marches or demonstrations, and to intern without trial. In the North of Ireland there were therefore hundreds of thousands of people who were unrepresented in Parliament or in the Council, who were discriminated against in jobs, in education, in housing and in social services. Discrimination infected every nook and cranny of the six counties. If the Catholics protested against any of these measures, or if they organised themselves in opposition, they were confronted by a 'law and order' dressed up in the uniform of oppression and bigotry. These prejudices and discrimination survived the passing of the Race Relations Act in Britain in nineteen-sixty-five and have continued to the present day.

For almost all the life of the Northern Parliament, the half million beleaguered Catholic people of Northern Ireland had been cowed into submission. However, the slow fuse which had been burning away in Northern Ireland for four decades finally ignited. The forgotten minority of Northern Ireland battered its way to the attention of the British Government, the British people and the outside world in the late nineteen-sixties. The ignition came from an unexpected source. In January nineteen-sixty-four the Campaign for Social Justice, was set up as a middle-class pressure group, which collated and publicised information about cases of discrimination in Northern Ireland. This body, though itself non-political in origin and intention, speedily established contacts with critics of the Unionist regime inside and outside Ulster. In nineteen-sixty-five, it affiliated with the National Council of Civil Liberties in London, and it may be regarded as the forerunner of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association which was formed two years later in nineteen-sixty-seven. It was not, however, until the summer of nineteen-sixty-nine that the latter organisation found its opportunity and its role. The dam burst in October nineteen-sixty-eight, when the Civil Rights Association staged a protest march in Derry. This is when the violence began, most notably on the part of the police, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, as well as the 'B' Specials. A percussion of violence was set off by the ambush of marchers by Paisleyites at Burntollet Bridge in January nineteen-sixty-nine, culminating in the 'Battle of the Bogside' in August, and the subsequent onslaught by Protestant mobs and the 'B' Specials on Catholic areas of Belfast. British troops were already being used in aid of civil power, they were now fully committed. The Belfast

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violence left ten dead and one thousand, six hundred injured and property damage of eight million pounds. Suddenly the true nature of the police state in Northern Ireland was exposed to the world.

Following the October nineteen-sixty-eight march and violence, Heaney voiced his anger in an article for *The Listener* which reflected the sentiments of the entire Catholic community in the North. 'The Minister considered that a demonstration on behalf of the rights of the minority was a danger to public law and order ... He placed Police. He alerted a reserve force. The rest was violence ... The events in Derry shocked moderate opinion on all sides and are likely to become a watershed in the political life of Northern Ireland ... But it seems now that the Catholic minority, if it is to retain any self respect, will have to risk the charge of wrecking the new moderation (of Captain O'Neill) and seek justice more vociferously'. (Heaney. S., 'Old Derry Walls', The Listener, 1968, p. 522).

Heaney was commenting on the facts, facts which flashed across the television screens of millions of people in the western world, and which revealed the zeal of the police in crushing the minority's rightful protest. In the same article Heaney also commented optimistically on the march by several thousand Queen's University students on the ninth of October nineteen-sixty-eight in protest about the violence of the fifth of October nineteen-sixty-eight march. Heaney wrote, 'Catholic and Protestant, Unionist and Republican have aligned themselves behind the civil rights platform to examine the conscience of the community'. (Heaney. S., *Old Derry Walls,* The Listener, 1968, p. 522). Heaney's optimism however, soon evaporated and later that year he was sounding a note of caution. By the end of nineteen-sixty-eight the activists among the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association were identifying with confrontational political tactics popular in France and America. The radical People's Democracy movement, born in the crucible of student revolt, adopted the tactics of civil disobedience. Control of the People's Democracy passed from Miss Bernadette Devlin, one of the students prominent in the earliest days of this organisation, to former members of the University. Their aims, while embracing the anti-discriminatory ideas of the Civil Rights Association, in fact went far beyond the redress of immediate grievances, envisaging as they did the eventual creation of a Workers and Small Farmers Republic for the whole of Ireland. Heaney warned, in an article for the Queen's University magazine, *Gown,* that the student organisation,

People's Democracy 'must remember the real hinterland of prejudice which people on both sides are fighting and not lose sight of this reality'. (Heaney. S., *Gown*, 1968, p. 4).

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

On a personal level during this period Heaney had much success. He married Marie Devlin in August nineteen-sixty-five, whose family had a strong sense of their Irish Catholic identity, and a long tradition of religious tolerance. Hobsbaum departed from Belfast in nineteen-sixty-six and Heaney took over hosting duties of the 'Group' until nineteen-seventy. Heaney also succeeded Hobsbaum as lecturer in English at Queen's University, a post he held until nineteen-seventy. In nineteen-sixty-nine, *Door into the Dark* was published by Faber. It was received tentatively by reviewers who commented that there was something 'unsettled' about it. The chapter will now consider this volume.

DOOR INTO THE DARK

There are considerably wider cultural, historical, political and social perspectives in *Door into the Dark*, which Heaney develops more fully in *Wintering Out* and *North*. In the first poem of this volume, that the chapter will discuss, Heaney is again addressing the national past. 'Girls Bathing, Galway, 1965', encompasses notions of history, the communal past and the violent invasions of Ireland. Heaney makes this explicit here.

> 'No milk-limbed Venus ever rose
> Miraculous on this western shore.
> A pirate queen in battle clothes
> Is our sterner myth ...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 11).

Life in Ireland is filled with evidence of the successive waves of invaders. There is no love or peace in Ireland, only wars and civil wars and the weight of its bloody history and myths. The violence and brutality are continuous, locked into a vicious circle, they feed

off each other. The Irish are a subject people, their suffering largely unnoticed and their cries of protest, and for help, unheard by the outside world.

'... they float and crawl,
A catherine-wheel of arm and hand;
Each head bobs curtly as a football.
The yelps are faint here on the strand...

The queen's clothes melt into the sea

And generations sighing in
The salt suds where the wave has crashed
Labour in fear of flesh and sin...'

(Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 11)

The image here is of a conquered Ireland, its people mourning their loss. The loss of freedom, of the Gaelic language, loss of identity, repressed by both State and Church. This is a brooding poem, yet Heaney is optimistic that Ireland will eventually know peace and love. Unfortunately Heaney's optimism was misplaced as ugly, sectarian and violent tribal warfare was about to erupt again in Northern Ireland.

'Requiem for the Croppies' is a historical poem, the subject of which is the seventeen-ninety-eight Rebellion. It is more political than much of what Heaney has written to date and it indicates his growing concern about England's ongoing oppression of Ireland. Military oppression is central to this poem, and this oppression increasingly preoccupies Heaney in his later work also. The seventeen-ninety-eight rising was one of the most concentrated episodes of violence in Irish history. What happened rapidly adopted a sectarian rationale, and reflected the hysteria of local gentry and Orange recruits as much as supposedly deliberate provocation by the Government. The organisation of the United Irishmen was not sophisticated in military terms, tending to revolve around bands of pikemen with local leaders. In a curiously contingent and haphazard way some unlikely figures (Protestant) became involved in leading local rebellions. This owed something to the traditional patronage exercised by the gentry over local 'fleets', or gangs. Wexford saw the worst violence which may owe much to a tradition of 'frontier settlement' and a

highly politicised, assertive and active Catholic gentry. Protestant and Catholic relations were truculent, at the artisanate level as well as among the gentry. In North Wexford, the proportion of Protestant settlement was exceptionally high. The arrival of notably Orange Militia Companies increased tension. Despite some effective generalship, the insurgents failed. A campaign marked by horrific and unforgotten atrocities on both sides, already described as 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' ended in the rout on Vinegar Hill, on the twenty-first of June seventeen-ninety-eight, and left an inheritance of heightened sectarian animosity. Mass atrocities were perpetuated in circumstances of chaos and confusion, symbolised by the oddly assorted icons of the rosary and the 'cap of liberty'. Charles Cornwallis (1738 – 1805) was the British Commander-in-Chief in Ireland and responsible for defeating the 'rebellion'. Cornwallis regarded abolition of the Irish Parliament and Catholic emancipation as the dual means to pacify the country. In November seventeen-ninety-eight he wrote to his brother, James, 'Ireland cannot change for the worse, but unless religious animosities and the violence of the parties can be in some measure allayed, I do not think she can receive much benefit from any plan of Government'. (Pakenham. T., 1992, p. 389). Cornwallis resigned when Catholic relief failed to succeed Union in eighteen-hundred and one. His joy at leaving Ireland was allayed by the sense that he left the country 'dangerously half reformed'.

'Requiem for the Croppies' is about the massacre of these Catholics on Vinegar Hill in seventeen-ninety-eight, about the downtrodden discovering ingenuity in their struggle, but finally being overwhelmed by superior, and foreign technology, scythes against cannon. The poem was written in nineteen-sixty-six, which was the fiftieth anniversary of the nineteen-sixteen Rising in Ireland, and when most poets in Ireland were straining to celebrate this anniversary. Heaney however, chose not the nineteen-sixteen Rising itself but what he considers its original seed in the rebellion of seventeen-ninety-eight. This poem reiterates the grim truth of Irish history. The croppies took on the might of the British, ill equipped with pikes and scythes.

> 'We'd cut through reins and rider with the pike
> And stampede cattle into infantry,
> Then retreat through hedges where cavalry must be
> thrown...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 12).

The sadness of being on the run in one's own country is brought forcibly home to us in this poem and is a condition to which Heaney often returns in later more consciously political poems. Finally,

> '... on Vinegar Hill, the fatal conclave.
> Terraced thousands died, shaking scythes at cannon...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark,* 1969, p. 12).

The 'rebels' were surrounded by ten thousand Government troops with twenty pieces of artillery and bombarded with shells until, 'The hillside blushed, soaked in our broken wave'. Robert Kee writes that 'more than half the fifty thousand estimated dead, were killed in cold blood'. (Kee. R., 1982, p. 130). This legalistic murder smacks of ethnic cleansing and the images of the hillside drenched in blood and the mass grave are both chilling and contemporary. 'They buried us without shroud or coffin'. The pathos of the opening lines, of the impoverished peasants carrying barley to eat while on the march, links with the ominous observation in the final line of the barley surviving the dead.

> 'The pockets of our greatcoats full of barley –
> No kitchens on the run, no striking camp –
>
> And in August the barley grew up out of the grave'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark,* 1969, p. 12).

The barley, bearing silent witness to the slaughter and pointing to a harvest of further rebellion. Heaney believes that the seed sown here becomes the seed of the Easter nineteen-sixteen Rising and, ultimately, of Irish independence. The horror of assassination yields that new life with which the soil has been impregnated.

James Simmons accuses Heaney of showing his Republican colours here. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 3). I would argue that the fact that he chose to write about seventeen-ninety-eight rather than nineteen-sixteen indicates that he was trying to put some historical distance and perspective between him and the more recent and emotive violence of nineteen-sixteen. At the time of writing Heaney thought that the end would be achieved

by peaceful means. Heaney later wrote that he did 'not realise at that time that the original heraldic murderous encounter between Protestant yeoman and Catholic rebel was about to be initiated again, in the summer of nineteen-sixty-nine in Belfast, two months after the book was published'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 56). There was much pressure brought to bear, both by the Irish State and the Roman Catholic Church, on Irish writers and poets in nineteen-sixty-six, to 'celebrate' Easter nineteen-sixteen, Heaney resisted this pressure, to a certain extent at least, by writing instead about seventeen-ninety-eight. R. Buttel writes that Heaney's tone is 'in keeping with a requiem, it is stately, mingling grief and nobility'. (Buttel. R., 1975, p. 54). Heaney uses history as a cultural expression rather than as a celebration of violence. While wanting to address his own response to the 'Irish Situation' he is very aware of the dangers, 'in writing anything that, in the cause of truth telling, is actually an exacerbation'. Heaney later wrote that 'writing in nineteen-sixty-six in Northern Ireland, where the Unionist hegemony was in position, where there was also a new slight air of liberation, it was all right for me to write this poem and I'm very glad I did it ... It was just saying remember us, take us into account ... But for me to write that poem now, it would be very different. It would be in fact a poem of violence rather than a poem of imagination'. (Heaney. S., *Place and Displacement*, 1984, p. 12). This is the spirit in which 'Requiem for the Croppies' was written, Heaney from the very beginning has been a poet anxious to do the world some good, not to make mischief. The fact that this poem was later used as a code poem for the IRA, and by some of Heaney's critics, as a stick with which to beat him, is unfortunate. However, the experience heightened his awareness of the relationship between lyric and life, of the 'responsibility for what you say'. In nineteen-sixty-six when this poem was written, Heaney had no idea of how soon a new harvest of violence would begin. That harvest came to fruition in nineteen-sixty-eight with the harsh certainty that seems a part of Irish history and, it must be said, virtually any history that incorporates a struggle for national identity. In this poem Heaney is looking for a poetic strategy to contain the 'aggravation of the young Catholic male', and to understand the historic deprivation of his people in more fundamental terms than those offered by the particular momentary strategies of politics.

The next two poems to be discussed in this chapter, 'The Wife's Tale' and 'Mother', indicate Heaney's deepening insight, and, appreciation of the lot of women in Irish society. Here Heaney makes some comment on the politics of the domestic, the plight of Irish women. In *A View of the Irish*, Brian Cleeve writes, 'Broadly speaking, the Irish

masculine presumption is that a woman is property. That she likes being property, and that lacking a man to own her and abuse her and order her about she will become neurotic. That she is much stupider than men, and greedier and more materialistic than men'. (Cleeve. B., 1983, p. 70). The feminist view of Irish women as exploited slaves, discriminated against by law, by the Church, by society, by tradition, brutalised, robbed of dignity, denied even minimal human rights, told what to do and what not to do by men, is however, far nearer the truth. Admittedly, this unsatisfactory status of modern Irish women has begun to change, over the last decade or so, in the cities and large towns. However, when these two poems were written in the nineteen-sixties, the description of Irish women as 'exploited slaves' was indeed the reality.

'The Wife's Tale' dramatises the division between men and women in Ireland. The husband in this poem is authoritatively directing and the wife humbly subservient. He nonchalantly orders her to serve the labourers before him. That done, he orders her to go and inspect and admire his work. 'It's good clean seed. Away over there and look'. (Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 15). He is unaware or uncaring of the fact that his wife is not sure of what she is to look at.

> 'Always this inspection has to be made
> Even when I don't know what to look for'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 15).

This is an annual ritual, the wife presumably is too much in awe of her husband either to admit her incomprehension or to express her disinterest. The husband does not understand her civilising gestures, like the land, she too must serve as an extension of his ego. When she has completed her wifely duties she is dismissed, forgotten.

> 'And that was it. I'd come and he had shown me
> So I belonged no further to the work...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 16).

Unacknowledged but with dignified resignation she 'gathered cups and folded up the cloth / And went'. The men however sit in a closed circle oblivious of her.

'... But they still kept their ease
Spread out, unbuttoned, grateful, under the trees'.

(Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 16).

This poem portrays a relationship that is both intimate and incomplete, the pairing of a sensitive wife and an unsympathetic husband / master. Her care and service are taken for granted, she is shown little appreciation by a husband whose life revolves around his work. Her life is routine, and conventionalised, there is little that is distinctive about it. Heaney's probing of the relationship between the sexes in Ireland discloses in intimate detail the way the woman's life is determined by the men, and the fact is borne home that a woman's efforts can only be incidental to the important business of Irish men.

In the following poem 'Mother', Heaney sympathetically re-assesses the role of Irish women as mothers. Brian Cleeve writes that the 'Irish masculine view of woman as mother varies between that of the family tyrant grasping limp and bloodless sons and husbands against her monstrous breasts; and the loving, all-enduring victim willing to feed her male children on her heart's blood'. (Cleeve. B., 1983 , p. 112). Heaney himself writes that 'women have never got full credit, in Ireland, for their bravery. They sacrifice everything to life'. (Heaney. S., *The Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, No. 61, Spring 1969). This poem portrays the exhaustions and frustrations of the pregnant farmer's wife. It reminds us of the fact that procreation can be agonising as well as fulfilling. Her daily labour continues unrelieved despite her pregnancy and her weariness.

'I am tired of the feeding of stock.
Each evening I labour this handle
Half an hour at a time ...

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

(Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 17).

When she describes the impoverished gate in the yard as 'on its last legs. / It does not jingle for joy anymore', one cannot help but feel that it is herself that she is describing. While tending to the needs of everyone and everything around her, her own needs are neglected. She longs for her own space, her own identity, in Jungian terms, to achieve the conscious realisation of self, her individuation.

> 'O when I am a gate for myself
> Let such wind fray my waters
> As scarfs my skirt through my thighs,
> Stuffs air down my throat'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 17).

The poem ends with a sense of claustrophobia. This woman like so many others, is trapped by her sex and the round of necessity. These two poems highlight the plight of women in Irish society, they are a reflection upon the multiplicity of roles which females are expected to play. More often than not, their labour is 'unacknowledged and unappreciated'. (Foster. R.F., 1989, p. 235). Irish society is, if not hostile to women, contemptuous of them. 'The dominant priorities for women in Ireland, as dictated by men, are household duties and child-rearing'. (Corkery. D., 1967, p. 30). The exploitation of women in the household is maintained by their non-admission to the public sphere. The Irish State, almost from its inception, did nothing to alleviate the hardship or redress the balance. It adopted a strongly conservative approach to gender roles and family relationships, being mainly concerned with reinforcing an orthodox Catholic morality, a morality which turned a blind eye to patriarchal oppression. Repression of women will preoccupy Heaney also in his subsequent volume, and stimulates some fine poems such as 'Limbo' and 'Bye-Child'.

In 'A Lough Neagh Sequence' Heaney continues to examine the complexities of his cultural heritage, focusing on issues of tradition and violence. The sequence opens with a fatalistic claim, a claim of destruction, 'The lough will claim a victim every year'. There are victims and perpetrators in the first poem of the sequence 'Up the Shore', and ongoing violence. Life follows rhythms of cycle and return. The fishermen and eels are part of the circle. The Irish fishermen, however, show a sense of fair play towards their victims.

'But up the shore in Antrim and Tyrone
There is a sense of fair play in the game.
The fishermen confront them one by one ...'

(Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 26).

Whereas the British company who owns the weirs and sluice gates does not. It violates the historical rights of the native fishermen.

'At Toomebridge where it sluices towards the sea
They've set new gates and tanks against the flow...'

(Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 26).

This is an oblique reference to the Catholic minority versus British authority. The suggestion is that the British, with wealth and power on their side, do not play fair with their victims, the native Irish fishermen, who have fished the lough in the old, traditional way for hundreds of years. The resigned and fatalistic fishermen never learn to swim because they say, 'We'll be the quicker going down'. Whether they can swim or not is irrelevant because one way or the other 'the lough will claim a victim every year'. The suggestion here is that there is a parallel between the eels and Irish national identity. The British have unfairly robbed the Irish of their land, culture and identity, while the Irish stoically pursue it, knowing that loss of life will be involved in that historical pursuit. This is the destiny of the Irish, there is historical continuity in the instinctual urge to retrieve what they have been deprived of, and 'the Irish as a nation accept this destiny with understated courage', and often without conscious comprehension. (Ardagh. J., 1995, p. 82).

Benedict Kiely comments that in 'Beyond Sargasso', the second poem in this sequence, 'there is an analogy between the eel with its instinctual longing for adventure and hungering for home, and Heaney's contradictory, Celtic nature'. (Kiely. B., 1970, p. 12). Here, Heaney continues to search for his own response to the Irish situation. He has acknowledged that the influences of the Irish Church and State make one feel as if in a 'strait-jacket', however, there is simultaneously that 'contradictory' but magnetic pull of

the homeland. Here is a good example of the self-division within Heaney which will become agonisingly more apparent in subsequent volumes.

In 'Bait' the worms, those 'innocent ventilators of the ground' are 'cheated of it' just as the Irish have been 'cheated' of their country. In 'Setting', Heaney portrays the fishers as robots, they are programmed to pursue their merciless work.

> 'Not sensible of any *Kyrie*,
> The fishers, who don't know and never try,
> Pursue the work in hand as destiny'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 29).

This image carries through to 'Lifting' where the boats' wakes are 'enwound as the catch / On the morning water: which / Boat was which?'

> 'And when did this begin?
> This morning, last year, when the lough first
> spawned?..'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 31).

None of the fishers have a separate identity, their boats' wakes melt into each other, they are indistinguishable, just like the British Army troops. Sadly, depressingly, no-one knows when it all began. Killers and victims lack the recognition that the pattern is characteristic of Irish violence over the centuries. Both are involved in a senseless, ongoing dance-of-death ritual, a mutual killing.

'Vision' completes the sequence. There is a menacing prediction in this poem. Heaney sees the 'world's live girdle' as a 'horrid cable', a cable that is flexed. Very soon Northern Ireland would be overrun, not with 'lice and eels' but with IRA and Loyalist terrorists and with British Army troops. Camouflaged men would soon occupy ditches and hedges, and street corners, having 'gathered there for vengeance'. From the malign depths of human nature fresh violence, fear and death would hatch a spawning that would quickly smother the province. The unhappy congruence in Ulster of political and

religious repression and the attendant violence, will surface again and again, as we progress through Heaney's subsequent volumes, and observe his search for images which are not distorted and which do not demean the truth.

In 'Whinlands' Heaney encompasses notions about history and national identity. He writes about the gorse blossoms which are characteristic of Northern Ireland, and which, for Heaney stand for a particular kind of culture and character. He is looking for natural forms and shapes which articulate the identity of the whole of Ireland.

'Put a match under
Whins, they go up of a sudden.
They make no flame in the sun
But a fierce heat tremor'.

(Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 35).

Whins present an analogue to Irish society. The fire takes only the thorns but not the woody stems. Like the whins, the Irish people have throughout history been massacred, crushed, burnt, but the desire for national freedom remains. 'Nationalism', often subdued, 'waits for the right time' to surge and blossom again. (Gellner. E., 1997, p. 102). In the final stanza the parallels to Irish life are made even clearer.

'Gilt, jaggy, springy, frilled,
This stunted, dry richness
Persists on hills, near stone ditches,
Over flintbed and battlefield'.

(Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 35).

The whins are fertile and resilient, they transcend national 'failures' such as that recalled in 'Requiem for the Croppies'. Northern Irish society, like the whins is insistent, thorny, volatile, tenacious, being founded on this same base of largely forgotten or hidden history or prehistory.

In 'The Plantation' Heaney's discovery is analogous to that of Joyce's Stephen Daedalus, who discovered that departure from Ireland and inspection of the country from the outside was the only way of getting to the core of Irish experience. The word 'plantation' has strong historical and political overtones in Ulster, so that a political reading of the poem might see it as referring to the imposition of English rule and culture on the 'wild' indigenous Gael. Heaney, like many before him, is now aware of the heavy sense of loss and dispossession, of injustice and suffering; of the deterritorialisation inflicted both on a national consciousness by the efforts of colonisation, and on individual subjects by acculturation.

> 'Though you walked a straight line,
> It might be a circle you travelled ...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 36).

Heaney's survival as a poet however, and as a person, will depend on his ability to remain fluid and responsive. It is in this poem that Heaney accepts that he has somehow to place himself in relation to Ireland and the Troubles, he becomes aware that a further, deeper investigation of the matter of Ireland is necessary.

In nineteen-sixty-nine, Professor P.V. Glob's book, *The Bog People*, which is a study of archaeological finds in Jutland, Denmark, was published. Heaney recognised the poetic potential of Glob's book and he used its anthropological insights in interpreting the present state of Ireland. T. C. Foster writes that in 'Bogland', the final poem of his second volume, Heaney 'seemed to be searching for a thematic centre and the combination of the Troubles and Glob's work offered such a centre'. (Foster. T.C., 1989, p. 5). Glob's book provided Heaney with the material he would need to find his perspective on the violence in Ulster. He used this to good effect in his subsequent two volumes, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

In 'Bogland', Heaney attempts to locate a specifically Irish national consciousness through the lands' habitual landscapes. He again looks to the past to find connections to modern society. By the end of this second volume it is clear that the pull of history is growing stronger for Heaney. The bogs of Ireland, which form the geological base of

much of the country, yield up treasures greater than coal, forgotten or lost parts of a heritage. The bog is a natural place that is also the repository of history.

> 'We have no prairies
> To slice a big sun at evening –
> Everywhere the eye concedes to
> Encroaching horizon,
>
> ... Our unfenced country
> Is bog that keeps crusting
> Between the sights of the sun'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, p. 41).

Heaney highlights a sense of vulnerability here, Ireland is not only a small country but also 'unfenced', unprotected. 'Sights' has a cold ring to it and brings to mind a rifle, reminding one of Ireland's violent past and present, and also the sense that Ulster is not a place of expanding frontiers. Ireland's compensatory cultural resource is the bog which contains all of Irish history.

Kavanagh wrote that 'a turf of bog is a history of the world from the time of Noah'. (Kavanagh. P., 1975, p. 77). The Irish landscape remembers everything that has happened in and to it. Heaney's awe at the bogland springs from his sense of its ancient life.

> '... Our pioneers keep striking
> Inwards and downwards,
>
> Every layer they strip
> Seems camped on before.
> The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage.
> The wet centre is bottomless'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Door into the Dark*, 1969, pp. 41 - 42).

Heaney makes Ireland's many layered bog the equivalent of other ancient cultures like Troy and Mycenae, which were also 'camped on before'. Ireland has her own type of pioneers who have carefully mined this treasure trove. Those engaged in this activity are not reciters of the litanies handed out by schools, courts or churches. They look 'inwards and downwards' into the 'bottomless centre' of Irish history, 'recovering there the traces and treasures of previous cultures and peoples, as the bogland of Ireland literally contains historical and prehistorical evidence released by archaeology'. For Heaney, therefore, the bog is a 'kind of Jungian ground', it acts as 'the memory of the landscape, just as the unconscious in Jung's psychology is the archetypal memory of the race'. (Corcoran. N., 1986, p. 62). Heaney found in the bog a door into the 'dark, rich places of the human psyche', the Irish psyche and the Irish past, richly layered and opening inwards in a series of endless discoveries. (Longley. E., 1986, p. 144). 'Bogland' has a direct contemporary relevance. If Northern Ireland is locked within a numbing, no-win political contest that freezes the imagination, the perspectives opened into the past by 'Bogland' offer rich creative alternatives.

In nineteen-sixty-nine Heaney was ready to 'pioneer' the frontiers of Irish consciousness and 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'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 56). Along with the 'dark, rich places' however, also lay brutal, sectarian violence. Parker argues that 'Bogland' reveals 'the poet struggling for self-definition, making tentative soundings into the deeper tracts of the consciousness, as he strives to reconnect himself to the watery land which bore him'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 99). From now on the psychic self-searching of the poet would be fused to that of the nation, as Heaney digs further into the whole substance of Ireland. Andrews argues that Heaney's 'imaginative excavations, in response to stark public as well as personal matters, were to take him deeper into, under and finally out beyond his early rural terrain than he can have foreseen'. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 14). However, as Heaney probes inward, into what lies below and beyond, he does not falsify the physical and emotional actuality of his/the world.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the first phase of Heaney's career as he begins to focus on and engage with his Irish heritage, and in so doing comes to political and artistic awareness. As Heaney begins to examine the various traditions and pressures of Ireland he becomes aware of how they can calcify into negativity and destruction. He looks to the past and draws parallels between Ireland's traumatic history and contemporary society in an attempt to come to an understanding of the present sectarianism and injustice in Northern Ireland, and in the hope of finding an alternative way that would both combat the negatives of his Irish inheritance, and at the same time suggest just and peaceful strategies that would give a coherence and rational form to Northern Ireland. Even in this early phase of his career there were pressures on Heaney from his tribe to take their side, and an expectation that he would say something about the situation in Northern Ireland. Vendler takes up this point, commenting that from the beginning 'Heaney has been forced, by the place and time into which he was born, to take on, within the essentially private genre to which he was called, the representation of an unignorable social dimension'. (Vendler. H., 1998, p. 175). All artists are susceptible to the tension created by the conflict between Art and Life/politics; in a troubled society that tension is intensified by the urgency created by the absence of truth and justice. From the beginning of his poetic career, Heaney has asserted that the serious poet should be preoccupied with ethical issues. Heaney sees his poetry as a 'definition of his stance towards life, a definition of his own reality' and he sets high standards for himself. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 47). In this early phase of his career and throughout each stage of his development, both as a poet and as a person, he wrestles with the question of his own moral responsibility. Owen warned that 'all a poet can do today is warn. That is why true poets must be truthful'. (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. xiv). What exactly this truthfulness demands can be seen in Heaney's struggle to find a poetic voice, take a moral stand and find a vision. From nineteen-sixty-nine onwards, when violence again erupted in Northern Ireland, Heaney felt it 'imperative to discover a field of force in which, without abandoning fidelity to the processes and experience of poetry ... it would be possible 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'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, pp. 56 - 57). This was not only to prove problematic but also to lead Heaney into the deepest of soul-searching. It would place daunting pressures and responsibilities on a sceptical, defensive, displaced poet torn

by conflicting dogma and troubled by the nightmare of history, constantly threatened with the dissolution of the self, yet deeply suspicious of the more obvious forms of ideological control.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BIRTH OF A CONSCIOUSNESS

IN

WINTERING OUT

'History is indeed a difficult prison to escape from,
and the history of Ireland is as difficult as any'.

Kee. R., *Ireland, A History*, 1982, p 50.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is concerned with Heaney's third volume, *Wintering Out* which was published in nineteen-seventy-two. While Heaney's first two published volumes contain a small number of poems which advert in some way to the situation in Northern Ireland, in *Wintering Out* and indeed, throughout this second phase of his career he returns again and again to the contemporary political situation, seeking ways to address it, to confront it in his work. As the situation in Northern Ireland progressively deteriorated, Heaney shifts away from the bucolic world of childhood and engages with the harsher adult world. In his first two volumes of poetry, Heaney's pan-historical approach, one which had made him wary of political, religious and nationalistic dogmatism, allowed him to explore Ireland's various traditions. But now those traditions, in the form of exclusive political and ideological factions, violently clashed in the streets of Belfast and Derry. With the resurgence of the Troubles in the late nineteen-sixties, Heaney's notions about what poetry should be changed. Andrew Murphy argues that while Heaney 'started his career in the manner of a Patrick Kavanagh, now at mid career, he found himself cast in something like the role of Yeats'. (Murphy. A., 1996, p. 4). Heaney struggled to find an 'adequate way of addressing the conflicts of his particular historical moment in the poems he wrote and published from the late nineteen-sixties to the mid nineteen-eighties.' (Murphy. A., 1996, p. 4). Like Yeats, he not only 'struggled to find expression for, and poetic engagement with, the political crisis, but also worried over the question of the nature of the poet's responsibility to that political situation'. (Murphy. A., 1996, p. 4). Heaney fretted over what the role of the poet should be in and towards such times of crisis. Reflecting upon the Troubles and their impact upon the writer, Heaney wrote; 'we live in critical times ourselves, when the idea of poetry as an art is in danger of being overshadowed by a quest for poetry as a diagram of political attitudes. Some commentators have all the fussy literalism of an official from the ministry of truth ... If a poet must turn his resistance into an offensive, he should go for a kill and be prepared, in his life, and with his work, for the consequences'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 219). Heaney was not prepared to turn his poetry into 'an offensive', and he certainly did not want to 'go for a kill'. Nonetheless, he needed to explore a form of poetic 'resistance' that voiced both halves of his divided self while avoiding the extremes of political activism and political escapism.

In *Wintering Out* Heaney stretches his talents in new directions, it is far more politically aware than either of his first two volumes. In part one of this volume, Heaney explores the deeper structures of present hostilities, the way in which the divisions of the Protestant and Catholic communities are embedded in history, politics, language, topography and religion. Rather than focusing directly on incidents from the present, he concentrates primarily on the origins and hinterland of the conflict. In part two of this volume Heaney comments further on the condition of women in Ireland and the attitude of Church and State towards them. He engages with the covert and taboo aspects of life in Ireland. In 'Limbo' and 'Bye-Child', Heaney deals with the issues of infanticide and illegitimacy. These chilling tales can be read as parables for the present state of Ireland and it's moral paralysis. Human loss, hurt, derangement and alienation are absorbed within a timeless, archetypal and cosmic perspective as he considers the cruel imperfections of the human condition itself and the culpability of the Irish Catholic Church.

Heaney needs to be discussed against the backgrounds of poetry and life in Ulster and the rest of Ireland, and within the context of a society torn and disrupted by violence. An artist's personal history (imagined or actual) must also be taken into account. In this chapter therefore I will examine the backgrounds against which Heaney wrote *Wintering Out*, both contemporary and historical, public and personal. I will discuss only a fraction of the poems of *Wintering Out*, I do this not merely because of the obvious constraints of time and space, but to keep my focus sharp and to highlight how Heaney handles the dilemma of an artist in a tumultuous society. The chapter will conclude that Heaney in this volume, and at this phase in his career, was an artist desperately searching for a space in which he did not concede to outside pressures, in which he could be true to the aesthetic demands of art and in which at the same time he could be true to the bloody complexity of the social upheaval and violence in the North of Ireland.

CONTEMPORARY BACKGROUND

Northern Ireland had changed quite dramatically between nineteen-sixty-six, when *Death of a Naturalist* was published, and nineteen-seventy-two when *Wintering Out* appeared. While the poems of *Wintering Out* were being written, the political situation in Northern Ireland had become suddenly volatile and violent. 'Exploiting instead of assuaging anachronistic passions, the Provisional Army Council of the IRA, which was formed in

December nineteen-sixty-nine, established a powerful position amongst the frightened Catholics of the North during the next twelve months, presenting themselves as champions who would defend them against Protestant mobs and the British Army'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 91). Catholics could not help but recall memories of the British Army's traditional role as an old enemy, especially when IRA harassment of the Army provoked retaliation which confirmed those Republican voices now prophesying war. From any perspective, the British Army's position in Northern Ireland (in July nineteen-seventy) was not an enviable one. There was a crumbling administration at Stormont, vainly trying to introduce reform against the wishes of a majority of the party which had placed it in Government. The RUC was in a state which Sir Frank Cooper, a former head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, had described as 'total collapse'. Cooper continued, 'It was not merely dismembered, it was a shambles ... It meant inevitably that the Army had to go on for much longer playing the lead role.' (Institute of Contemporary British History, Seminar on Ireland 1970 – 1974). Therefore in a real sense, the force of law and order was the Army. Even apart from the fact that to Irish Nationalists a British uniform in Ireland was/is an irritant in the political oyster around which no pearl will ever form, the Army was the Army and not a police force. Moreover, it was an Army which had come to Ireland against an operational background that included Aden, Cyprus, Kenya, Malaya, all 'foreign', post-colonial, counterinsurgency theatres. The techniques which it had acquired along the way were counter productive in a white, English-speaking, Irish city which was supposed to be treated as a part of the United Kingdom. A strain of frankly racist condescension, influenced by colonial experience elsewhere, was encapsulated in a term frequently used in military circles to describe the Irish: 'bog-wog'. The fact that the Irish responded with equally derogatory nomenclature did nothing to improve community relations. The official role of the Army was to act in aid of the civil power if violence became unmanageable. On the eighteenth of June nineteen-seventy, a British General Election toppled Labour and returned a Conservative Government under Edward Heath. Reginald Maudling became the new Home Secretary. Maudling displayed a lack of vigour to the point of indolence. But above all, in place of the restraint to which the Army was subjected under Labour, a quite brutal search-and-ransack operation of the Catholic Falls Road area was sanctioned within days of the Tories taking over. The new 'get tough' policy was supported by Maudling who decided that Callaghan's moderate policy had not worked. This action confirmed moderate Nationalist opinion in the belief that the Conservative and Unionist Party was resuming the traditional alliance which had led to the setting up of the Statelet in the first place.

Time and again the Army stood by while Catholics were attacked by Loyalist, Protestant mobs, which often included RUC officers. When the Army did intervene it was to fire rubber bullets and C.S. Gas against the Catholics, not the Protestants. As far as the Provisional IRA was concerned, a tidal wave of recruitment was released which transformed the movement from a conspiracy to a guerrilla army. Any doubts among Nationalists and Republicans about the role of British troops were laid to rest in August nineteen-seventy-one, when the Army, against the advice of its own senior officers, carried out a ruthless policy of interning dissidents to the regime without trial. Brian Faulkner, who had taken over from Chichester-Clark as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland in March nineteen-seventy-one, had been strongly pressing for internment for some time. 'Operation Demetrius', as the internment drive was termed, came into operation at 0400 hours on the ninth of August nineteen-seventy-one. Deep-laid preparations for internment and some well rehearsed ancillary procedures were in place by the fifth of August nineteen-seventy-one. Lists of those who would be subject to internment, and places in which to intern them were drawn up.

Heaney describes one such camp in his introductory lyric in *Wintering Out*, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Far more sinister, however were the plans for the systematic employment of torture against detainees. Although ruinous in PR terms, the use of torture was in a sense, only the poisoned icing on the internment cake. 'Operation Demetrius' was botched in practically every respect one can think of. Allegations of indiscriminate arrest and brutality, especially in interrogation of suspects, brought a storm of protest from Catholic representatives. Liberal opinion in the press was sickened, and later the European Court of Human Rights savagely denounced the British Government. As a result of internment the IRA received an accession of strength which, though it sometimes ebbed, never died out again throughout the next twenty four years (and beyond), despite an ever-lengthening list of atrocities. If there were any lingering doubts in Northern Ireland as to which side the British Army was on, these were dispelled in blood in January nineteen-seventy-two. A civil rights march, in defiance of a Government ban on marches (but not on meetings) resulted in the reckless shooting by the Army of thirteen civilians. The rally was in protest against internment. Brian Falkner advised the Army that it was their duty to take a hard line with trouble makers. The rally passed off in a peaceful fashion, but as it concluded, armed personnel carriers approached. Paratroopers, armed with SLR rifles began firing on the crowd, thirteen died on the spot and one later, seventeen others were wounded to a greater or lesser degree.

The attitude of the British Army to the incident may be summed up in the words of Brigadier Thompson who commented, 'They shot well didn't they?' The effect of Bloody Sunday was not to get Britain out of Ireland but to enmire her even more firmly in the muddy by-ways of Fermanagh and Tyrone, as Churchill referred to them during the Home Rule Crisis. On the twenty fourth of March nineteen-seventy-two, Edward Heath, the British Prime Minister accepted the resignation of Brian Faulkner, the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, and London resumed direct control of the affairs of Northern Ireland after a gap of some fifty years.

THE ROLE OF THE IRISH CATHOLIC CHURCH

No discussion of Seamus Heaney and his work can ignore the role of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Religion and politics are inextricably intertwined in Ireland, and, many argue that the interface is not of a beneficial nature. The social and cultural oppression south of the border is on a par with the political, religious and economic oppression north of the border. The Catholic Church actively encourages the former and has done little or nothing to relieve the latter. Heaney, coming from an Irish Catholic background, speaks in one interview about the almost narcotic intensity of the religion of his home, 'my sensibility was formed by the dolorous murmurings of the rosary, and the generally Marian quality of devotion'. (Haffenden. J., 1981, pp. 60 – 61). The rulers of the southern state reflect the same Catholic, conservative attitudes as the Church, and together they maintain the pressure to emigrate on those who cannot or will not conform. Joyce, Shaw, Wilde and O'Casey are among the non-conformists. At the end of *Wintering Out*, Heaney too realises that to get to the core of the Irish experience/problem one needs to get away from Ireland, if only for a while.

Crucial to the institutional and popular achievements of the Church in the period following the famine until very recent times was the role played by Catholicism in 'confirming a sense of national identity'. (Sharpe. E., 1992, p. 23). The Church, with her regularised rites and practices offered to most Irish men and women a way to be Irish, which set them apart from the rest of the inhabitants of the British Isles, meeting the needs thereby of a nascent Irish nationalism at a time when the Irish language and the Gaelic culture of the past were enduring a protracted decline. The Catholic faith was peculiarly suited to play a role in the nationalist awakening. Bound up in the past with

the traditional Gaelic way of life to which the famine had largely put paid, historically associated with the repression of the eighteenth century when the native priesthood had heroically resisted the proscription of their faith, permeated with that profound sense of the supernatural which had characterised the countryside for centuries, Catholicism was richly endowed with attributes appropriate to its modern role in the nation's life. Strengthened by the Roman vigour of the devotional revolution, given a distinct tincture of Victorian respectability by the new discipline imposed on popular expressions of piety, the Catholic faith (of the majority of Irish people) became therefore intimately linked with national feeling. Despite the fact that during the Irish Civil War the 'Catholic Bishops had antagonised the Republicans through their support of the Free State Government', and despite the fact that some Ecclesiastics felt obliged to oppose the tactics employed by political activists, Irish Catholicism increasingly became a badge of national identity. (Brown. T., 1985, p. 28). This was particularly so in Northern Ireland. Northern Irish Catholicism was more deferential to clergy and nuns than had become the norm in the South, where, in the absence of such a pronounced 'them and us' syndrome, time had moved on slightly. The official attitude of the Church towards Protestantism was still the arms-length variety. 'Ecumenicalism was not a widely sown crop'. (Beckett. J., 1979, p. 50). In general, for the Northern Irish Catholic, the Church, in anatomical terms, could be thought of less as the cerebral than as the broad shoulders of consolation. Above all, one respected the Priest. Politically many of the Northern Irish priests were staunch Nationalists and, from the late nineteen-sixties, many of them, in flagrant disregard of official Church teaching, which had proclaimed respect for the authority of Stormont, used the pulpit to preach sermons that provided a seedbed for the emergence of the most ruthlessly efficient guerrilla force to appear in Western Europe since the ending of World War II.

Religious distinctions emerged therefore not only as convenient tags but also as 'central to political division'. (Rowthorn. B., 1988, p. 162). On the one hand the Church hierarchy over the years had in a sense collaborated with Unionist/State repression, by not challenging the status quo, and on the other hand, once the Troubles began, a minority within the Church, some deliberately, some inadvertently, helped swell the ranks of the IRA. The Irish Catholic Church fed the 'bankrupt psychology' implicit in the terms Irish Catholic and Ulster Protestant, what it never did was to provide the kind of social and political leadership that the Catholic people so desperately needed and deserved.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Heaney spent the academic year nineteen-seventy – nineteen-seventy-one in America at the University of California at Berkeley. Parker writes that 'Heaney's experiences in America accelerated the "politicisation" of his poetry'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 92). The reader who equates political poetry with polemical versification rightly insists on discussing Heaney's work by avoiding the label 'political', but the equation inaccurately restricts the term to an insignificant domain of literary endeavour. Tom Paulin, while admitting that 'the imagination can be strengthened rather than distorted by an ideology', goes on to clarify what a political poem means for him. 'My definition of a political poem does not assume that such poems necessarily make an ideological statement. They can instead embody a general historical awareness ... rather than offering a specific attitude to state affairs.' (Paulin. T., 1986, p. 18). I have no argument with Paulin's view of what constitutes 'political poetry'. Heaney does not have a narrow political agenda that he wishes voiced through is poetry. His poetry finds its cultural stability in the development of 'historical awareness', it subtly records the violence and turmoil, and provides a good example of the many ways in which poetry responds to political issues without sacrificing its aesthetic integrity.

It was in America that Heaney encountered the poetry of Gary Snyder, Robert Bly and Robert Duncan, and its engagement with protest against the war in Vietnam. Corcoran argues that Heaney learnt a lesson from these poets, that he could apply to his own work in a different political context, 'an awareness that poetry was a force, almost a mode of power, certainly a mode of resistance'. (Corcoran. N., 1986, p. 29). Berkeley through the nineteen-sixties was a centre of unrest, political activism and theories for an alternative society. Heaney recalls that at the time 'nature mysticism stuff was hot on the ground – everybody trying to be a Red Indian or whatever'. (Haffenden. J., 1981, p. 70). Students and staff at Berkeley were 'appalled by the actions of successive Governments in Vietnam and Cambodia, they identified with contemporary and historic victims of white American cultural supremacy'. Parker writes that 'increasingly Blacks, Hispanics and Indians were demanding their say in American affairs, and Heaney was inevitably reminded of the political and cultural assertions being made at that time by the minority back home in Ireland'.(Parker. M., 1993, p. 92). It was during this year that Heaney also met Thomas Flanagan, who later wrote *The Year of the French*, and Conor Cruise

O'Brien. Flanagan was deeply concerned with Irish history and literature and he encouraged Heaney and strengthened his resolve to embrace the national theme.

Heaney returned with his family to a troubled Belfast in September nineteen-seventy-one. In a piece collected in *Preoccupations* entitled 'Christmas nineteen-seventy-one', he recounts the increasing military presence, including his own experience of being stopped by the Army for having left his car tax lapse. 'We have to live with the Army. This morning I was stopped on the Falls Road and marched to the nearest Police barracks, with my three-year-old son, because my car tax was out of date ... It hasn't been named martial law, but that's what it feels like. Everywhere soldiers with cocked guns are watching you – that's what they're here for – on the streets, from doorways, over the puddles on demolished sites. At night, jeeps and armoured cars groan past without lights; or road-blocks are thrown up, and once again its delays measured in hours, searches and signings among the guns and torches'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p.30). Over the next few months, Heaney and his family had several close shaves with violence and death. Heaney writes 'last Saturday a bomb scare just pipped me before I had my socks and pyjamas paid for in Marks and Spencer, although there were four people on the Shankhill Road who got no warning. A security man cornered my wife in Robinson and Cleaver's store and ... a few days previously someone's timing device had given her a scare when an office block in University Road exploded just as she got out of range'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p.31). Before going to Berkeley, Heaney was a determined campaigner for civil rights, taking part in the marches of nineteen-sixty-eight/sixty-nine. Following the Bloody Sunday massacre grief, anger and defiance overtook Catholic Ireland, and in defiance of Stormont, one week later, on Sunday the sixth of February nineteen-seventy-two, another march was organised, this time the march was in Newry. Parker writes that 'among the demonstrators were Heaney and Michael Longley. Both have vivid recollections of the helicopters hovering over them menacingly. Despite the loudspeakers warning "if you go a step further, you are breaking the law", the "sacred irrevocable steps" had to be taken to "show solidarity with those who had died" '. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 118). However, Heaney's year in America had unsettled him and now the threat of violence and the proximity of violence in Northern Ireland oppressed him. But there were other pressures also, Heaney writes, 'among poets of my own generation in the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies there was a general feeling of being socially called upon which grew as the polarisation grew and the pressure mounted upon the writers not only to render images of the Ulster predicament, but also

perhaps to show solidarity with one side or the other in the quarrel ...' (Heaney. S., *The Redress of Poetry*, 1995, p. 193). Heaney wanted to avoid falling prey to this kind of pressure, he therefore decided to resign his post as a lecturer at Queen's University, to pursue a career as a freelance writer. He and his family found sanctuary from the immediate bloodshed, if not its after effects, when he was offered a cottage at Glanmore in Co. Wicklow in the Republic by Ann Saddlemeyer, a Canadian scholar. By August nineteen-seventy-two, the Heaney's were installed at Glanmore, and physically, at least, at a distance from the acute political turmoil in the North.

How does a writer poetically address the problems of a country whose political and cultural fissures have resulted in an apparently endless cycle of distrust, oppression and violence? Seamus Heaney had to answer this question for himself in the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies. 'Creating a form of poetry commensurate with times of strident political turmoil is perhaps the greatest challenge a poet can face' (Molino. M., 1994, p. 153). 'On the one hand, poetry is secret and natural, on the other hand it must make its way in a world that is public and brutal ... at one minute you are drawn towards the old vortex of racial and religious instinct, at another time you seek the mean of humane love and reason'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p.34). A mind pulled between two poles, so clearly evident in this quotation, can be seen throughout Heaney's work in this period. As a citizen and a poet, Heaney wanted to address the schism in Ulster society and the continuing problem of violence and repression, both of which had created and perpetuated an underclass of Catholic citizens, though he did not want to advocate the violent retaliation practised by the Provisional wing of the Irish Republican Army. Heaney needed to find a form of creative dialogue, an emancipating discourse that would face the realities of the ideologically motivated, violent, pragmatic political arena but would also circumvent the monologic, exclusionary, and restrictive discourses so often used by those who function in that arena. Between nineteen-sixty-eight and nineteen-seventy-two Heaney developed a polyphonic voice that displaced the political and cultural antagonisms endemic to his country. In *Wintering Out*, Heaney's poetry tentatively begins to chart its course between the conflicting demands of art and politics/life. The voice Heaney begins to develop here is essentially accommodating, wielding the language of moral imperative that often accompanies the political voice while nurturing the expressive intensity that dominates the register of the more private lyric. Heaney here begins to develop a poetry that is sensitive to his country's abiding public demands, while endeavouring to cultivate simultaneously the lyrical freedom that

renders such demands palatable, as he strives to be both artistically free and socially responsible.

WINTERING OUT: PART ONE

Heaney finds himself brought into direct confrontation with the latest manifestation of the Northern Ireland conflict as he opens this volume. He succinctly and successfully depicts the state of siege in post-internment Ireland, with its physical, psychological and spiritual ramifications in the introductory lyric to this collection.

> 'This morning from a dewy motorway
> I saw the new camp for the internees:
> a bomb had left a crater of fresh clay
> in the roadside, and over in the trees
>
> machine-gun posts defined a real stockade.
> There was that white mist you get on low ground
> and it was déjà-vu, some film made
> of Stalag 17, a bad dream with no sound.
>
> Is there a life before death? That's chalked up
> on a wall downtown. Competence with pain,
> coherent miseries, a bite and sup,
> we hug our little destiny again.'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Wintering Out,* 1972).

The images here are nightmarish. Heaney is referring to the internment camps that had been set up in nineteen-seventy-one. Hundreds of people had been rounded up and detained in camps like this one that Heaney sees from the motorway. People who had not been active in the IRA for years were interned and also many who had never been in the IRA. Not a single Loyalist was ever interned, but then no Loyalist had an interest in challenging the status quo. The whole scene has, for the poet, an air of unreality about it. Hardly able to believe that the situation can have come to this, he likens what confronts

him to a scene from a bad war movie. 'And it was déjà-vu, some film made / of Stalag 17'. The analogy with the celluloid prison, beyond linking England with Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, implies that the constant mass media coverage has familiarised violence and martial law to the point that they lose their horror. For all the shock of encountering this scene however, the final stanza of the poem registers less surprise at new developments than resignation in the face of the recognisably familiar.

Murphy writes that 'the slogan chalked upon a Belfast wall – "Is there life before death?" – indicates a certain grim humour, the kind of weary cynicism that comes from bitter familiarity with suffering. In the closing lines of the poem, an entire community settles down to the desperate mundanity of the reopened wounds of old conflict'. (Murphy. A., 1996, p. 49). Andrews argues that the last stanza questions the 'quality of life that is possible amid such conditions', and believes that the rest of the poems in this volume 'have to be read in the context of this numbed despair'. (Andrews. E., 1993, p. 68). I agree with Andrews, the poems of this volume must be read in the shadow of Long Kesh Prison, in conjunction or contrast with the celluloid version of the prison as well, for these poems exist within the cultural context of a military state and its constituent violence. Heaney may want to challenge the way people perceive and discuss the Troubles, but he does not want them to forget its horrors. Michael Parker writes that the 'themes' of the entire volume are introduced here, 'the history, disorientation and the collective faith ... and the moods of identification, resignation, separation and despair ... The subsequent poems of this volume will explore the Irish destiny "our little destiny" and articulate a response to centuries of military, political and linguistic and cultural domination'. (Parker. M., 1993, pp. 93-94). James Simmons accuses Heaney of offering the reader 'barren nationalism' here. I would remind Simmons that Heaney chose to omit certain poems from this volume of poetry, the choices he made are revealing. Between June nineteen-sixty-nine, the date Heaney published *Door into the Dark*, and January nineteen-seventy-two, a period of time that corresponds with the beginning of the current Troubles, Heaney published at least forty poems in journals and magazines, only about fourteen of which were included in *Wintering Out*, published in November nineteen-seventy-two. The poems that were excluded from the volume were overtly political poems that Heaney quickly came to realise were emblematic of the unproductive and polarising discourse of Northern Ireland; a discourse he wished to avoid and therefore these poems rightfully did not belong in *Wintering Out*. In this volume Heaney studiously tries to avoid the cramping noise of political rhetoric.

In 'Bog Oak', Heaney takes another look into the past to affirm his ancestry; he is searching for historical recognition. The 'long seasoned' rib of oak brought back from the bog to the carter's thatch conjures up the generations of Irish Gaels, an entire native community, a gathering of ancestors stretching back into a communal past: 'the moustached / dead, the creel-fillers'. Here in 'Bog Oak' the mood is one of resignation after long striving. The forbears' wisdom and images mirror this impotence:

'as a blowdown of smoke
struggles over the half-door

and mizzling rain
blurs the far end
of the cart track.
The softening ruts

lead back to no
"oak groves", no
cutters of mistletoe
in the green clearings.'

(Heaney. S., *Wintering Out,* 1972, p. 4).

The fact that these ruts, lead back to no 'oak groves' hints at the bleakness and centreless existence in modern Ireland. In the final two stanzas of the poem, we discover what is just about visible at the end of the track: 'perhaps I just make out / Edmund Spenser'. Heaney offers us here a dense and complex vision. It is in defining the role of the Elizabethan English landowners in Ireland that he arrives at a clearer definition of his own culture. By fifteen-ninety-eight the Plantation Policy was well under way, four hundred thousand acres of land were confiscated after the Munster Rising, to be granted to English families. The handling of the whole situation was incompetent and slow. The Gaelic way of life which was, as Beckett writes, 'so closely bound up with personal services and with family rather than territorial titles', was seriously undermined. (Beckett. J., 1979, pp. 65-66). What the speaker in this poem sees is an image of the sixteenth-century English poet Edmund Spenser, who served as a minor colonial official in Ireland. In an article for '*The Guardian*', Heaney writes of Spenser 'From his castle in Cork he

watched the effects of a campaign designed to settle the Irish question. He and the silver poet Sir John Davies watched the demise of a civilisation whose lifeline was bitten off when the squared-off walls of bawn and demesne dropped on the country like the jaws of a man trap'. (Heaney. S., 'The Trade of an Irish Poet', 1972, p. 17). Spenser composed a political treatise on Irish affairs, entitled *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, in which he advocated the deployment of extremely harsh measures against the native Irish, and endorsed Lord Deputy Grey's belief that civilisation could not be built in Ireland until the ground was levelled for foundation by force. Elmer Andrews points out that Spenser was also amongst the first of the linguistic imperialists: 'he equated the Gaelic language with sedition, and argued for the establishment of the English language, understanding very clearly the total interrelation between discourse and power'. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 156).

'Bog Oak', offers us a similar set of connections as 'At a Potato Digging', which was discussed in chapter one of this study. Murphy argues that where the earlier poem suggests that, 'if we penetrate the surface of the contemporary rural landscape we will find the unhealed wound of the Great Famine, 'Bog Oak' indicates that we can read the colonial history of the country within the grains of the retrieved timber'. (Murphy. A., 1996, pp. 36-37). There is a sense of historical resonance here which is compounded by the quotation from Spenser's treatise which Heaney incorporates into his poem. In the treatise itself the full passage appears as follows:

> 'Out of every corner of the woodes and glinnes they came creeping foorthe upon theyr handes, for theyr legges could not beare them; they looked like anatomyes of death, they spake like ghostes crying out of theyr graves; the did eate of the dead carrions, happy wer they yf they could finde them, yea, and one another soone after, insoemuch as the very carcasses they spared not to scrape out of theyr graves; and yf they founde a plotte of water-cresses or shamrokes, there they flocked to as to a feast ...' (Spenser. E., 1596, p. 654).

Spenser was writing of the famine in Munster which resulted from the English campaigns against the Irish in the late sixteenth century, but one can hardly fail to hear an echo here again, of the famine of the mid-nineteenth century, in which identical events played themselves out. Karl Marx has famously observed that 'all great world – historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice ... the first time as tragedy, the second as farce'.

(Marx. K., 1972, p. 87). Heaney is emphasising here that history is repeating itself not just as tragedy and farce but as endlessly reiterated cycles of affliction and blight.

In this volume, Heaney examines further one of the major legacies of colonialism, the linguistic dispossession of the Irish people. He considers England's efforts to suppress Irish place-names and the Irish language, efforts he considers political oppression. His fascination with Ireland's divided linguistic inheritance is a potent means of digging into national history and identity. In 'Anahorish', Heaney's 'place of clear water', the name resides as a metonym for the ancient Gaelic culture that is to be tapped, leading past the literary mists of Celtic twilight into that civilisation whose demise was effected by soldiers and administrators like Spenser and Davies. In poems such as 'Anahorish' Heaney weighs the language that history has left him with. Andrews argues 'place, identity and language mesh in Heaney, as in nationalism, since language is seen primarily as naming, and because naming performs a cultural reterritorialisation by replacing the contingent continuities of a historical community with an ideal register of continuity in which the name (of place or object) operates symbolically as the commonplace communicating between actual and ideal continua'. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 98). In a poem such as 'Anahorish', Heaney imagines that the name itself possesses ineffable powers of cultural sovereignty. Irish place-names in the United Kingdom became for Heaney subversive incantations that both glorify his Celtic lineage and establish its integrity in British Northern Ireland. The poem dextrously appropriates a landscape politically British in its legal demarcation but linguistically Irish in its nomenclature. The genealogy established in the poem between the people of Heaney's childhood and the 'mound dwellers' lies entrenched beyond the reach of English bloodlines, and the poem combines a quiet celebration of an Irish childhood with a strenuous resistance to cultural hegemony.

The next poem the chapter will examine is 'Toome'. Like 'Anahorish', 'Toome' is a poem in the dinnseanchas tradition, which considers the sounds of a word, its pronunciation and usage, and the people who use the word. The matter of poetic diction, whether based on the regional pidgin or the royal parlance, is an important issue. The subject of poetic diction concerns all poets, but Irish authors have addressed the matter with exceptional vigour, emphasising the political implications of choosing or ignoring various words and figures of speech. The speaker in 'Toome' speaks to the past with every word, and the uttered word refers to both a political and historical terrain. Toome

Bridge was the site of the Irish Rebellion of seventeen-ninety-eight as well as the site of archaeological finds. The sound of the word Toome, evokes the 'blastings' of British cannon fire as well as the pun on tomb. The imagery of the poem, 'loam, flints, musket-balls, / fragmented ware, / torcs and fish-bones' recalls a distant and violent past, descending from modern musketry to ancient torcs. The dialectal words and rhythms in Heaney's verse, those wayward words often labelled 'variant' by lexicographers (and by the English), represent the common inheritance of the Catholic culture of rural Northern Ireland, a culture that from Heaney's standpoint has suffered political displacement. Heaney enshrines his culture while fashioning a cogent response to the problems faced by the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland.

A reading of 'Broagh' also evokes the interrelationships among words, their etymologies and pronunciations, and their social and political contexts. Buttel argues that 'Broagh' brings together in its opening lines the three traditions Heaney encountered as a child in Northern Ireland. Parker takes up this point writing that 'the Gaelic (Bruach, a riverbank), the Scots (rigs, a Planter word for a riverside field), and the Anglo-Saxon (docken, an old English plural for the dock plant)', were all used in daily speech. (Buttel. R., 1975, p. 70). (Parker, M., 1993, p. 99). The word 'Broagh' as well as the other dialect terms in the poem, accentuates the cultural diversity of Northern Ireland. Both Parker and Lang argue that Heaney here is attempting to 'construct a ford between past and present, and, somewhat optimistically, between Nationalist and Unionist. If left to themselves, he implies, perhaps the Ulster Catholics and Protestants might one day learn to accept each other's traditions and acknowledge the rich diversity of their linguistic heritage'. Parker continues that there is 'wry humour in the poem's final line, for the poem ends with a guttural sound common to both communities in the North of Ireland but unavailable to an English person, a reminder that it is not only the pronunciation of the *gh* which the "strangers found / difficult to manage" '. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 99). Poems such as 'Anahorish', 'Toome' and 'Broagh' address psychocultural repressions by way of a series of linguistic repossessions, and although, as Parker argues, 'on one level they mourn the vanished music of Gaelic, on another they deny silence and loss'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 97). What Heaney is suggesting here is that the first steps towards some sort of reconciliation in the North could occur through a conscious use of the 'cultural depth-charges latent in words', and a willingness to accept the vast and varying diachronic associations such words carry with them. (Lang. P., 1994, p. 22). This approach is inclusive rather than exclusive, and its inclusiveness at times points to the possibility of a

reconciliation beyond sectarian division. Tony Curtis criticises Heaney for making too much of the linguistic differences in Northern Ireland. I would remind him that in the volatile and various social and linguistic conditions that exist in the North of Ireland, 'language is a minor point of major importance'. (Heaney. S., *The Redress of Poetry*, 1995, p. 66).

Heaney's etymological interests have occasioned several of his finest poems, but only a few have openly addressed the political questions that confront the Irish writer. The first section of 'Traditions' states the case succinctly.

> 'Our guttural muse
> was bulled long ago
> by the alliterative tradition,
> her uvula grows
>
> vestigial, forgotten
> like the coccyx
> or a Brigid's Cross
> yellowing in some outhouse
>
> while custom, that "most
> sovereign mistress",
> beds us down into
> the British Isles.'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Wintering Out*, 1972, p. 21)

The feeling of linguistic displacement in this poem is shared by many Irish writers. Heaney feels himself a prisoner of an alien language, condemned to use the language of an oppressor, condemned to use the dialect of Irish-English. The vocalic beauty of the Irish language and its ability to give the listener/chanter access to deep cultural truths makes England's imperialist efforts at suppressing the language seem especially tragic. Heaney focuses upon the question of language and nationality and the Irish writer's role in a language that is another's before it is his or hers. Various dialect words, word-play, and words with complex etymologies abound in many of Heaney's poems as the speaker

attempts to find and use a form of 'English' language that unleashes his particular Irish heritage. Later in this poem after noting evidence of the Elizabethan invasion, diction, archaisms, references to Shakespeare's' *Henry V* and Spenser's *State of Ireland*, and of lowland Scots words 'bawn' and 'mossland', Heaney cites Leopold Bloom, who responds to the question of nationality 'sensibly' in *Ulysses*: ' "Ireland", said Bloom, "I was born here. Ireland".' (Joyce. J., 1922, p. 60). The point is, however much one may feel the ignominy of speaking the conquerors' language, English is not merely the mother tongue but the native tongue of modern Ireland, just as the English literary tradition also forms, like it or not, a major part of the Irish literary landscape. The facts may prove distasteful, they are, nevertheless, undeniable. Heaney accepts this when he later imagines James Joyce telling him that 'The English language / belongs to us'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 93). Commenting on these language poems Heaney writes, 'I had a great sense of release as they were being written, a joy and a devil-may-careness, and that convinced me that one could be faithful to the nature of the English language ... and at the same time be faithful to one's own non-English origin, for me that is Co. Derry'. (Deane. S., 1977, p. 65).

James Simmons argues that this is just one more way of asserting a nationalist position. However, I would argue that Heaney here is asserting the right to diversity within Northern Ireland. Whatever linguistic code one has, it should be accepted not penalised or ridiculed or used as an imperial humiliation.

'The Other Side', an expression used both by Catholics and Protestants to refer to those people who are not part of their group, is a poem in which a Catholic speaker comes face-to-face with the patriarchal discourse of a Protestant neighbour. This poem anticipates poems especially in *North*, which deal with the rival traditions, matriarchal Catholicism and patriarchal Protestantism. Tony Curtis writes that the poem 'that most literally, and perhaps most richly "politicises" the terrain is this poem, in which Heaney intertwines land, religion and language to characterise, and tentatively close the distance between his own family and a neighbouring Protestant farmer'. (Curtis. T., 1982, pp. 68 - 69).

The speaker's farm borders his neighbours, 'his lea sloped / to meet our fallow'. The speaker does not describe the neighbour, only his language and his gestures. To the speaker's ears, the neighbour speaks with a 'fabulous, biblical dismissal, / that tongue of chosen people'. (Heaney. S., *Wintering Out*, 1972, p. 24). The reference here is to the

Protestant's assurance that his religion is true because his faith is steeped in the biblical word of God. The word 'dismissal' conflates the Protestant's use of the bible to dismiss the Catholic Church as an unauthentic faith with the Protestant's rejection of the Catholic missal, the readings and prayers of the Mass. Lang argues that 'the neighbour is also dismissive about the Catholic's land, and regards them perhaps as akin to Lazarus'. (Lang. P., 1994, p. 24). The view from the hidden Ireland is ably represented here in this poem, where the Protestant possesses the good land. The 'Protestant is the possessor' of the 'promised furrows', while the Catholics own the 'scraggy acres', highlighting again the 'injustices of centuries'. (Harkness. D., 1996, p. 87).

The Protestant neighbour speaks a patriarchal dictum, and 'his brain was a white-washed kitchen / hung with texts, swept tidy / as the body o' the kirk'. (Heaney. S., *Wintering Out,* 1972, p. 25). In short, the speaker's Protestant neighbour is a product of his 'side'. However, even though the neighbour speaks as one of the elect, he is not disrespectful of those from the other side. He waits quietly outside the house until the final bead of the rosary has been fondled before knocking on the door. In the community in which Heaney grew up, Protestants and Catholics lived in harmony with one another, they displayed tolerance and courtesy to each other, such as that displayed in this poem. Both men in this poem clearly recognise the alterity that defines their relationship, most, if not all, of their encounters over the years having been mediated by and bear the inscriptions of one side or the other. Even the talk of grass seed, if indeed it eventually occurs, will not escape the traces of biblical prophecy, religious differences, and social and political conflicts. However, the touch on the shoulder, minor as that gesture is, spans a cultural chasm, acknowledging and responding to a sense of empathy that, despite their differences, exists nonetheless between those who stand on either side of that chasm. The touch on the shoulder the speaker contemplates,

> 'Should I slip away, I wonder,
> or go up and touch his shoulder
> and talk about the weather
>
> or the price of grass-seed?'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Wintering Out*, 1972, p. 26).

carries neither the taint of submissiveness nor the bite of revolt and reveals the struggle for even the most basic communication.

James Simmons is harshly critical of Heaney in this poem, accusing him of being 'bound in his tribe and timidity', and of not making any effort to 'make a breakthrough'. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 53). Again I disagree with Simmons, this poem does 'not duck the difficulties of improving cross-community links, but rather faces them squarely with wry good humour'. The subject of this poem is rapprochement and I agree with Parker when he argues that the 'encounter between Heaney and a Protestant neighbour illustrates' just how difficult it is to breakdown 'centuries of conflict and distrust'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 101). The Irish critic Edna Longley, who often criticises Heaney's work, claims that 'The Other Side', does 'not minimise difference or its cultural vision but spans two languages to create a third'. (Longley. E., 1986, p. 144).

Terrifying present conditions in Belfast, brought about by or intensified by British occupation of the province, are treated in a set of lyrics collectively titled 'A Northern Hoard'. The five constituent poems are; 'Roots', 'No Man's Land', 'Stump', 'No Sanctuary' and 'Tinder'. The poems in this sequence illustrate the burden of Irish history. The speaker in 'A Northern Hoard', reflects upon the violence in Northern Ireland and the stance he must take toward that violence. The title of the sequence 'A Northern Hoard' is both a reference to the ancient Celtic Clans (or hordes) of Ireland's past, as well as to the diverse voices, myths and languages that exist in the North, a hoard of traditions that do now and always have waged war with one another. That the sequence of poems is set, in contemporary Ulster, is a sign of the continuing Irish struggle for survival and homeland. The chilly, disconsolate mood of this volume lashes the reader in this sequence of poems. The landscape is very bleak, almost a wasteland, nothing can grow here either in the landscape or in the creative imagination. Heaney's birthplace has become a sectarian battleground, a place of death rather than of life. Parker writes that 'crimes multiply' here and the only promise is the promise of 'revival of ancient tribal savagery'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 103). In 'Roots' the roots of love have been destroyed by the conflicts 'of gunshot, siren, and clucking gas'. The line 'we petrify or uproot now' warns that the constant and recalcitrant repetition of Nationalist and Unionist discourses over time 'petrify' into unproductive political positions unless they are 'uprooted now'. (Heaney. S., *Wintering Out*, 1972, p. 29). Uprooting the petrified discourses of hatred, sectarianism and exclusion portends the only source of hope for the people of the North.

In the second poem of the sequence, 'No Man's Land', the speaker is a deserter, abhorring complicity in and responsibility for the suffering. He finds respite only by leaving and thereby shutting out all signs of violence. Having temporarily escaped the sounds of the wounded, the speaker returns to 'confront my smeared doorstep'.

> 'I deserted, shut out
> their wounds' fierce awning,
> those palms like streaming webs.
>
> Must I crawl back now,
> spirochete, abroad between
> shred-hung wire and thorn,
> to confront my smeared doorstep
> and what lumpy dead?
> Why do I unceasingly
> arrive late to condone
> infected sutures
> and ill-knit bone?'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Wintering Out*, 1972, p. 30).

The violence has continued in his absence. The speaker's lament about arriving 'late to condone', suggests that his presence there condones the violence in some way. It also highlights the poet's disorientation and confusion.

Heaney is anguished by the whole situation. In the next poem 'Stump', he glimpses victims of the plague, huddled in a 'pow-wow'. We are presented with another nightmarish scene where the 'plague', the violence has become a ghastly witch's sabbath and the speaker is a carrier, a spirit as destructive as the riders of the Apocalypse, yet he is also a victim, the 'cauterized stump'. Is this the Irish consciousness which is implicated in and victim of its own violence? The question is loaded: 'what do I say if they wheel out their dead?' (Heaney. S., *Wintering Out*. 1972, p. 31). The question is to what extent should he concede to the pressures of his own time and place and people and to what extent should he follow the demands of his own imagination? This is the central question of Heaney's prose writing as well as of his poems. This question is very much in

evidence in *The Government Of The Tongue*, which, Andrews writes, 'has a double meaning, encoding the poet's doubt: should the tongue be governed by the claims of politics and morality, or should it acknowledge only the laws of its own venturesome urgencies?' (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 214). Heaney will continue to grapple with this question in subsequent volumes. Repeatedly, he wonders just what the poet has to offer in circumstances of overwhelming grief and loss.

In 'No Sanctuary', Lang writes that Heaney 'returns to the collective "we" and its culpability'. (Lang. P., 1994, p. 21). 'No Sanctuary' contains the staring face of a Halloween pumpkin which seems to mock customary assurances of faith. Heaney calls it the 'Death mask of harvest' with its 'unhallowed light'. The ancient festival, the Samain of the Celts, here symbolises the death of a culture, Christian belief is nullified by the death mask's stare, violence and death reign. The successive denigration of the Irish people has forced their return to and reliance upon Pagan customs, reminding us of what 'poor, bare forked' creatures we are beneath the thin veneer of 'civilisation'. There is a suggestion here that man needs to return and look into the undifferentiated energy, the chaos at the heart of the 'unhallowed light'. (Heaney. S., *Wintering Out*, 1972, p. 32).

In 'Tinder', the final poem of this sequence, Heaney is exploring the connections between Ulster's violent past and its violent present. In this poem, Heaney remembers an incident from childhood when he and some other boys tried to light a fire from flints. Heaney calls these flints the 'cold beads of history and home'. Parker calls them a 'rosary consisting of the martyrs and disasters in Nationalist mythology recited in Catholic households along with the Our Fathers and Hail Marys'. Parker continues, that obsessive 'fingering of the shards of the past has been spiritually disabling, and in trying to "raise a spark", the boys inflict wounds upon themselves'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 104).

> 'We clicked stone on stone
> That sparked a weak flame-pollen
>
> And failed, our knuckle joints
> Striking as often as the flints'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Wintering Out*, 1972, p. 33).

Heaney recognises how centuries of indoctrination on both sides, 'have bequeathed a legacy of intolerance and fear, and fostered the tribal mentality' which now expresses itself in sectarianism. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 104). Man is stripped of his accoutrements in this poem, the ground has been razed for the possibility of new histories and fertility, but also for new self-destructive 'Gomorrahs'.

Tony Curtis writes that the 'underprivileged tribe' who have lit the tinder of revolution wonder what to do with their 'new history', while the 'poet simultaneously wonders about his role'. (Curtis, T., 1982, p. 69). The trauma of the Troubles is very evident in this sequence. It is a sequence of poems that challenges and questions the speaker's personal versus public obligation towards the violence that plagues his country. David Lloyd criticises Heaney here, arguing that the 'historical and political particularities of the situations Heaney writes about become obscured'. (Garratt, R., 1995, p. 121). Corcoran counters this, writing that, although Heaney's poetry is 'a poetry everywhere bruised by Northern politics and history, ... it is not evasive, but on the contrary subtly responsive and alert to present and past conflict, concerned to be poetry, and not some other thing'. (Corcoran. N., 1986, p. 73). Heaney is anxious to avoid the 'snares of ideological declaration and received opinion', he does not want to be a mere mouthpiece for dogma. (Corcoran. N., 1986, p. 73). Heaney wants to assert the primacy of the imagination, he does not wish to contribute to entrenched and unproductive debates among exclusive groups and discourses. His struggle to suggest an emancipating discourse is clearly evident in this sequence.

In Bernard O'Donoghue's view, Heaney's 'first great' statement poem is 'The Tollund Man'. He continues that the 'most important thing' about 'The Tollund Man' is 'that it serves notice, more signally than any other poem in *Wintering Out,* that Heaney is now embarking on the painful process of writing his "Meditations in Time of Civil War", the "responsible tristia" of the "inner émigré" Ovid or Mandelstam'. (O'Donoghue. B., 1994, pp. 65 - 66). I have tried to emphasise in this chapter that Heaney's work is never to be taken in isolation from its social context. The issues of Irish nationalism, identity, conflicting traditions, and politics are constant concerns in Heaney's poetry. However, that fact does not mean that he necessarily writes verse with a narrow political agenda.

Heaney was aided in his quest for 'befitting emblems', 'images and symbols adequate to our predicament' when he discovered P.V., Glob's Book *The Bog People,* in nineteen-

sixty-nine. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, pp. 56-57). 'The Tollund Man' is a poem which responds powerfully to the photographs in Glob's book. What Glob offers is an image of a pre-Christian, Northern European tribal society, in which ritual violence is a necessary part of the structure of life. Most of the Iron Age bodies recovered from the Jutland Bogs and documented by Glob had been the victims of ritual killings, many of them having served as human sacrifices to the earth Goddess Nerthus. Heaney detected a kinship between the Pagan civilisations of Jutland and Ireland's own Celtic traditions and saw the fatal attraction of Nerthus living on in such figures from the Nationalist pantheon as Kathleen ni Houlihan (Caitlin ni Houlihan), the Shan Van Vocht (Shean Bhean Bhocht), and Mother Ireland. Killings for an Iron Age Goddess of the boglands are recorded throughout Northern Europe, including Ireland. But as Heaney is to infer in his next volume, *North*, these Jutlanders and their language are related to the Vikings who settled in Ireland. Thus, Heaney is also continuing to explore the multiplicity of voices that constitute Ireland's traditions, literature and history, here. In an interview with Brian Donnelly in nineteen-seventy-seven, Heaney articulated his sense of the force of the Iron Age narratives as a means of establishing a space in which it was possible for him to encounter contemporary atrocities which, otherwise, he did not feel he could adequately encompass within his poetry: 'My emotions, my feelings, whatever those instinctive energies are that have to be engaged for a poem, those energies quickened more when contemplating a victim, strangely, from two thousand years ago, than they did from contemplating a man at the end of the road being swept into a plastic bag – I mean the barman at the end of our road tried to carry out a bomb and it blew up. Now there is of course something terrible about that, but somehow language, words didn't live in the way I think they have to live in a poem when they were hovering over that kind of horror and pity'. (Corcoran. N., 1986, p. 96).

'The Tollund Man' acts as a prelude to the bog poems and other historical poems of *North*. In this poem and in his next volume, Heaney incorporates the voices of mythic characters and the victims of the Iron Age sacrifices in poems that juxtapose, or cohabit, the recent violence in Northern Ireland and its history of violence and hegemony. He is not, however, striving for a mythic discourse through which the victims of recent violence will be 'transformed utterly', as the slain revolutionaries of the Easter Uprising are in Yeat's poem. To deify or glorify a victim is, to a certain extent, to perpetuate the need for that victim; to look directly at the victim is to perceive the need for a solution to the

violence. Heaney uses myth to help reconcile himself to the current violence of Ulster and to try to come to some understanding of it.

In section two of this poem, Heaney recalls an incident in which the bodies of four young Catholics, murdered by Protestant militants, were dragged along a railway line in an act of mutilation.

> 'Tell-tale skin and teeth
> Flecking the sleepers
> Of four young brothers, trailed
> For miles along the lines.'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Wintering Out*, 1972, p. 37).

By focusing upon the individual victims, Heaney gives voice in absentia to those victims who can no longer speak, and they speak of senseless violence. A violence that must stop. The death of 'The Tollund Man' was at least part of a framework of belief and it held a meaning within the seasonal and agricultural rhythms of a people, but the current violence is both senseless and unnecessary. Also 'the sadism and brutality surrounding contemporary murders is all the more appalling' compared with the almost serene death of the man from Tollund. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 107). In the last section of this poem, Heaney identifies with 'The Tollund Man' as a victim of violence whose 'sad freedom' is the uncertainty of finding himself pulled by forces outside his control. Heaney imagines himself travelling in Jutland, and if Jutland has had its victims, so too has Heaney's own native place. The similarity between the violent context of 'The Tollund Man' and the violent context of Heaney's home is that sense of 'sad freedom'. For Heaney that 'sad freedom' involves seeing violence for what it is without glorifying it. When Heaney prays to 'The Tollund Man' to make the corpses 'germinate', he is drawing hopeful parallels between the ritual killing and fertility rites of the Iron Age and the ritual killing and sectarian violence of contemporary Northern Ireland. Heaney is praying for the seeds to germinate into creativity and peace, not violence.

Ciaràn Carson has accused Heaney of being 'the laureate of violence – a myth maker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, an apologist for the situation, in the last resort, a mystifier.' (Carson. C., 1975, pp. 183-186). I disagree with Carson, the various speaking

voices in Heaney's poems question and interpret the myths of the past, they do not valorise the victims, past or present. Garratt writes that the speakers in Heaney's poems 'at times adopt an ethical discourse and at other times a self-reflective discourse of demystification both of which comprehend and question rather than transform'. (Garrett. R., 1995, p. 7). James Simmons criticises Heaney, arguing that the poet is more concerned with his own responses to and feelings about the violence than he is about the victims themselves, and that he trivialises the violence rather than assuages it. I would remind Simmons that Heaney is anxiously alert to the problematics of writing poems about the Irish political situation. Much of his poetry is scored with the apprehension that his sense of responsibility as a Northern Irish poet brings to him. He is not trivialising the issues nor evading them, he is 'offering befitting emblems'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 57).

WINTERING OUT: PART TWO

In part two of *Wintering Out*, Heaney increasingly places under scrutiny the inherited cultural and religious truisms of his community and the dominant register of the poems is interrogative. Heaney's 'graceless, scared and stunted community' is put under the spotlight in this section, where many of the evoked figures suffer some kind of human diminishment, isolation, repression, disenchantment, exploitation or betrayal. We glimpse an imperfect world where the community is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic and where a Catholic ethos dominates. A community more concerned with conformity than with any notion of true humanity, social justice, equality or freedom. A community terrified by any show of individualism or diversity. One sees the hurt and derangement occasioned by social taboo and, beyond that, the cruel imperfections of the human condition itself. Heaney is subtly insightful as he meditates on the pain and hurt of life, and in particular the lives of Irish women.

The Irish writer Tim Pat Coogan has spoken provocatively of Ireland having suffered for so long from 'two forms of colonialism', that of London and that of Rome. The influence of Rome is very strong in Ireland, in the sense that the Catholic Church in Ireland is ultra-ultramontane in its subservience to a Vatican that appoints all its senior Bishops, taking care to pick only orthodox conservatives. Pope John Paul is said to regard Ireland as his last firm bastion in Europe, as much as his native Poland, at a time, when in many

countries, the faith has been receding. The Irish Catholic Church is authoritarian and secretive, and very centred on moral sexual issues. It has huge influence over the State and it is commonplace for Bishops to interfere in politics. Mary Robinson has described its 'patriarchal, male-dominated presence, as probably the worst single oppressive force subjugating women in Ireland'. (Donovan. K., 1994, p. 59). The Church denies freedom of choice in personal matters also, it outlaws divorce and abortion and it was only very, very recently that birth control and homosexual practice were finally legalised. This 'holier than Rome' attitude is enshrined in the Irish Constitution. Women had no part in framing Bunreacht na hEireann, the Irish Constitution, not one woman took part in drafting it. The article in the Constitution that is of particular interest for the purpose of this discussion is Article 41.2. This article reads:

1. In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.
2. The State shall therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. (Donovan. K., 1994, p. 200).

To many this statement is grossly offensive to the dignity and freedoms of womanhood. It speaks of woman's life within the home (not just her work there), implying that the natural vocation of woman (the generic is used, so it means all women), is in the home. It is the grossest form of sexual stereotyping. It can be regarded as an implicit denial of freedom of choice to women in personal matters, a freedom taken for granted by men. It speaks of mothers neglecting their duties, but omits to mention the duties of fathers. It fails to recognise that a woman's place is a woman's choice. This article shows that the vision of the Irish State on the role of women in Irish society is that of a full-time wife and mother in a indissoluble marriage, having a preference for home duties and 'natural duties' as a mother. The institutional alliance between Church and State which supported traditional familial arrangements in practical effect put women in a cage. This article also shows that the goals of State policy were by and large those of the Catholic Church.

In 'Limbo' and 'Bye-Child, Heaney begins to break the taboo of silence that surrounds illegitimacy and infanticide (among many other issues) in Ireland. Both poems deal with the searing effects of the shame felt by women who have had 'illegitimate' children.

Roger Sawyer, in his book *We are but Women* writes that 'infanticide was (and in some rural areas still is) committed to avoid disgrace ... there are now grounds for believing that it was far commoner than contemporary observers appreciated'. (Sawyer. R., 1993 pp. 31 – 32). Few in Ireland or indeed the Western world were left in any doubt of this when the 'Report of the Tribunal of Enquiry into the Kerry Babies Case', of nineteen-eighty-four was published. The enquiry, which set out to discover the circumstances surrounding the death of the 'Cahirciveen Baby', found that in the same month, April nineteen-eighty-four, in the same County, County Kerry, 'not one but two cases of infanticide had been committed. Both children were illegitimate'. (Sawyer. R., 1993 p. 179).

'Limbo' is not just concerned with 'private cruelties and guilt' but is a chilling tale about the present state of Ireland. 'Limbo' is a horrific example of how 'tribal taboos and laws can so easily outweigh civilised, humane values. Rather than risk ostracisation by the "Christian" community in which she lives, the unmarried mother of 'Limbo' drowns her new-born baby son'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 112). The hypocrisy of a society which 'venerates the role of the married mother in the home', but cares not at all for women who have fallen off the pedestal on which history and religion have placed them, and which ignores the role of men in procreation, is exposed. (Keogh. D., 1994, p. 38). This society labels an innocent new-born child 'illegitimate' and attaches such dark and evil connotations to that label that the mother feels it is preferable for the child to die rather than live, both for it's sake and for her own. Parker writes that 'though the killing was in part motivated by her desire to protect herself, it can also be seen as a perverse act of love, for if the child had survived, he would have suffered the "stigma of bastardy". One must assume that the forgiveness that Christ showed to the woman taken in adultery has no place in Bally Shannon'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 113). Andrews argues that this social order is 'reductive, authoritarian and responsible for the corruption or denial of natural human feeling; the private life is speculative, repressed and infinitely sad; the natural world and beyond that, the whole cosmic order, are cold and dead'. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 72). Consequently, all creation is condemned to a state of inescapable and perpetual 'Limbo'. This is an alien world where life is taken away. Heaven and Hell one can attempt to understand but 'Limbo' has always appeared a bit out of focus, defined by what it is not rather than what it is. The woman's cross is not only the 'Christian' disapproval of 'bastardy' but also her own pain.

Heaney opens the poem with the flatness of a news report;

'Fishermen at Ballyshannon
Netted an infant last night
Along with the salmon...'

(Heaney. S., *Wintering Out*, 1972, p. 58).

He then moves from seemingly cruel, casual irony but with an underlying pathos 'an illegitimate spawning / A small one thrown back / to the waters', to the grief of the mother.

'Ducking him tenderly

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

(Heaney. S., *Wintering Out*, 1972, p. 58).

We are now focused firmly on the mother's pain, and after such pain what knowledge? Heaney seeks to understand the mother's action in a broader, social context. This woman, like so many other Irish women, had no choice, since the social taboo deriving from religious pressure is the main determinant of her action. That action confirms a human condition of unalterable and absolute degeneracy. Andrews writes 'it is as if her religion initiates and endorses what she does. She is fulfilling a ritual sacrifice at the cost of her own humanity and all natural feeling'. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 124). Both mother and baby are victims of a religious and social order that is eventually revealed as factitious and invalid. At the end of 'Limbo' Christ is a figure of the most intense exclusion and ineffectualness 'Even Christ's palms, unhealed, / Smart and cannot fish there'. We are left with the realisation that not only can mortal life include such an agonising act but also that in the universe a region of absolute indifference exists, beyond even Christ's reach.

In 'Bye-Child', the companion piece to 'Limbo', we are confronted with the horrors of parental abuse. This poem concerns another 'illegitimate' child, another 'reject' of Irish society who has been confined to a hen-house by a mother who is ashamed of him, and who because of the pressures of her society, tries to hide her 'sin' form the eyes of the world. The child has been robbed of the power of speech, he has been reduced to the bare grounds of his psychic presence. The child has become a spirit, a little void, deprived of all human socialisation and development of personality. We are presented with another nightmarish vision of a maimed culture, a disordered universe and a world in which the suffering of the good can only be endured. 'Man's inhumanity to Man' is brought forcibly home to us with the poignant description of the boy's removal from the centre of life and love and sanity, into a realm which defies words and all natural human feeling. Again, both mother and boy are victims. The mother's actions have reduced her to no more than a 'poor, bare, forked creature', something less than human, less than animal even, 'by a religious and social order more concerned with keeping up appearances than with humane reason and values'. (Bocock. R., *et al.*, 1985, p. 212). The death of the baby in 'Limbo' and the physical, emotional and spiritual deprivation of the child in 'Bye-Child' constitute an important failure on the part of the Irish Church and State.

In the final poem of *Wintering Out*, Heaney is physically removed from Ireland. 'Westering' here means making a journey westward, specifically the trip Heaney and his family made to California in nineteen-seventy. On the day of the Crucifixion the journey to the 'new world' starts, ostensibly leaving symbols of religion and minds tinged by the centuries of an exclusive Christianity behind. For Heaney the cradle of civilisation has become an 'empty amphitheatre'. Andrews writes that 'it is as if Ireland endures the empty stillness' and 'falling light' of a continual Good Friday, her people 'bent/to the studded crucifix', bowed in a 'posture of perpetual supplication'. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 79). Heaney feels some release at escaping the priest ridden backwater with the 'congregations' in their 'still churches', this society of ritual pretensions with no true centre of spiritual gravity.

> 'What nails dropped out that hour?
> Roads unreeled, unreeled'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Wintering Out*, 1972, p. 68).

California represents a new freedom for the poet, a new found ability to escape from the bonds of orthodoxy. 'The poet has to go away in order to find home' in order to see Ireland as it really is. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 211). Like Frost's birch-stringer, Heaney has to 'get away from earth a while / And then come back to it'. This again prefigures the advice Heaney imagines James Joyce giving him in the later volume *Station Island*. There, Joyce suggests that Heaney must 'strike' out alone, strength, vision, confirmation must come from remaining 'at a tangent'; 'out on your own', as Osip Mandelstam realised. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, pp. 93 - 94).

Religion, Christianity, Christian allusion feature in this poem and in many of Heaney's poems, yet it is difficult to define his attitude towards Catholicism and Christianity. In part one of this volume, with its focus on the larger political and historical distress, and in part two, with its focus on the personal, domestic, social and religious distress of many Irish women, religion seems an actual force for harm. Yet to assume this would be reductive and to ignore the complexity of Heaney's responses. All one can say at this stage in his career is that Heaney's attitudes to Catholicism and Christianity are complex and ambivalent. He does not argue with or attempt to explain the human condition, however, the questioning and self-questioning in these poems belies any unified position or stance to the violence or to the religious and social order in Ireland. The overwhelming sense of loss is here again in this final poem, loss, suffering, dispossession and injustice which has dominated this volume as a whole.

CONCLUSION

In my introduction to this chapter I said that Heaney's notions about what poetry should be changed in the late nineteen-sixties, when the violence in the North erupted again. Heaney wrote in *Preoccupations* that poetry now became for him, 'a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 56). In *Wintering Out*, Heaney's search is apparent. He clearly realises that the times demand a poetry commensurate with their social and political upheaval, but the overtly political or propagandist poem is not the answer. The 'idiom' that Heaney is searching for is remote from that of political activism. Heaney does not wish to re-articulate the old antagonisms of Ulster politics from a single and exclusionary perspective, he therefore strives to create a form of poetry that circumvents political monologism. In this volume, Heaney attempts

to reinscribe or revise what Seamus Deane calls the 'outmoded' terms that malinger in the Irish consciousness: 'the continuation of the Northern "problem", where "unionism" and "nationalism" still compete for supremacy in relation to ideas of identity racially defined as either "Irish" or "British" in communities which are deformed by believing themselves to be the historic inheritors of those identities and the traditions presumed to go with them'. (Deane. S., 1986, p. 53). Throughout this volume, Heaney's anxiety over what the role of the poet should be in such times of crisis is even more apparent than in the previous two volumes. The apprehension that his sense of responsibility as a Northern Irish poet brings him is particularly apparent in the poems of 'A Northern Hoard', where he considers the relationship between the contemplative, essentially passive life of the poet and the active life of those who became directly involved in the affairs of the world. Can the poet ever have any kind of effective role in the face of intense suffering? This sense of conflict over his own position becomes more clearly focused in *North* and *Field Work* which will be discussed in the next two chapters of this study. In part two of this volume Heaney highlights particular facets, often hidden of the human consciousness and unconscious. He exposes the secret culture of the hidden Ireland and the malign influence of the Irish Catholic church, and the injurious impact of the relationship between Church and State on the Irish People.

To conclude, I believe that Heaney's verse in this volume in the main, transcends the confinements of the narrow political arena. The confrontations encountered in his verse account for one of the defining strengths of his work. Heaney examines social and political exigencies that structure the various elements of his verse, but his poems do not plead for political action. Catholic and Protestant, North and South, Republican and Unionist, rural and urban, these are the dichotomies associated with Heaney, the dichotomies that some of his more stringent readers have expected him to resolve. The resolution of the larger social issues, if it arises at all in the poetry, arises from the emotional matrix of the individual author, from the ambivalences and tensions that characterise Heaney's response to the events surrounding him. Such poems, as Paulin asserts, embody a historical awareness that merits political analysis. Throughout this bleak volume, Heaney searches for the space he needs to manage both political concerns and narrative integrity, and to avoid the pressures to 'take a side' in a poetry that attempts to chart a course between the conflicting demands of art and life.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POETRY OF RESISTANCE

IN

NORTH?

'Enjoy poetry as long as you don't use it to escape reality'.

Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. XIX.

INTRODUCTION

The focus in this third chapter of the thesis is Heaney's fourth volume *North*, which was written between nineteen-seventy-one and nineteen-seventy-five. This particular volume concentrates on the public sphere and has excited more comment and criticism than any other volume of his work to date. It has been labelled Heaney's most 'political' volume.

The volume is divided into two parts. In the first part of *North* Heaney describes tribal violence and atrocities, feuding and revenge, military conquest followed by linguistic colonisation and sectarianism. We are presented with the lamentable behaviour of all sides involved in Ireland's struggle and the suffering that is occasioned by the search for self-determination.

Part two of *North* consists of poems that confront the tragedy of Ulster more personally than anything which this poet has published before. In part two Heaney highlights formative moments from his youth and early manhood. He remembers interrogations by police and priests which he either experienced or witnessed. He identifies the psychological and spiritual abuse of racial conditioning and the physical abuse committed in the name of Mother Church or Father State, both of whom aimed to keep the Catholic population in a state of subjugation, to create and maintain a sense of inferiority and unworthiness amongst Catholics and thus to maintain the status quo.

Heaney is not afraid to grapple with the political issues that divided / divide his country, the verse is 'equally bold' as it ransacks his own personal history and the history of his country for the appropriate metaphor, the correct image 'adequate', as he has written 'to our predicament'. (Morrison. B., 1982, pp. 58 – 59). Heaney's predicament, his cultural perspective, is one continually confronted by a long tradition of sectarian violence, and the vision of the past gradually revealed in his verse begins and ends in interrogation demanding to know whether or not peace and violence represent the two guises of historical progress, as he soul-searches for what the proper role of the poet should be in such circumstances. Heaney is careful not to respond too directly to the compulsions of the times, yet he does seek for the way through to communicate the horrors in a compassionate and responsible way. As is proper, he remains tentative over the direct influence poetry has on a situation but he does discuss the need for a solution: 'changing

the structures of feeling', yet he is worldly-wise enough to know that justice may be ultimately unattainable.

As in previous chapters, I will concentrate on only a small percentage of the poems in this volume. Many writers have devoted volumes to *North* and I am allowing a mere chapter; while I am very aware of the dangers of this it is the only option open to me in this particular study. I will concentrate on those poems which have aroused the most controversy, the most excitement and criticism and for my part, the most interest.

My argument in this chapter is that this is where we see Heaney at his most vulnerable. In *North* the delicate balance which Heaney has, up until now managed to maintain, between the poles of social responsibility and of self-exploration / artistic freedom wavers. This is where Heaney concedes to the influences and pressures of Ireland. It is, in my view, by far his most sustained meditation on the Troubles. Heaney's despair, his confusion, hurt, anger and mental duality are far more apparent in *North* than in his previous volumes. There is a deeply felt sense of loss, guilt and exhaustion here and the volume closes with the poet questioning his own reasons for writing. This was a critical period for Heaney and before embarking on an analysis of *North* it is, I feel, appropriate to establish the pattern of events which helped to shape the poet's consciousness at that particular time of his life and phase of his career.

CONTEMPORARY BACKGROUND

As mentioned in chapter two of this study, Westminster assumed direct responsibility for Northern Irish affairs in March nineteen-seventy-two. This inevitably altered the relationship between the two parts of Ireland. A much greater emphasis on Ministerial and in particular Prime Ministerial meetings, more in London and Dublin than Belfast, took matters beyond the reach of the elected representatives of the province. These latter frequently felt marginalised, while their constituents found it impossible to call their governors to account. The national parties were not represented in Northern Ireland, so Governments, Labour or Conservative, could act without regard to elected opinion on the ground. William Whitelaw, a close friend of Prime Minister Heath, was declared the first ever Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Whitelaw faced a double threat, from Unionists who deeply resented their loss of control and British lack of confidence in

them, and from the Provisional IRA which mounted its most sustained effort to disrupt the province and bomb Britain out of Ireland. Whitelaw demonstrated his willingness to compromise by meeting Provisional IRA leaders in London in July nineteen-seventy-two, however it came to nothing as the IRA would not compromise and on the twenty-first of July nineteen-seventy-two, they killed eleven people in Belfast on what became known as Bloody Friday. Having failed to stop the IRA campaign, Whitelaw launched 'Operation Motorman' on the thirty-first of July nineteen-seventy-two, when he sent the Army into 'No-Go' areas, finally ending them. Terrorism escalated throughout this period, paramilitary violence continued in the province, spilling over from time to time into the Republic and into Britain. Whitelaw realised that the old Westminster-style majority-rule Stormont would not do. There must be proper sharing of power between majority and minority representatives if power was again to be devolved to Belfast. However, in an artificially contrived polity, with a built-in, permanent, Unionist majority, talk of democracy by 'majority-rule' was misleading. Furthermore it soon came to be accepted by the new English Government that recognition of a role for the Nationalist community implied recognition of the broader 'Irish dimension', no matter how unpalatable this might be to Unionists. Whitelaw was determined to achieve an executive body made up of representatives of both traditional Unionism and Nationalism and on the thirtieth of October nineteen-seventy-two a document on Northern Ireland's future, recognising its 'Irish dimension' and constitutional rights, was published by the British Government.

On the twentieth of March nineteen-seventy-three, a White Paper 'Constitutional Proposals for Northern Ireland' recommended a return to devolution, with power-sharing in an Assembly with specific local responsibilities, and a Council of Ireland to institutionalise regular consultation between Belfast and Dublin. Voting took place on the twenty-eighth of June nineteen-seventy-three to elect the Assembly, whose seventy-eight members convened on the thirty-first of July nineteen-seventy-three. By November of that year a consensus on the establishment of a power sharing Executive had been reached, with Brian Faulkner as its Chief Executive. However, when the Sunningdale Conference proposed a Council of Ireland on the twelfth of December nineteen-seventy-three, Unionist hard-line hostility knew no bounds, there was outrage, panic and hysteria as Unionists in general rejected the Council of Ireland as a threat to the Union. The Freudian fears of the Unionist community that anything in the way of benignity towards the minority or Dublin, would inevitably thrust them towards a united Ireland were kindled afresh. These fears, combined with a lack of political will on the part of the then

British Government, and a very marked display of willpower, though of an unhelpful sort, on the part of the British Army played a significant part in wrecking the remarkable political development of the time.

Whitelaw was recalled to London in December nineteen-seventy-three and Heath lost the General Election of February nineteen-seventy-four. In May nineteen-seventy-four, a widespread strike called by the Ulster Workers Council, which lasted from the fifteenth to the twenty-ninth of that month, forced the resignation of the Executive on the twenty-eighth of May and the abandonment, for the time being at least, of the hopeful experiment of power-sharing. Following the fall of the Executive, Labour took up direct rule unenthusiastically. The distancing of Great Britain from Northern Ireland was vividly illustrated in November nineteen-seventy-four when, in the wake of an IRA bombing outrage in Birmingham, the Government rushed through Westminster a 'Prevention of Terrorism Act', which, a Labour Cabinet Minister admitted privately, was 'equivalent to banishing British citizens to Northern Ireland which was supposedly part of the United Kingdom'. It is hardly surprising that the remainder of the Labour Government's life witnessed a policy of what Wilson admitted must have seemed a 'negative almost defeatist' character, with 'no new proposal for the future of the province'. (Boyce. D.G., 1996, p. 88). The IRA too played a role in frustrating any policies which did not factor the IRA into the equation. There was an ever-rising death toll in Northern Ireland in the early nineteen-seventies and ever present fear and the spread of mayhem. But despite IRA atrocities during this period the behaviour of the British Army helped to tip the balance back in favour of the Provisionals and away from the horror that the IRA had engendered with atrocities like 'Bloody Friday'. During this period also the Provisional IRA stripped itself down to a leaner and certainly meaner, force. They became more selective in their operations and their intelligence-gathering reached a deadly plane of efficiency. Sectarian murder and rising tension, torture, beatings, maiming, corruption and near anarchy dominated this period in Northern Ireland where to be Catholic was the equivalent of being black in South Africa.

This was the Northern Ireland that Heaney and his family left behind when they moved to the Republic in nineteen-seventy-two. There was much discussion at the time, and subsequently, as to Heaney's motives for moving. These have variously been described as being because he found it difficult to settle down after his year in the United States, and because Northern Ireland was not a suitable or safe place in which to raise a family. It was also suggested that Heaney wanted to embark on a new way of life in a new area and that he had become disenchanted with the 'committee atmosphere' of Belfast. Others suggested that Heaney felt that it was time to 'go it alone' and to devote himself totally to poetry without the distraction of teaching. Last but not least it was suggested that he wanted to distance himself from the 'corrupt set-up' in the North. Without doubt political considerations affected Heaney's decision to leave the North of Ireland; however it is only in retrospective explanations that Heaney stresses his determination to distance himself ideologically from the 'corrupt set-up'. In an interview with James Randall in nineteen-seventy-nine, Heaney said, 'undoubtedly I was aware of a political dimension to the move south of the border ...' (Randall. J., 1979, p. 8). In another interview in nineteen-seventy-nine, this time with Seamus Deane, Heaney said 'for the Protestant sensibility the Troubles were an interruption and disruption of the status quo ... For the Catholic writer, I think the Troubles were a critical moment, a turning point, possibly a vision of some kind of fulfilment. The blueprint in the Catholic writer's head predicted that a history would fulfil itself in a United Ireland or in something ... In the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies the world was changing for the Catholic imagination. I felt I was compromising some part of myself by staying in a situation where socially, and indeed, imaginatively there were pressures against regarding the moment as critical'. (Deane. S., 1979, pp. 47 –48). Heaney was a prominent public figure and news of his move was reported upon, both in the South and in the North of Ireland. In the South, the *Irish Times* headlines welcomed his arrival, while in the North, the Unionist Protestant *Telegraph* rejoiced in the fact that 'the well-known papist propagandist' was on his way to 'his spiritual home in the popish republic'. Heaney himself had mixed feelings about the move, he left behind his birthplace, home, extended family, friends and colleagues, and faced an uncertain future. Heaney's friends and colleagues also had mixed feelings about the move. They felt a certain sense of betrayal, not only because Heaney had left the North but because he had chosen the Republic of Ireland as his new home rather than somewhere else in the world. Again, in his interview with Seamus Deane in nineteen-

seventy-nine, Heaney recalled his own sense of ambivalence about the move, 'going to the South was perhaps emblematic for me and was certainly so for some of the people I knew. To the Unionists it looked like a betrayal of the Northern thing'. . (Deane. S., 1979, pp. 47 –48). Heaney had (and still has) celebrity status as a public poet and as a result bore the weight of his own community's expectations as well as the resentments of some of those in the North who were (and are) faithful to an opposing tradition. After Heaney's move to the South there was a general air of expectation among his community in the North and in general in the South that he would make a statement, take a side. Catholics throughout Ireland fashioned Heaney as a public spokesman and expected him to speak out for his oppressed people.

It is a truism that literature and politics in Ireland, just as religion and politics, have always been closely entwined and that Auden's assertion in his elegy on Yeats that 'poetry makes nothing happen', does not have an Irish application. The long-standing symbolic relationship between literature and politics in Ireland itself lays an extra burden and responsibility on the shoulders of the Northern Irish poet, who resents, sometimes explicitly, the imperious claims of the blood-sodden politics. One can respect the natural hesitation the poet may feel at taking on a 'big theme', his awareness of the dangers in the willed forcing of sensibility into the hot, angry world of bombs and bullets. However, what must be remembered is that poets, artists and writers in Southern Ireland at this time and up until very recently, were expected to work in a distinctive national mode, and to mount a social criticism of a society with clearly defined targets for attack. The Irish Republic/public demanded that poets and artists fulfil clearly defined social and national roles. As Irish people began to sense their changing circumstances and as the Northern crisis challenged much that they had taken for granted about the national life, it was the artist and particularly the writer and poet who was expected to provide some level of guidance as to the way forward. Writers and poets were therefore asked to reflect quite specifically on the contemporary struggle in the North. Writers and poets in the South were expected to nourish the dominant ideology of the Southern State. The widespread belief of the Church, the major political parties and the Republic at large was that the constitutional arrangements of nineteen-twenty-one had left much unfinished business to be completed in the future. Crucial amidst such business was the undoing of the great wrong of partition in the reunification of the nation. The ideal was of a thirty-two-county Republican Ireland and the South, when faced by the ideological challenge of the

Northern crisis (at that time) showed an ambivalence that gave heart and encouragement to the men of violence.

The Northern Irish problem is too complex to be dealt with in glib slogans or pamphleteering propaganda, yet the burden is not to be so easily shrugged off. Events since nineteen-sixty-eight forced Heaney, in his own words to 'hug our little destiny again'. As he remarked in nineteen-eighty 'from that moment (nineteen-sixty-nine) 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'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 56). As the Belfast graffito succinctly puts it, 'anyone who isn't confused here doesn't really understand what's going on'. Heaney was confused and he was also under tremendous pressures from all sides to make some sort of pronouncement on what was going on. The confusion and the pressures created a duality in Heaney at that time. *North* is the product of that confusion and of those pressures, but it is also the product of Heaney's honest attempt to understand and interpret the situation and to come to some conclusion about a possible solution.

NORTH: PART ONE

The study of racial history often leads one far afield, engendering comparisons between cultures that would seem to share little in their current state of development. In *North* Heaney again draws on P.V. Glob's book *The Bog People* published in nineteen-sixty-nine, which contained photographs of Danish men and women whose bodies had been remarkably preserved by the tanning agents present in the bogs where they had lain for almost two thousand years. As was noted in chapter two of this study, many of those found had clearly been the victims of ritual sacrifice. The Norsemen first invaded Ireland during the eighth century, and Heaney began to cultivate the obvious parallels between their violent culture and the one that now divides contemporary Ireland. 'The Tollund Man' from *Wintering Out* was Heaney's first poem to investigate the Iron Age culture of Denmark, an investigation that culminates in the poems of *North*. For Heaney, Denmark's Iron Age provides the dire precedent for the problems of Northern Ireland and his poems look back at that time seeking sustenance in simple understanding. By way of Glob and Bogland, Heaney began to find an answer to the question of what images and symbols might be adequate to the Irish predicament.

The first poem the study will discuss from *North* is 'Funeral Rites'; the theme of this poem is revenge and how one can possibly stop the awful cycle of revenge killings. In this poem Heaney refers to 'Njal's Saga' which recounts the years of savage internal strife in Iceland which led to the loss of the independence that her pioneers had created. From the Saga's anonymous author, writing around twelve-hundred-and-eighty of the chronic feuding among Iceland's Norsemen, Heaney garners sobering lessons for his own bellicose culture seven hundred years later. Heaney turns to histories of primitive cultures that resemble his as he strives for an impartial view of ancient and contemporary history.

The opening of 'Funeral Rites' suggests the individual bearing the crushing burden of the North's funereal ritual.

> 'I shouldered a kind of manhood,
> stepping in to lift the coffins
> of dead relations ...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 6).

However, Heaney goes on to suggest that the rituals and ceremonies practised by his family and by the local community help them come to terms with death, help them grieve and help them resume everyday life.

> 'Dear soapstone masks,
> kissing their igloo brows
> had to suffice
>
> before the nails were sunk
> and the black glacier
> of each funeral
> pushed away.'
>
> (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 7).

The funeral has provided reassurance and communal solidarity. In section two of the poem however, we are brought into direct confrontation with the internecine squabbles and murderous intrigues of Northern Ireland.

> 'Now as news comes in
> of each neighbourly murder
> we pine for ceremony, ...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 7).

What sort of ritual could possibly contain the anger and grief that are occasioned by such violent deaths? Heaney advocates a public ceremony involving a descent into the tombs of Boyne. His hope is that such a ceremony might result in a cultural rebirth and end the violence. Heaney imagines a massive, non-sectarian funeral cortege to 'the great chambers of Boyne' in which both sides bury their hatchets with their dead. The crowd descends from the streets of Belfast and the bloodshed of 'each neighbourly murder' into the healing darkness of the neolithic tombs. Entry into and re-emergence from the dark are perhaps the most ancient of all human metaphors for death and rebirth. Heaney imagines each family driving its car through the sepulchre and emerging renewed, the sins of the past and the divisiveness of the present left inside the tomb. Once the tomb is sealed the 'cud of memory', the slow constant contemplation of the past and present and of injustices that must be avenged will be 'allayed for once'. As a result each family will drive home 'past Strang and Carling fjords', emblems of Ireland's varied and violent past, and leave those 'dead by violence ... unavenged'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, pp. 8 - 9).

Heaney's use of the Boyne tombs is interesting, the burial chambers of the megalithic site of Newgrange, in the Boyne valley, take one back to pre-Christian Ireland. In the native Celtic religion, the Boyne was a sacred river, 'the fountain of all knowledge', and the Newgrange site itself was associated with Aengus, the Celtic God of love. However, the Boyne has other associations too, the Orange Day marches every twelfth of July, celebrating the defeat of Catholic James II by Protestant William III, are also associated with the Boyne.

Heaney is looking for the common ground here as he tries desperately to offer at least a glimpse of consolation.

> 'disposed like Gunnar
> who lay beautiful
> inside his burial mound,
> though dead by violence
>
> and unavenged...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 9).

Heaney wants to displace the welter of blood revenge with forgiveness. For Heaney, Gunnar is beautiful here because 'though dead by violence', he seemed to see outside the vicious circle of death and revenge killings for a short time. Heaney strains to make a ceremony at the heart of the Irish Troubles, the Boyne area, in the hope that this burial could be a sufficient arbitration for all the Irish dead and in the hope that all the Irish living might evolve what Jung called a 'higher consciousness' in response to an apparently intolerable conflict.

Neil Corcoran contends that this poem 'urgently desires an end to the terrible cycle, but it can imagine such a thing, only in a mythologized visionary realm' (Corcoran. N., 1986, p. 111). Edna Longley argues that 'Heaney's imaginative appropriation of the ceremonies of mythic ritual ... dignify the killing and give it a disturbing sense of affirmatory ... inevitability'. (Longley. E., 1986, p. 140). It might be said in Heaney's defence that he is employing his vision neutrally, as it were, as explanatory of the pathology of violence, not as in any sense an endorsement or an explaining away of the violence. Heaney longs to create a community and a communion through a symbolic act, although he recognises that the 'cud of memory', what is referred to as 'memory incubating the spilled blood' in the poem 'North', exerts a powerful influence that will not be allayed so easily. Hope is what the two opposing communities in the North of Ireland desperately need if there is to be any attempt at reconciliation, however the delicate aspirations and hopefulness of this poem will not be found in the rest of *North*.

The next poem 'North', which is the title poem of this volume, also looks at revenge and at the parallels between Iceland's past and Ireland's present, establishing connections between Viking raiders and contemporary paramilitaries. Heaney's confusion and anxiety about his role as a poet in the face of the Northern Ireland Troubles is also very evident in this poem.

The poem opens with Heaney returning to the Donegal shore to take stock. He speaks of both ancient Icelanders and modern Irelanders when he observes,

> '... Thor's hammer swung
> to geography and trade,
> thick-witted couplings and revenges,
>
> the hatreds and behindbacks
> of the althing, lies and women,
> exhaustions nominated peace,
> memory incubating the spilled blood'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, pp. 10 – 11).

The tired desperation arising from the struggle permeates the poem when Heaney states flatly that 'exhaustions nominated peace / memory incubating the spilled blood'. However the poet is here to take stock and he hears the 'ocean-deafened voices / warning' him. He is given advice about how he should write.

> 'Keep your eye clear
> as the bleb of the icicle,
> trust the feel of what nubbed treasure
> your hands have known'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 11).

The creative process is described here as a foray, both a journey and a battle. Insight and composition occur in the changing light of the aurora borealis rather than in a single, directed shaft of light. Writing poetry in refracting, changing light is far more

challenging than writing poetry in an inspiring single shaft of light. Ever since the publication of his first volume *Death of a Naturalist* in nineteen-sixty-six, Heaney had constant and contradictory advice and admonitions from critics eager that he should write of Ireland in accordance with their views of the situation. The pressures and the Troubles rose to a peak while he was writing *North*. The problem was not lessened because he belonged to a small country: the pressures of loyalty, expectation and censure were stronger in the smaller community and no escape was afforded by his move South.

The fact that Glob's book influenced Heaney is made very clear in the next poem to be discussed, 'The Grauballe Man'. This poem is dominated by sectarian violence as are all of the central poems of this volume. Heaney writes that he 'first saw' the grauballe's man's 'twisted face / in a photograph'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 29) Heaney made two trips to Denmark in nineteen-seventy-three and visited the grauballe man at Aarhus. He explained not only the significance of the archaeological finds themselves, but the whole range of possibilities those discoveries held for his poetry. Heaney discovered a way in which the past might be used to illuminate the present as he strained to explain, order, articulate Irish history and Irish violence. The sad portrait of the weeping 'Grauballe Man', named after the town in Jutland near where he was found in nineteen-fifty-two, underscores the persistence of blood sacrifice and blood feuds in modern Ireland. In his book, Glob explains that the man's neck was slashed from ear to ear and his naked body dumped in the bog around three hundred and ten B.C., during midwinter celebrations. His grim death was intended to hasten the coming of spring. For Heaney however, the dead copulate with the dead only to reproduce noxious precedents for future conduct.

'The Grauballe Man' begins by comparing the man's anatomy to various features or inhabitants of the landscape. His wrists are grained 'like bog oak', his heels resemble a 'basalt egg', and his arches have shrunken, 'cold as a swan's foot / or a wet swamp root'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 28). The grauballe man gives birth to an image of himself 'bruised like a forceps baby'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 29). The implicit hope of 'The Tollund Man', which was discussed in chapter two of this study was that the sectarian violence of Northern Ireland might be transformed into a fertility rite, promising peace and bounty for the future, as the sacrificial victim presaged for his age. The Grauballe Man however, has none of The Tollund Man's peacefulness, his face is anguished and strained. The natural imagery of this poem is brutally interrupted when one perceives that 'the chin is a visor / raised above the vent / of his slashed throat ...'. The wound is said to

be 'cured' but, in denial, as the poet's memory weighs 'beauty with atrocity', we are made to feel only the atrocity of 'each hooded victim / slashed and dumped'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, pp. 28 - 29). In twentieth century Ireland, the scales of beauty and atrocity are perilously balanced. The spring season, encompassing both the Ascension ritual of the Christian Church and the Bacchic revelries of pagan society, celebrates the rejuvenation of the world. Yet it is difficult to imagine 'The Grauballe Man' in his Easter finery.

The language of this poem 'slashed', 'hooded', 'dumped', jerks the reader into contemporary Belfast. For Heaney The Grauballe Man is a timeless victim whose contemporary incarnation is the Catholic victim in Northern Ireland and the naked Gaul is an emblem of the colonised provincial dying as he seeks revenge on an indomitable imperialist.

In his study on the IRA, Tim Pat Coogan documents the kind of sectarian murder that Heaney places in an ancient context. Coogan writes, 'scores of young Catholics in nineteen-seventy-two, were found with hoods over their heads and bullets through their brains. Others were found in a condition better imagined than described, with mutilations, throat cuttings and every form of atrocity'. (Coogan. T. P., 1995, p. 446).

What should be remembered however, is that for every Catholic victim found in this way there was also a Protestant victim; the UDA had modelled itself on the IRA. There was a feeling among Protestants that the IRA were no better than animals and should be treated as such. They adapted and 'improved' on such IRA tactics as kneecapping by using Black and Decker drills. For the IRA, anyone who was or is not 'with' them was or is 'against' them and therefore an 'enemy', there are no shades of grey, only black and white. And so the fears, confusion, the inculcated bigotry, the hates feed off each other, and men of both tribes, were and are done to death in every conceivable and inconceivable way.

I am unsure of what Heaney is doing in this poem. He draws parallels between 'The Grauballe Man' and the dying Gaul and present day Catholic victims: it is the Catholic victims who, like Gaul are fighting and dying in their attempt to overthrow the Imperial power of Britain. Yet one must ask, what about the Protestant victims? They are fighting and dying to maintain the Imperial power but, they too have their 'hooded victims /

slashed and dumped'. For Heaney Gaul and Gael, Roman and Unionist, have simply traded places and the process is all the more depressing for being archetypal. It is as if under the pressure of the sectarian violence Heaney overlooks the Protestant victims in the poem, and because of this his vision and compassion are no larger than those of the contending politicians. My feeling is that this is a good example of Heaney succumbing to the influences and pressures of his time rather than following the demands of his own imagination.

Edna Longley remarked that 'beauty on the whole has outweighed atrocity'. (Longley. E., 1986, p. 152). I disagree with Longley's comment. Just as the birth images of Yeat's 'Easter 1916' suggests a difficult and trying labour so 'The Grauballe Man' is 'bruised like a forceps baby'. There is an uncertainty in this poem, an uncertainty concerning the efficacy of sacrifice, whether politically or ritually orientated. That uncertainty links into Heaney's complicated attitude, his duality, his fascination and repulsion with the legacy of violence he finds within his national past and present. The more Heaney struggled to understand Irish history and Irish violence the more confused and ambivalent he became, as is apparent in 'Punishment', where he admits he has conflicting feelings towards the victims.

In my view, 'Punishment' is the most powerful poem of this volume, it clearly reflects Heaney's conflicting recognitions and self-division. Glob's book was again the inspiration for this poem. Glob recounted how an undernourished fourteen year old girl in the first century A.D., 'was led naked out onto the bog with bandaged eyes and the collar round her neck, and drowned in the little peat pit', on the Windeby estate in Schleswig. (Glob. P. V., 1969, p. 114, p. 153). Her head was shaved as was the custom for women who committed adultery. Heaney draws parallels between this victim and the fate of contemporary Catholic girls in the North of Ireland who break the law, that is the tribal law of the IRA, who tar and feather girls for 'traitorous affairs' with the British.

> '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'.

(Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 31).

Heaney stands horrified but dumb before her 'betraying sisters', shaved, stripped, tarred and handcuffed by the IRA to the railings of Belfast in punishment for keeping company with British soldiers, and repudiating IRA totems and taboos. Heaney identifies with the victim but also with the onlookers of whom he is one, he admits to contradictory feelings of civilised outrage and tribal satisfaction. In Ireland perhaps more than in any other country 'unforgiving memory, has been each generations' legacy' to the next. (Cairns. D., *et al.*, 1988, p. 144). To let bygones be bygones is impossible in a culture wedded to the dead and to the past.

In this poem, Heaney again examines the question of revenge, but here it is intra-group revenge that he looks at. How the Catholic community punishes its own for their perceived 'crimes'. This can be taken as another example of the dark side of the Catholic religion which venerates women so long as they conform, but abuses them once they fall from the pedestal upon which it has placed them. Neil Corcoran expands on this pointing out, 'the chilling irony of the biblical allusions in the poem is that they both judge this act of tribal revenge by the more merciful ethic enshrined in the biblical religion, while they also implicate that religion in precisely those sacrificial rituals which join Jutland and Irish Republicanism ...' (Corcoran. N., 1986, p. 117). There is also the suggestion in this poem that the tribal revenge has its roots deep in the ancestral mind set of the community, deep in the Northern Irish psyche, and there is a sense that it is somehow inevitable and unavoidable, that the savagery and cruelty are part of the tribal cycle.

This poem caused much controversy and much criticism. Liberal sensibilities were stunned by the severed heads and strangled victims of Iron Age fertility rites and their modern-day equivalents in Northern Ireland. But more particularly they were stunned by Heaney, who although critical of his own dispassionate ability to observe, discern and tacitly condone the violence of clan life, conceded that he too 'would have cast ... / the

stones of silence', and would not have stood up to defend the young girl from her accusers. Pulled by conflicting allegiances, Heaney had a sense of 'civilized outrage' but he also understood / understands 'the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge'. The contradictory, self-destructive forces in himself and his tribe prevented Heaney at that time from standing up to and actively resisting the abhorrent reprisals of his Catholic tribe against those who, like himself, had abandoned its religion and revolutionary principles. The critics were vociferous in their condemnation of this poem. Ciaran Carson, who is always a harsh critic of Heaney, argued in a nineteen-seventy-five review of *North* that the poem and the volume misinterpret, even mystify history, ignoring 'the real differences between our society and that of Jutland in some vague past, expressly to make political violence forgivable because comprehensible, to turn understanding of that violence into its absolution by placing it in the realms of sex, death and inevitability'. (Longley. E., 1986 p. 157). Robert Garrett counters this criticism by arguing that it is a mistake to see this poem as a complete surrender to race, community tradition or violence, a mistake arising from 'privileging closure, allowing the poet's conclusion the right to out shout the rest of the poem'. (Garrett. R., 1995, p. 100). Edna Longley, noting that the poem takes the point of view of the victim and of the crowd has asked: 'But can the poet run with the hare and hunt with the hounds?' (Longley. E., 1986, p. 154).

This poem is a very good example of Heaney responding to the pressures of social, political and religious circumstances, to the crossed pieties inherent in the very language he speaks and writes with. Heaney's position viš-à-viš the Troubles in Northern Ireland is difficult to pin down in this second phase of his career, and this poem's ending has caused notable perplexities for many who have consequently judged him harshly. For me, this poem is of critical importance because it is excruciatingly and fearlessly honest, and because the voice of individual reason and that of the community's instinct co-exist and interact here. As a fellow Irish person, I can identify with Heaney here and 'understand' his understanding, it springs from the duality that the Northern conflict threatens the moderate Irish psyche with. This poem describes the reality of nineteen-seventies Northern Ireland which was Heaney's reality at that time. I believe T. C. Foster is correct when he writes that although 'Heaney belongs to the set of liberal-educated / English-speaking / reasonable adults, he also belongs to the set of native-Celt / Northern-Irish-Catholic nationalists. He may wish to speak with the voice of the first group; part of him, however, remains in touch with that second group, even its more extreme or unsavoury parts'. Foster continues that Heaney in 'saving himself from the twin perils of a headlong

plunge into the violence of the Provos on the one hand or easy condemnation on the other, here becomes a victim of those historical forces he outlines so clearly'. (Foster. T. C., 1989, p. 55).

Glob's influence is also behind the long, powerful and disturbing poem 'Kinship'. In his book, Glob suggests persuasively that the well-preserved bodies dating from the Iron Age found in the Danish bogs are those of victims sacrificed to some kind of territorial Goddess. Heaney finds in this suggestive metaphors which he transposes and elaborates to account for the violence of Irish history, and especially of Northern Ireland. The ancient dead become one in the poem with the modern dead. For Heaney there is a connection because he has watched the killings and has seen the faces of the dead, both in Glob's work and in his native country. There are parallels between past and present, in the rituals, the victims and also in the occupying forces of a conquering foreign power. Also important is the fact that the speaker in this poem stands 'at the edge of centuries / facing a goddess' who 'swallows / our love and terror'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 36, p. 39).

That Goddess cannot be simply reduced to an invader, whether Viking or British: she is a product of Heaney's kin, she is a devouring Goddess, she is Mother Ireland, the Shan Van Vocht, Kathleen ni Houlihan. She devours her own, always demanding new sacrificial victims, new martyrs for the Republican cause.

> 'Our mother ground
> is sour with the blood
> of her faithful,
> ...
> how the goddess swallows
> our love and terror'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, pp. 38 - 39).

David Annwn writes that 'this goddess is clearly representative of among other things, Irish chauvinism in its many forms'. (Annwn. D., 1984, p. 145). Annwn quotes Heaney as saying that in the Iron Age of Northern Europe there was: 'a society where girl's heads were shaved for adultery ... a religion centering on the territory, on a goddess of the

ground and of the land and associated with sacrifice. In many ways the fury of Irish republicanism is associated with a religion like this, with a female goddess who has appeared in various guises. She appears as Kathleen ni Houlihan in Yeats' plays; she appears as Mother Ireland also. I think the republican ethos is a feminine religion in a way'. (Annwn. D., 1984, p. 145). Annwn argues that one feels that Heaney is so close here to saying that republican violence is the black side of Catholicism, the destructive aspects of the pre-Marian Goddesses which have not found a 'home' in Christian doctrine. The speaker in 'Kinship' believes that 'nothing will suffice', which answers the question posed in Yeats' 'Easter 1916': 'too long a sacrifice / can make a stone of the heart / O when may it suffice?' (Yeats. W. B., 1956, pp. 179 – 180). There is a helplessness and a hopelessness about the speaker's response that leads one to the conclusion that the thirst for sacrifice is unquenchable and the need for victims recurrent and inevitable. This type of hopelessness has not been present in Heaney's previous volumes to this degree.

In the final section of the poem, Heaney turns to Tacitus, historian and geographer of Imperial Rome.

> 'And you, Tacitus,
> observe how I make my grove
> on an old crannog
> piled by the fearful dead:
> ...
> report us fairly,
> how we slaughter
> for the common good
>
> and shave the heads
> of the notorious,
> how the goddess swallows
> our love and terror'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, pp. 38 – 39).

Heaney invites the Roman historian to be a witness to the situation in Ireland. It is as if that is all Heaney can hope for. This poem does not achieve the resolution of 'Funeral Rites', the response is 'love and terror'; there is no middle ground. The poem clearly replies to the Romans, to the English soldiers, politicians, Irish terrorists, sympathisers and perhaps, most despairingly, to Heaney himself that 'nothing will suffice'.

Neither Heaney's critics nor his usual band of admirers liked this poem. Blake Morrison wrote, particularly with reference to the last two verses of the poem, that 'Heaney's poetry grants sectarian killing in Northern Ireland a historical respectability which it is not usually granted in day-to-day journalism: precedent becomes, if not a justification, then at least an explanation'. (Morrison. B., 1982, p. 68).

It seems to me that it is the suggestion of inevitability about the violence that Morrison, Tamplin and others objected to. Yet Ireland has one of the longest and most violent histories of any country and the violence still continues. Many Irishmen and women north and south of the border would identify with Heaney's sense of the inevitability of it all, especially those living through the horrors of Northern Ireland in the nineteen-seventies. As he becomes more deeply enmired in the politics of Northern Ireland, Heaney sees the victims of the religious strife of his day in an increasingly personal light. In 'Kinship' he tries to find a context in which to view modern chaos and has to accept that the bog goddess, Kathleen ni Houlihan, Mother Ireland or whatever one likes to call her, is not just a giver of life but also a taker of life, she indiscriminately 'swallows our love and terror'. Heaney does not ignore the human, personal tragedy of her insatiable appetite but at this point in his career he cannot see any solution. Heaney looks squarely at the process of violence here and the net result of his recognition of the various elements is paralysis.

'Act of Union' is a poem about political history, about the English colonisation of Ireland. It tells us about England's rape of Ireland, and sees Irish history as being the horror of that rape, the nightmare that so many Irishmen and women want to escape from. The Act of Union of eighteen hundred created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The Act following in the tradition of English imperialism in Ireland, virtually guaranteed a future of insurrection and internecine violence which ended in the South only with independence and, in the North, continues unabated to this day.

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

The act sprouted an obstinate fifth column
Whose stance is growing unilateral...
His parasitical
And ignorant little fists already
Beat at your borders and I know they're cocked
At me across the water. No treaty
I foresee will salve completely your tracked
And stretchmarked body, the big pain
That leaves you raw, like opened ground, again'.

(Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, pp. 43 – 44).

The unholy coupling of Ireland with her neighbour the United Kingdom has brought great pain and distress to Ireland both from the initial act of colonisation or rape and from the outcome of that colonisation, the offspring of the rape which 'sprouted an obstinate fifth column / Whose stance is growing unilateral'. The issue of the pairing are the paramilitaries in Northern Ireland, both Loyalists and the IRA., the legacy bequeathed is one of violence. The 'parasitical / And ignorant little fists' now threaten both Ireland and England as the brutality and barbarism escalate. Again, the theme of the inevitability of violence continues in this poem. 'No treaty / I foresee will salve completely your tracked / And stretchmarked body, the big pain / that leaves you raw, like opened ground, again'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, pp. 43 – 44). Heaney cannot envision any resolution to the conflict despite treaties and talks. Like forcing a woman to live with her rapist, England's presence in Northern Ireland is an open sore in the Irish psyche.

Heaney has been criticised on several occasions for not being able to represent the other side. On the whole I think that Heaney tries to balance his view of the Troubles, seeing both sides as victims of a situation not of their making, however, he does not achieve that

balance in this particular poem. Heaney admits as much to Seamus Deane in an interview in nineteen-seventy-seven.

'Poetry is born out of the watermarks and colourings of the self. But that self in some ways takes its spiritual pulse from the spiritual structure of the community to which it belongs; and the community to which I belong is Catholic and nationalist ... I think that poetry and politics are, in different ways, an articulation, an ordering, a giving of form to inchoate pieties, prejudices, world-views, or whatever. And I think that my own poetry is a kind of slow, obstinate, papish burn, emanating from the ground I was brought up on'. (Deane. S., 1977, p. 62). Heaney told Deane that he was inevitably situated in a narrow political and religious moment at that time (the nineteen-seventies). The 'slow burn' as T. C. Foster writes 'may make it impossible for Heaney to give full sympathy to the other community in such a divisive situation; there are certainly pressures from within his own ... not to. And the result, the dual impulses toward loyalty and understanding toward the smaller community and the larger, create a double voice ... a tension.' (Forster. T. C., 1989, p. 70). Here we have another good example of Heaney being pressured by the expectations of his community rather than following the demands of his own imagination, the outcome of which is a poetry that is both tribal and restrictive.

NORTH: PART TWO

In part two of *North,* Heaney examines the more personal issues of identity, influence, and perspective. It focuses on the problems of contemporary Northern Ireland, the societal ills and what Heaney experienced growing up and living in such a society. It also soul-searches again about the role of the poet in such a society.

'The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream' examines the poet's role in society and whether or not poetry can make a difference, or, in Heaney's own words, 'make anything happen'. In nineteen-seventies Ireland there was a general expectation that poets would wield a 'crowbar' and attempt to assess the political situation of the country. The title of this particular poem was inspired by Shelley's observation that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. In this poem, the speaker sinks his 'crowbar in a chink ... under the masonry / of state and statute'. (Heaney. S., *North,* 1975, p. 50). This pleases his 'wronged people' in 'their cages' but turns out to be an empty gesture

that only succeeds in getting him captured and imprisoned by the authorities who are 'amused' by him.

> 'The commandant motions me to be seated. "I am
> honoured to add a poet to our list". He is amused ...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *North,* 1975, p. 50).

The machinery of State is finally, untroubled by the poet's grand gesture of insurrection, it is but a brief and ineffectual display of political bravado. It seems to me that disillusionment orders this poem, as Heaney asks again to what extent is the poet / poetry impotent?

Heaney's confusion which was so apparent in part one of *North* continues in part two of the volume. The poet's role in society in addition to involving the questions of identity, influence and perspective must also be a matter of personal, artistic and civic responsibilities. For the Irish poet in particular the question of his or her role must be answered within the context of modern Ireland and the context of British influence upon the Irish writer. The choice is complex, the poet cannot luxuriate in the perfect, abstract symmetry and postulations of a mathematician like Archimedes. Neither can the poet abandon reason altogether for the Tarzan-like gestures of the political activists, that have an immediate and visceral appeal, but do little to address the root problem of violence and tyranny. The poet's responsibility lies in capturing the moment when song and suffering, art and life, co-exist.

Parker writes that the long and pessimistic poem, 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing' sprung from 'a need to be explicit about the pressures and prejudices watermarked into the psyche of anyone born and bred in Northern Ireland'. He continues that this poems sees Heaney 'wedged into a corner expected to make some kind of statement, to take up some kind of political stance'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 144). Heaney was either still in the North of Ireland or visiting the North when he wrote this particular poem.

'I'm back in winter
Quarters where bad news is no longer news'.

(Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 51).

Some have argued that this poem, along with others in part two of *North* are an example of Heaney paying his dues to his compatriots, responding to the pressures of other Belfast writers, in particular Padraig Fiacc, who were urging Heaney at the time to make some comment or to take a side. The public were also waiting for Heaney's new 'fashionable' collection and expecting him to convey the horror of Northern Ireland. Heaney wrote this poem following an interview with an English journalist who was collecting opinions on 'the Irish thing'. The poem contrasts the very serious political problems facing Ulster, a society divided almost to the brink of civil war, with the slogans and platitudes that constitute the dominant discourse on 'the Irish thing',

'The times are out of joint ...

Men die at hand. In blasted street and home...

"Oh, its disgraceful, surely, I agree",
"Where's it going to end?" "Its getting worse."
"They're murderers", "Internment, understandably ..." '

(Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, pp. 51 – 52).

Heaney condemns that rhetoric which offers itself as the voice of sanity and those who suck 'the fake taste, the stony flavours / Of those sanctioned, old, elaborate retorts'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 51). Such rhetoric is a betrayal of popular sanity, as it reduces pain to a few stock phrases. Yet Heaney too is guilty of partaking in such rhetoric as he was of conniving 'in civilized outrage' in 'Punishment'. It is like a morse code which Heaney has access to, a meaningless code, the hollow phrases merely characterising the behaviour of all of the frightened people in the North of Ireland, both beleaguered residents and dispassionate journalists alike, who keep the violence and trouble at bay with words hollowed of meaning through relentless, unreflective use.

Heaney's sense of hopelessness and helplessness is communicated to us in the following verses.

> '... The liberal papist note sounds hollow
>
> When amplified and mixed in with the bangs
> That shake all hearts and windows day and night.
> ...
> Last night you didn't need a stethoscope
> To hear the eructation of Orange drums
> Allergic equally to Pearse and Pope.
>
> On all sides "little platoons" are mustering –
> ...
> To lure the tribal shoals to epigram
> And order. I believe any of us
> Could draw the line through bigotry and sham,
> Given the right line, *aere perennius*'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, pp. 52 – 53).

Heaney wrestles with the national crisis of terror and violence, he would like to put the current problems into historical perspective but the very modes of speech and thought have been blunted although 'I believe any of us / Could draw the line through bigotry and sham, ...' the right line is not given: 'I am incapable'. (Heaney. S., *North,* 1975, p. 53). Reticence is the art of survival in the North of Ireland, it is a symptom of the offensive nature of that society. In Northern Ireland everyone holds back, the people choose their words with the greatest of care and not only their words but also which elements of themselves they wish to reveal or conceal. In the North to stay completely silent tells as much about one as overtly taking sides, therefore the nonspeak of the cheap homilies is a necessary survival tool.

In section three of this poem, Heaney explains further about this sick society and its taboos.

' "Religion's never mentioned here", of course.
"You know them by their eyes", and hold your tongue.
"One side's as bad as the other", never worse.

...

Smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us:
Manoeuvrings to find out name and school,
Subtle discrimination by addresses
With hardly an exception to the rule...

O land of password, handgrip, wink and nod,
Of open minds as open as a trap,

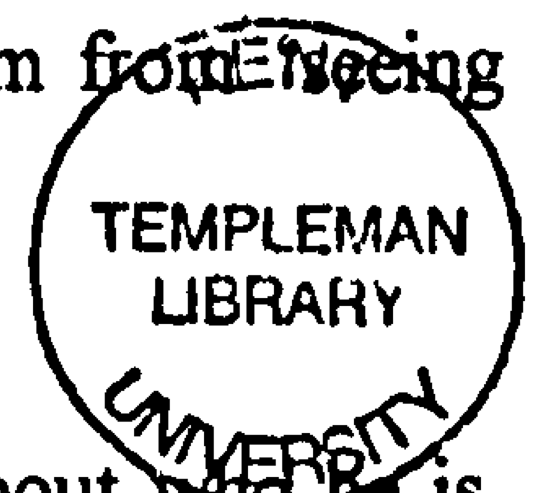
Where tongues lie coiled, as under flames lie wicks,
Where half of us, as in a wooden horse
Were cabin'd and confined like wily Greeks,
Besieged within the siege, whispering morse.'

(Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, pp. 53 – 54).

This state is indeed rotten, the paranoia bred by the siege mentality apparent everywhere. This is a place where names and addresses, schools and dialectal variation all identify one's place in the terrible reality of the divided society. Section four of 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing', Heaney used as the introductory lyric to *Wintering Out*, which was discussed in chapter two of this study. It is bleak and depressing in the extreme. Heaney looks on in horrified amazement at the internment camp, the bomb craters in the road and the machine gun posts, hardly believing that things can have come to this.

Heaney was again charged with being unable to see the other side in this poem. This is another good example of Heaney succumbing to Kathleen ni Houlihan. He is walking a knife edge here, as he attempts to take an uneasy mid-line position on violence, trying not to condemn or valorise either side. He clearly identifies with his minority Catholic group here, he is unable to repress this instinct to take sides, at this particular period of his life and phase of his career.

Heaney's reference to Conor Cruise O'Brien in the poem is interesting. O'Brien wrote a book entitled *States of Ireland* in which he vilified the IRA / Sinn Féin as fascist, aristocratic organisations so steeped in 'the language of sacred soil and the cult of the dead' that they are blind to both past and present and therefore oblivious to saner policies for the future. (O'Brien. C., 1972, p. 319). For O'Brien the revolutionary nationalists wallow in political necrophilia, he continues that, 'legitimate authority is derived only from the generations of the dead who died for Ireland, and is wielded in the present by the organisation of men and women prepared to repeat blood sacrifice'. (O'Brien. C., 1972, p. 318). O'Brien believes that in Ireland there is an 'unhealthy intersection' of art and politics. Are Heaney's sacred sense of Irish soil and his preoccupation with the dead, mired in the type of blindness O'Brien attributes to IRA / Sinn Féin, at this particular point in his career? I have too great a sense of unease to say that they are, yet nagging doubts remain. What I feel more certain about is that Heaney, who, up to this point in his career, on the whole, kept away from too direct an engagement with the upheaval in the North and kept away from too close an identification with either side, here draws dangerously close to the violence. Heaney's strategy up until this volume has been to keep his distance in order to gain the perspective required to examine the forces behind the unrest, and while I am aware that distance can also be a liability, removing Heaney too far from the immediacy of the Troubles that inform and vivify his work, his closeness in this instance, in my opinion, numbs his sensitive ear and prevents him from 'seeing feelingly'.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'Freedman' is a moving poem. It speaks again of Heaney's confusion about who he is, and the multiplicity of influences that have shaped him. The epigraph that precedes the poem comes from R. H. Barrow's *The Romans*. 'Indeed, slavery comes nearest to its justification in the early Roman Empire: for a man from a "backward" race might be brought within the pale of civilization, educated and trained in a craft or a profession, and turned into a useful member of society'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 55). Barrow's reference to being 'brought within the pale of civilization' is revealing because this Roman practice of conquest and occupation was copied by the British in Ireland. Some of the natives or the 'backward' people were re-educated or re-trained in the ways of the coloniser, ways that no longer made him or her 'backward'. Once re-educated, the previously 'backward' natives became members of the coloniser's society who could do something useful for that society, but by the same token also helped to maintain the status quo. Such a colonial metamorphosis is what Heaney refers to elsewhere as 'my identity

so rudely forc'd'. This situation disturbs Heaney, he has been subjugated and educated by the dominant culture, and the suggestion is that he is still in essence subjugated by the dominant culture.

> 'Subjugated yearly under arches,
> Manumitted by parchments and degrees,
> ...
> *"Memento homo quia pulvis es"*.
> I would kneel to be impressed by ashes,
> A silk friction, a light stipple of dust –
> I was under the thumb too like all my caste.
> ...
> Then poetry arrived in that city –
> I would abjure all cant and self pity –
> And poetry wiped my brow and sped me.
> Now they will say I bite the hand that fed me'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 55).

The Latin terms that Heaney uses here are also interesting. In this poem Heaney says he was manumitted, the act of manumittere, in classical antiquity, bestowed a certain level of humanity upon a slave. However, although the slave was no longer a chattel neither was he elevated to the status of his former master, the freedman – libertinus – bore the mark of his former state for many generations, his was a wholly negative status. The freedman had to be made a freedman by those with the power to define the status of others, the power to dispense or deny freedom. Heaney clearly has reservations about Latin culture here. The Romans never conquered Ireland but most of Ireland is dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, this influence is both foreign and repressive, it is negative and dogmatic. Heaney identifies with the freedman, he recognises that 'I was under the thumb too like all my caste'. The word 'caste' conjures up images of India, another British colony, where parallels can be drawn between the status of the 'lowest of the low', the caste of 'untouchables' and Heaney's Catholic caste in Northern Ireland. What Heaney is saying is that he and the rest of his 'backward' race are subjugated both by the Imperialist system and the Roman Catholic Church. He and others like him, mainly from working class and small farmer background benefited from the 1947 Education Act. That

education gave Heaney a form of freedom as he learnt to use his education through poetry. However, that education also allows Heaney to see things for what they are and to ask awkward questions, which can upset the status quo. Once Heaney begins to speak, he is accused, in turn, of biting the hand that fed him, the typical backlash of colonial paternalism against those who do not acquiesce.

Again Heaney is on the knife edge, he does not want to maintain the status quo of the historical enemy, Imperial Britain, neither does he want to become a mere mouthpiece for the IRA / Sinn Féin, nor continue to blindly follow the dictates of the Roman Catholic Church. The reality is whatever Heaney says or does not say he will be accused of biting the various hands that fed him.

'Singing School', the closing sequence of six poems explores dialect as one part of a multiplicity of forces conspiring against the citizen, particularly the Catholic citizen, in Northern Ireland. In 'The Ministry of Fear', Heaney describes the immediate social and political circumstances which he grew out of and he comments further on the rotten state and the sick society that is Northern Ireland. Here, Heaney finds himself in a country at war with itself and with England, 'the muzzle of a sten-gun in my eye:' a country where fear is institutionalised and which attaches great social and political importance to dialectal variations, reminding the reader of the historic origins of the violence and of contemporary discrimination based on dialect. Heaney describes some of the traumas he underwent as a teenager and the abuses both physical and psychological perpetrated by the Church through its educational system and by the State. Fear permeates this poem and is projected into two institutions, the Catholic Secondary School of St. Columb's, and the British Northern Irish State.

Heaney felt like an alien when he went to boarding school, isolated and distanced from the work-rhythms of his ancestors. '... The lonely scarp / Of St. Columb's College, where I billeted / For six years, ... / ... I was so homesick I couldn't even eat / The biscuits left to sweeten my exile'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 57). He is thrilled as he acquires the gift of poetry yet he still feels like an intruder in the cultured domain of another class. 'Those hobnailed boots from beyond the mountain / Were walking, by God, all over the fine / Lawns of elocution'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, pp. 57 – 58). One of Heaney's lasting memories is of the snobbery, class distinction and insults of the Catholic priests who taught at the College. "... Catholics, in general, don't speak / As

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well as students from the Protestant schools". (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 58). He also remembers the way the vindictive and vengeful teachers abused their power.

'On my first day, the leather strap
Went epileptic in the Big Study,
Its echoes plashing over our bowed heads'.

(Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 58).

Heaney continues that he 'still wrote home that a boarder's life / Was not so bad, shying as usual'.

There is a suggestion of guilt here that he, like many others, stayed silent in the face of such psychological and physical abuse and submitted to the evil authority and racial conditioning of a Church that in its schools created a miniature state and that helped to instil and nurture an inferiority complex in Catholics and thus to maintain the status quo in Northern Ireland. 'Remember that stuff? Inferiority / Complexes, ...' (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 58). Heaney also recalls the public world of the State when driving home one night with a girlfriend, he was stopped and interrogated by the RUC. One can hear the disapproval and mistrust in the soldier's queries, Heaney's accent and his name identify him as Catholic / Nationalist, dialect is a litmus test of caste. Heaney also recalls another similar incident, this time the RUC opened and read some letters that he had with him and some poetry of S. Deane, his friend.

'They once read my letters at a roadblock
And shone their torches on your hieroglyphics,
"Svelte dictions" in a very florid hand.

Ulster was British, but with no rights on
The English lyric: all round us, though
We hadn't named it, the ministry of fear'.

(Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 59).

I find the title of this poem both interesting and apt. It comes from the novel by Graham Green written in nineteen-forty-three, which talks about the Nazi surveillance system which spread an atmosphere of fear and mistrust, the implication is that the school system and the RUC in Northern Ireland, also spread such an atmosphere. All of life in the North of Ireland is dominated by this 'Ministry of Fear', the fear, suspicion, mistrust arise from differences in names, phrases, accents, which in turn arise from history. Dialectal differences reinforce the class system and prejudice and fear are a result of a history of conquest; who conquered Ireland when, and what did they leave behind? The conclusion one is left with is that the Nazi-like 'Ministry of Fear' is all pervasive, it politicises everything it touches.

That all of life is permeated by politics in the North of Ireland is further made evident in 'A Constable Calls'. This poem portrays the subtle ways in which Heaney's community was and is subjected, as part of its experience of day-to-day life, to a system of power from which its members felt and feel alienated. Fear is again the dominant register of the poem as the policeman comes to take the farm census for tax purposes, his uniform makes him the embodiment of the Protestant State.

The poem begins and ends with a description of the English Constable's bike, an image in the poem that ultimately approaches a metonymic level, so closely aligned is its mechanic efficiency with the policeman's character. The policeman is an ominous figure, dark and threatening, obsessed with 'census-taking' and arithmetic and associated with the machinery of State.

The policeman works for the ministry of fear and we are reminded of the brutal force held available to be exercised by this agent of the State.

> 'Arithmetic and fear.
> I sat staring at the polished holster
> With its buttoned flap, the braid cord
> Looped into the revolver butt.

"Any other root crops?
Mangolds? Marrowstems? Anything like that?"
"No". But was there not a line
Of turnips where the seed ran out

In the potato field? I assumed
Small guilts and sat
Imagining the black hole in the barracks...'

(Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, pp. 60 – 61).

The divisive distinctions between English and Irish, guilt and innocence, confrontation and subservience are all suggested here. The presence of the emblems of official violence establishes a credible threat to the young Heaney. The poem not only records the meticulous aggressiveness of the English Constable with his 'doomsday book', it also chronicles the arrival of 'small guilts' and inquisition and guilt are by words of the Catholic who lives in contemporary Northern Ireland. The poem ends with the ominous, repetitive ticking of the Constable's bicycle like the timing devices of the bombs that were waiting to explode all over Northern Ireland.

In the next poem, 'Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966', Heaney describes a scene common to all in the North during the Marching Season. The Orange drums of Ulster's Loyalists fill the air with aggression just as the Constable's bicycle did. The Orange Order is a potent force in Northern Ireland, its influence in jobs, politics and religion is commonly held to be all-pervasive, and at all times its intent is to divide Catholic from Protestant so that the working classes of either sect will never unite to overthrow the Protestant ascendancy. Those living outside of Northern Ireland only become publicly aware of the Orangemen when they stage their annual march on the twelfth of July, the anniversary of The Battle of the Boyne, to commemorate the victory of William of Orange over James II, which victory led to the establishment of the Anglo-Scots Protestant population in Ireland. They also commemorate other Orange triumphs such as the routing of Catholics at the Battle of the Diamond in County Armagh in seventeen-ninety-five, after which the Orangemen were encouraged to take over Catholic land. At times of civil disturbance however, the Order becomes an instrument of savagery, and burnings, lootings and shootings bestrew its unlovely history.

In this poem the Protestant drummer beats out anti-papist rhythms that set the air vibrating:

> 'To every cocked ear, expert in its greed,
> His battered signature subscribes "No Pope".
> The goatskin's sometimes plastered with his blood.
> The air is pounding like a stethoscope'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, 1992 edn., p. 62).

The drummer seems the very personification of the crude anonymity of sectarian violence. Fear displays itself here again, the atmosphere is repressive and Heaney clearly feels the threat in the air. The Protestant drummer is also a representative of the State, the forces of Government, which are in British hands, in Northern Ireland seem arrayed against the Catholic minority against those who seek home rule or self-determination. The language in this poem is violent: the drums, 'lodging thunder / Grossly' take over the celebration as they take over the drummers, they 'preside, like giant tumours', over the celebration. The drum is a weapon as well as an instrument, its power sound, its message vehemently anti-papist. The drummer is portrayed in a somewhat uncomplimentary light, 'the lambeg balloons at his belly, weighs / Him back on his haunches, / ... He is raised up by what he buckles under'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 62).

The majority of Protestants taking part in the madness of the marching season are working class and they are as much victims as the Catholics they revile, they too are manipulated by the Protestant State and by their Church leaders, the line of Protestant clergymen agitators which stretches from Reverend Henry Cooke who died in eighteen-sixty-eight to the Reverend Ian Paisley today, in a line of unbroken turbulence. The drummer is 'raised up by what he buckles under', the heavy drums of history and he is 'raised up' above the Catholics in Northern Ireland by that same history because he is a member of the Protestant majority. The imagery in this poem is blurred and strained as if the noise and hatred have misted Heaney's vision. The Protestant marches and the particular routes along which they pass, often through predominantly Catholic areas, have long been a bone of contention in Northern Ireland and to this day stir Catholic emotions and promote solidarity among IRA / Sinn Féin. One can understand Heaney's resentment of such Protestant, triumphalist marches, he has lived through and experienced events in the North, yet surely he must realise that one side is as bad as the other? In this poem,

Heaney comes very close to falling prey to the political / poetic dilemma that he is struggling to overcome and which he must overcome unless he wants to merely re-articulate the old antagonisms of Northern Ireland's politics from a single and exclusionary perspective, it is another example of Heaney conceding to the pressures and influences of the tribe.

In 'Exposure', the final poem of this volume we find Heaney in Wicklow where he lived for four years after leaving Belfast in nineteen-seventy-two. Heaney is in a despondent mood weighed down with the burden of history and politics. County Wicklow serves in a sense as a site of conflict, because, although on one level Heaney's removal to the Republic prompts him to re-evaluate the exact nature of his political commitments as a poet, on another level, it also provokes a certain sense of anxiety and guilt about his abandonment of his home territory in a time of political crisis, even though the move has been a sensible and responsible one for his family. Throughout this volume the threads of race, religion and the inescapable politics of everyday life are woven together in a series of poems in which Heaney recounts some of the factors that have moulded his poetic identity. These factors play no small part in his decision in this final poem to escape the massacre and to weigh his 'responsible *tristia*' in the solitary woods of Wicklow. With the all pervasive context of violence in mind, Heaney mulls over his anxieties about the morality, justification and efficacy of poetic utterance in contemporary Ireland. This poem connotes self-revelation and confession, and in its directness it is atypical of Heaney's work up to now, i.e., nineteen-seventy-five. Here, one senses that Heaney feels that he has come to the end of some personal and poetic rope and that like the condemned prisoner he must make a statement, a summing up.

Heaney, wandering alone in the Wicklow woods, has physically escaped the violent upheaval in Northern Ireland, but he cannot escape his poetic responsibility. The move South had made him, as he says, an exile, a wood-kerne, a foot soldier from earlier uprisings who took refuge in the woods to avoid the bloodshed. There is a sense of great isolation here, of a lonely existence in the woods, misunderstood by society. Heaney feels exposed and vulnerable and wonders how he has ended up like this. He has been criticised by friends and foes alike and he has received much media exposure, he has been cast into the unwanted role of spokesman for his community who expected more pronouncements from him now that he was living in the Republic.

'How did I end up like this?
I often think of my friends'
Beautiful prismatic counselling
And the anvil brains of some who hate me'.

(Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 66).

Heaney worries again and again about the role of the poet, the question of how to live, as an individual and as a poet, how to live usefully, in a torn and contentious world of exposure, exile, murderously politicised speech and irreconcilable obligation.

'As I sit weighing and weighing
My responsible *tristia*.
For what? For the ear? For the people?
For what is said behind-backs?'

(Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 66).

Heaney here confesses to a sense of artistic purposelessness, he wonders why he should write at all, since 'the people' remain unmoved. The image of poetry as sparks the wood-kerne has blown up 'for their meagre heat' implies a limited poetry, written for comfort and satisfaction but of no public importance: not oppositional, not autonomous, but evasive. Focusing his attention on the probably-not-worthwhile process of creating, Heaney feels that he makes sparks that distract from the grander, brighter sight of the lost comet. Yet Heaney implies that at least this new position brings him a kind of freedom, at least the freedom from making one sort of impossible choice, he is 'neither internee nor informer'.

'And yet each drop recalls

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

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

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

(Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, pp. 66 – 67).

It is important that Heaney is 'neither internee nor informer', neither a prisoner of the British nor a traitor to the Nationalist cause, yet he feels vacuous and ineffectual from being neither this nor that, neither here nor there. He feels 'every wind that blows', the image suggests the vulnerability of his exposed self. As Heaney wrestles with the problems of involvement and withdrawal he has misgivings that he has not done enough for his people. The question which the final lines of *North* necessarily leave moot is whether and how Heaney might still write, where does he go from here?

CONCLUSION

North is Heaney's most gruesome account of the tragic aspects of sectarian hostility and the apocalyptic atrocities that have afflicted his country for centuries, and the effect that has had upon him as a poet and as an individual. The divided country, divided people and the divided Heaney are laid bare here. The volume is evidence of a vacillation between the obligation to speak for his community and the wish to perfect his art. The dilemma is an old one and is outlined in a sentence of Czeslaw Milosz, an Eastern European writer whom Heaney admires, and quoted in 'Away from it All': 'I was stretched between contemplation / of a motionless point / and the command to participate / actively in history'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 16). The dual mind of Milosz, is evident in Heaney and *North* is the outcome of that duality, it lends itself to a sense of guilt and inadequacy. When the actions of the politically active grasp the attention of the world,

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Milosz admitted he was 'unable to accept these individual's style of life with a clear conscience'. (Milosz. C., 1980, pp. 124 – 125). He was cast into a state of self-doubt, as if the actions of others whose behaviour and intent he knows are wrong nonetheless set the standard against which others, like himself and like Heaney, must be judged. Milosz wrote, 'the greatest ally of any ideology is, of course, the feeling of guilt, which is so highly developed in modern man that it saps his belief in the value of his own perceptions and judgements'. (Milosz. C., 1968, p. 41). Milosz ends his essay by advancing the actions of the poet. The critical year for Milosz was nineteen-thirty-nine, the critical year for Heaney was nineteen-sixty-nine. Milosz writes, 'my fate was to grapple exclusively with the secret doctrine as I sought to discover where, in which of its segments, the falsehood lay, and what is the duty of a man who encounters an obstacle that is the creation of human beings, yet seems almost wholly to elude their reason and will. For many people, the answer may be easy, as hunting a whale is easy for those who have never run up against one. For us, however, beginning with the year nineteen-thirty-nine, the problem was no longer abstract; it had become a concrete situation which required daily decisions. Like the primeval hunter face-to-face with mysterious nature, we learned painfully that if we could hope to subdue the equally mysterious element that has replaced nature in the twentieth century, it was not by force but by wiles'. (Milosz, C., 1968, p. 42). Milosz's words echo Heaney's account, quoted earlier in this chapter, of his own shift in poetic expectations that occurred in nineteen-sixty-nine when historic antagonisms violently erupted in Northern Ireland. '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'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 56).

Heaney wrote *North* as a means of coming to terms with the sectarian violence in his native Northern Ireland, but it led him to the dead end of hopelessness. No end to the killing was in view, and he appeared to conclude that the murderous impulse had some primordial root that defied rational analysis and, if it could be dug up at all, could not itself be killed and would continue to flourish, feeding on blood. Because the Protestant and Catholic sects shed blood in order to preserve their sacred ideals of Mother Ireland, she emerges more as a Yeatsian 'terrible beauty' rather than as a benevolent fertility goddess. Heaney can understand the devotion to the mother among Catholics and the IRA, and sympathises with their anger over her repeated desecration at the hands of Britain's Protestant Fathers. Yet if there is to be any solution to the crisis, any move

towards civilised compromise, both sides must realise that Mother Ireland is like a tyrannical matriarch, a vampire sucking the blood and the life from Ireland, from both Catholics and Protestants.

By ending this volume with a self-portrait of himself as an outlaw on the run, a wood-kerne pursued by Elizabethan troops 'blowing up these sparks / For their meagre heat', Heaney offers a final judgement of self and culture that is as unflattering as it is relentlessly judicious. If Heaney is an escapist, he is writing from Wicklow having been accused by Northern papers of betraying his roots, it is mad Northern Ireland that has hurt him into that poetic role, and it is the madness of Northern Ireland that is responsible for Heaney's painful duality.

In my view, *North* is a good example of Heaney veering away from the pole of free creative imagination towards the pole of community obligation. In this volume he clearly succumbs to the pressures of Ireland. As he wrote in *Preoccupations* in nineteen-eighty, 'at one minute you are drawn towards the old vortex of racial and religious instinct, at another time you seek the mean of humane love and reason'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 34). Here we are stretched between the effort to clear from our minds, consciously and rationally, the community's archetypal patterns of fear and violence so as to prepare the ground for a humane, practical, consensus solution; and the pull, too deep or genuine to ignore, of those same patterns, in Heaney's case, the familiar matrix articulated by Catholicism, Republicanism, the Irish language, the Irish historical, political, racial inheritance. Parker writes that 'history in Ireland has always been reluctant to let people alone, and from nineteen-seventy-two, up until the publication of *North* and since Heaney admits that he was "up to my neck in it" '. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 124).

Heaney himself had doubts about *North*; of the four volumes that went into his *Selected Poems*, no other was so thoroughly trimmed. Heaney told Frank Kinahan in nineteen-eighty-two: 'The line and the life are intimately related, and that narrow line, that tight line, came out of a time when I was very tight myself ... especially the poems in *North*. I felt that I'd come through something at the end of *North*'. (Kinahan. F., 1982, pp. 411 – 412). And to his friend, the playwright Brian Friel, Heaney confessed that after *North* he wanted to open 'a door into the light' and to close his 'door into the dark'. (Randall. J., 1979, p. 7). The influence of guilt upon the psyche of the poet is clear throughout much

of *North*, intertwined with Heaney's unease about the way a poet should conduct himself at a moment of public crisis. There is a feeling that Heaney may have mistaken his ground in this conflict by succumbing to the pressures of his tribe, to the pressures of Ireland, yet it is, in a word, truthful. *North* is painfully truthful in a way it could never be did it not let the tribe's jealous, all-demanding matrix of loyalties speak in its own unimpeded voice. The constriction, tension, fear and confusion of *North* are part of its truth. In this volume Heaney blames himself for vacillating, for not solving the old dilemma, yet how could anyone solve such a dilemma? As T. C. Foster writes, 'of course he can never be free of the circumstances in the six counties; of course the events there inform his writing; of course he is constantly touched on imaginative and personal levels'. (Foster. T. C., 1989, p. 77).

North was a necessary book for Heaney to write; throughout this period he was in a sombre and self-critical mood and that is reflected in the volume. However now Heaney must attempt to heal his inner divisions, to heal the community, he must move and encompass fully and directly a culture which seems, especially to those outside of it, incurably riven, eccentric, even mad. Writing to Brian Friel after the publication of *North*, Heaney made it clear that he wanted a 'door into the light'. The objective however, is to face both ways 'looking back to a ramification of roots and associations and forward to a clarification of sense and meaning', because those who look only backwards become victims of history, while those who abandon the past become victims of cultural collapse. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 52).

CHAPTER FOUR

SEARCHING FOR THE LIGHT

IN

FIELD WORK

'The way we are living,

timorous or bold,

will have been our life'.

Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 31.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will analyse selected poems from *Field Work*, Heaney's fifth volume which was published in nineteen-seventy-nine. After *North*, Heaney was unsure of the way forward, both artistically and personally, he wanted a 'door into the light', he wanted to slough off some of the burdens of history and politics that weighed so heavily upon him in *North* and feel the promise and possibilities of Art. (Randall. J., 1979, p. 7)

The volume can be divided roughly into two halves, the public and the private. In the first part of *Field Work* Heaney continues to grapple with public themes, pursuing further the debates which he initiated in *North*. In the second part of the volume Heaney turns to more personal and intimate concerns, his wife, family, the domestic side of life. For the purpose of this study I will concentrate on the public/political poems in the volume. The recurrent concern of this volume is the tension between song and suffering, Art and Life, the poet's role and responsibilities and the impact of political realities on private living.

There is a shift in focus, a movement in perception in *Field Work* as Heaney tries to find his 'door into the light'. After *North*, Heaney was exhausted by what Blake Morrison has called the 'burden of spokesmanship' prescribed by others. (Morrison. B., 1982, p. 72). In *Field Work* Heaney tries to pursue his own poetic practice, he wants to transcend the political responsibilities imposed on him, yet at the same time he equates transcendence with political escapism. In *Field Work* Heaney is looking for, and I would argue, needs, respite from the massacre. He is not looking for an escape, the ghosts of the Irish massacre haunt him, as they haunt the countryside just as the massacre fills the streets of Northern Ireland, with its own inescapable actuality. Much of *Field Work* is about the dead, however it differs from *North* in that it concerns itself with Heaney's own dead, his relatives and his friends and acquaintances, not with the distant dead of bogs.

My argument in this chapter is that there is a reorientation in *Field Work*, a movement forward towards the light, away from the desolation, hopelessness and darkness of *North*, away from the pressures of the tribe and the pressures of Ireland. In the last chapter of this study, my feeling that Heaney was unhappy with the stance he took or was 'forced' to take in *North* was discussed. He freely admitted to Frank Kinahan that the 'narrow ..., tight line' of *North* came out of a time 'when I was very tight myself ...' (Kinahan. F., 1982, p. 411). I suggest in this chapter that while Heaney does not quite achieve his 'door

into the light' in *Field Work* he does learn to place some trust 'in art's ability to confront conflicts between freedom and responsibility, private craft and public involvement', and manages to subtly shift the balance away from the tribal to the poetic.

In *Field Work* Heaney's psyche is as riven as Ireland itself as he seeks to break free from tribal complicity and learn to trust art as reality. Heaney's duality, his ambivalence, the contrary forces within him that were so evident in *North* also form the fundamental tension in *Field Work* where the public/political poems speak of tearing responsibilities towards poetic freedom and tribal demands. In nineteen-eighty-five, Heaney himself wrote 'the main tension' felt by poets in Ireland 'is between two often contradictory commands; to be faithful to the collective historical experience and to be true to the recognition of the emerging self'. (Heaney. S., *Envies and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet*, 1985, p. 5). My view of *Field Work* is that of Foster's, that this volume 'tacitly acknowledges that one can only dwell directly on the violence in Northern Ireland for so long without turning from it and trying to make a normal life, a normal poetry, yet even then one cannot leave it completely behind'. Throughout this volume 'the public and political contend with the private and personal, neither ever fully gaining' the upper hand. (Foster. T.C., 1989, p. 80). The point is that song and suffering, Art and Life, co-exist. The result of Heaney's psychological and political investigations in *Field Work* is an art that is representative of the adversities and tensions that have made Ireland what it is and that make Heaney who he is.

CONTEMPORARY BACKGROUND

Between nineteen-seventy-five and nineteen-seventy-nine while Heaney was writing *Field Work*, the violence in Northern Ireland continued. Throughout nineteen-seventy-five while the IRA and the British Army left each other more or less alone, some of the cruellest and most dramatic events of the decade occurred when Loyalist paramilitaries lashed out at innocent Catholics both by means of pub bombings and individual killings and the IRA retaliated with tit-for-tat sectarian murders. All three 'major paramilitary groups had their splits and feuds'. (Connolly. S., 1998, p. 54). The Provisional IRA with the Official IRA, the Official IRA with the Irish Republican Socialist Party, and the UDA within itself.

Detention was officially ended in nineteen-seventy-five which in effect meant nothing as the prisoners, mainly Catholic, were still held; only the methods of seizing and prosecuting changed, and an end was signalled for political status for prisoners from March the following year, nineteen-seventy-six. The last was a decision that was to provide much adverse publicity for the British and to provide a rallying point for the Provisionals during the low point of their campaign from the end of nineteen-seventy-seven to the summer of nineteen-seventy-nine. It also lead to the IRA hunger strikes of nineteen-eighty-one which tore Ireland apart and which will be discussed at length in the next chapter of this study on *Station Island.* The nineteen-seventies as well as being characterised by the 'usual' bombings and shootings, saw a large increase in the number of SAS men sent to the province, an increase in unemployment, and the failure of another attempt by Loyalists to stage a power strike, and all the while rising tension in the community.

This mayhem was the setting in which developed the most publicised response to violence. The largest peace movement of the entire Troubles began on the twelfth August nineteen-seventy-six. The Women's Peace Movement came into being when British troops in hot pursuit of a stolen car, shot the Provisional IRA driver dead, causing the car to go out of control and killing three young innocent children in front of their mother and aunt. The slaughter of the innocents that afternoon was too much for the women of Northern Ireland and two of then, Mairéad Corrigan and Betty Williams began circulating a peace petition. Spontaneously the Peace Movement mushroomed into the biggest mass movement of the decade, with Protestant and Catholic women marching together through both Republican and Loyalist parts of Belfast. Corrigan and Williams were awarded the nineteen-seventy-seven Nobel Peace Prize, however, the movement allowed itself to give the appearance of being more anti-IRA than anti-all forms of violence and therefore eventually alienated a lot of the IRA's Catholic supporters in the ghettos. It was also used by the Northern Ireland Office as a smokescreen for political inertia and ultimately petered out, leaving no lasting imprint on the campaign. The example above of the three Maguire children is unfortunately typical rather than atypical of the actual impact of the political reality on private lives in Northern Ireland, a horror that even as I write, has been repeated in the slaughter of the three Quinn children by a Protestant firebomb as part of the stand-off by the Portadown Orange Lodge at Drumcree Church in July nineteen-ninety-eight. The slaughter of the innocents, the tribes locked in endless hate and the

political inertia on behalf of the State are all dealt with in 'Ugolino' the final, tragic poem of *Field Work.*

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

In nineteen-seventy-five when *North* was published it was immediately acclaimed in the United States and Britain. However, it was less well received in Ireland and in particular in the North of Ireland. Critics at the time felt that the volume's emphasis on the tribal mentality and on violence did not go down well with the home audience. Heaney maintained that he was expecting this, he told Frank Kinahan in nineteen-eighty-two, 'I was expecting *North* to be hammered actually. I thought it was a very unapproachable book. But I was ready for the reaction ...' (Kinahan. F., 1982, p. 412). Bearing in mind Heaney's anxiety about his work and his fragile confidence, confidence he received from exemplars like P. Kavanagh who taught him to trust his own background, and Philip Hobsbaum who taught him to trust what he was doing, my feeling is that writing *North*, Heaney's confidence faltered, and that confidence took a further blow when the work was ill-received at home. Against this background of criticism in Ireland in the mid-nineteen-seventies the Heaneys underwent another period of change. In the autumn of nineteen-seventy-five Heaney took a full-time job teaching at Carysfort College of Education, a teacher training college in Dublin. In nineteen-seventy-six he was appointed Head of the English Department, a post he retained until nineteen-eighty-one. In nineteen-seventy-six the Heaneys moved again this time out of Glanmore and into Dublin where they took up residence in Sandymount. The accelerating chaos of contemporary Ulster made it an unsuitable place to return to and by now Heaney had three children, the eldest of whom, Michael, was nearing secondary school age. Heaney explained to Bel Mooney in an interview at the time that Glanmore had served its purpose in that Heaney had wanted the 'kids to have that sort of wild animal life that I had. I wanted that eye-level with the backs of ditches, the ferns and the smell of cow-dung, and I suppose I didn't want to lose that in myself'. (Mooney. B., 1984, p. 8). Heaney further explained to John Haffenden, that 'I suppose for the first time in my life, I thought of the future, and in order to set the domestic machinery quietly and effectively to work, I thought we'd move into Dublin'. (Haffenden. J., 1981, p. 59). Heaney was thinking of the future, he was nearing forty years, mid-life, and while the remoteness of places like Glanmore are attractive they are also isolationist and Heaney at that time was looking for his 'door into the light'.

Heaney began to be influenced by Robert Lowell during this period and with that influence came a chink of light. Lowell visited Heaney in nineteen-seventy-five following a conference in Kilkenny, and Heaney pays tribute to him in 'Elegy' in this volume. Foster writes that 'although Lowell's impact on Heaney's poetry is for the most part indirect and short-lived, Heaney's admiration for him shows through in *Field Work*'. (Foster. T.C., 1989, p. 8). I tend to disagree with Foster in that I believe that Lowell's influence on Heaney and by extension on Heaney's poetry is neither indirect nor short-lived. There are several important parallels between the two men. Heaney greatly admired Lowell's personal and artistic courage, he searches in *Field Work* for similar courage to steer such a poetic course, to emulate Lowell's vision. In *Preoccupations* Heaney writes of Lowell, 'there was never any doubt about the integrity and passion with which he pursued his artistic ambitions. There was a nineteenth-century sturdiness about the career. He was a master, obstinate and conservative in his belief in the creative spirit, yet contrary and disruptive in his fidelity to his personal intuitions and experiences. ... There was perhaps a conflict between his love of literature and his sense of his times ...' (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, pp. 221). Heaney continues a little further on in *Preoccupations*, that Lowell attempted 'to get nearer the quick of life, to cage the minute. ... His bravery was different from the bravery of John Berryman or Sylvia Plath, with whom his name has often been joined. They swam away powerfully into the dark swirls of the unconscious and the drift towards death, but Lowell resisted that, held fast to conscience and pushed deliberately towards self mastery'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, pp. 222 – 224). Heaney argues that we should be grateful to Lowell for 'the art that he could not and would not separate from the life'. All of the above can be applied to Heaney, his honest self-scrutiny and his guilt about the poet's conflicting responsibilities to art, life, family, society and the tribe are similar to Lowell's. Heaney too wants to 'get nearer the quick of life, to cage the minute' and his admiration for Lowell's bravery encouraged him to emulate Lowell's uninhibited commitment to his song which allowed Lowell to make a difference in the lives of others.

Up to and including part one of *North*, Heaney agonises over the topics and practice of poetry, from part two of *North*, on into *Field Work* and continuing through *Station Island*, Heaney homes in on the question of the poet's actual role in society. While the poet's role in society is, undoubtedly, a matter of personal, artistic and civic responsibility, it also inescapably involves questions of identity, influence and perspective. In his introduction to *The Government Of The Tongue* Heaney recounts an incident that

occurred in Belfast in nineteen-seventy-two. One evening while he and his friend David Hammond were travelling to a studio to record some songs and poems for a mutual friend in Michigan, several explosions occurred and, Heaney writes, 'the air was full of the sirens of ambulances and fire engines. There was news of casualties ... There was no sense of what to anticipate and still that implacable disconsolate wailing of the ambulances continued. It was music against which the music of the guitar that David unpacked made little impression. So little, indeed, that the very notion of beginning to sing at that moment when others were beginning to suffer seemed like an offence against their suffering. He could not raise his voice at that cast down moment. He packed his guitar again and we both drove off into the destroyed evening'. (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. xi). Heaney has since questioned their particular action that night, or lack of action. The artist's voice is most needed at moments of suffering and desolation and just because the poet is trapped within a system of violence, does not mean that violence should be the only voice. The artist's voice, the song, can co-exist with the artist's political surroundings, the suffering, whatever they may be. The poet's responsibility lies in capturing the moment when song and suffering co-exist. The co-existence of song and suffering is the lesson Heaney learned from Eastern European writers such as Zbigniew Herbert and Osip Mandelstam, and this lesson is behind the urgency and the ethic that informs many of the poems in *Field Work*. It is here the poet-figure finds his place: 'The witness is any figure in whom the truth-telling urge and the compulsion to identify with the oppressed becomes necessarily integral with the act of writing itself'. (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. xvi).

FIELD WORK

'Oysters', the opening poem of *Field Work*, has as its central concern poetic responsibility. The speaker in this poem cannot escape memory and the obligation that comes with memory, he cannot escape the call of his craft or the responsibility that call demands. All he can do at the particular moment when the thought strikes him is to eat 'the day / Deliberately'. (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 11). The speaker enjoying an evening of conversation and oysters with friends in a convivial setting is overcome by images of the violence done to the oysters themselves.

'Alive and violated
They lay on their beds of ice:
Bivalves: the split bulb
And philandering sigh of ocean.
Millions of them ripped and shucked and scattered'.

(Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 11).

In the fourth stanza Heaney imagines the Romans packing oysters over the Alps in their pursuit of empire.

'Over the Alps, packed deep in hay and snow,
The Romans hauled their oysters south to Rome:
I saw damp panniers disgorge
The frond-lipped, brine-stung
Glut of privilege'.

(Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 11).

Heaney associates the oysters with privilege, and privilege with the conquerors, having spent his whole life seeing himself as one of the class of victims of imperialism he finds himself in conflict with his roots. Moments of transcendence decline into disturbing meditations on old acts of imperialist aggression and privilege. Heaney recalls Rome but is thinking of England too as it gluts itself on Ireland. Heaney wants to celebrate uncluttered sensuality and the transcendental light beyond politics but history's gravity continues to tug. His anger is kindled by the fact that he cannot enjoy this simple repast and by the fact that his 'trust could not repose / In the clear light, like poetry or freedom / Leaning in from the sea' (Heaney. S., *Field Work* , 1979, p. 11). Yet there is hope at the end of this poem. Heaney eats 'the day / Deliberately', in the hope that 'its tang / Might quicken me all into verb, pure verb'. (Heaney. S., *Field Work* , 1979, p. 11).

Heaney is attempting to step back from immersion in the Ulster morass and take a new direction. 'Oysters' is expressive of the longing for amplitude and freedom of the mind, yet all the while Heaney is aware that artistic detachment is a luxury not easily sustained,

and such detachment, the speaker in this poem learns, if it even exists, is an impediment to artistic expression.

The co-existence and interweaving of antithetical elements, song and suffering, is evident in the second poem of this volume, the sequence 'Triptych' which begins with a poem about the aftermath of an assassination. 'After a Killing' was written in the wake of the assassination of Christopher Ewart-Biggs, the British Ambassador to Ireland, who was murdered by the IRA in July nineteen-seventy-six with a car bomb. The poem opens with the image of two shadowy gun-men.

> 'There they were, as if our memory hatched them,
> As if the unquiet founders walked again:
> Two young men with rifles on the hill,
> Profane and bracing as their instruments'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 12).

Armed IRA men, furtively hiking across country. The presence of these two assassins haunts the poem. The image is a manifestation of the 'unquiet founders', it is a manifestation of a collective memory of those who, dead but not silent, still stalk the countryside in the form of these two young rebels. Heaney asks 'who's sorry for our trouble?' Only the Irish are sorry for their troubles because it is they who have to live with the Troubles. The other issue here in this poem is the presence of outsiders, the 'unquiet founders' had a dream; their dream was that the Irish might 'dwell among ourselves'. Yet the continued presence of the British Army is a constant reminder that the Northern Irish are unable to dwell among themselves. That dream of the 'unquiet founders' is manifest in the two gunmen; therefore it assures that after any killing there will be another killing; while outsiders remain in the North, one moment of suffering will follow another.

The poem ends with the simple pleasures of everyday life as;

'to-day a girl walks in home to us
Carrying a basket full of new potatoes,
Three tight green cabbages, and carrots
With the tops and mould still fresh on them'.

(Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 12).

The force of politics and history does not preclude the pleasures of life. So too the pleasures of everyday life do not trivialise or ignore the recurrent suffering that constitutes Ireland's politics and history. Thus song and suffering do not completely eclipse one another, but nonetheless shadow each other, as life goes on even in the face of atrocity.

Andrew Murphy criticises Heaney for his ambiguity in this poem. He writes 'it is not clear, then, whether Heaney feels that the community is in sympathy with these militants, nor is it clear whether he feels that there is a clear line of continuity between earlier armed struggles and the violent campaign being pursued in contemporary Ireland, (the question of whether the contemporary IRA, whose nineteen-sixteen Uprising served to break the link with Britain is always a contentious issue in Ireland)'. (Murphy. A., 1996, p. 55). Let us consider Murphy's points individually. While many nationalists would not involve themselves in direct action, i.e., 'terrorist acts', a large section of the community in Ireland is to varying degrees in some sort of sympathy with the 'militants'. It is from this community that the 'militants' variously draw their recruits, it is this community that shelter paramilitaries who are on 'missions' and on the run, providing them with safe houses, food, clothing and information. The percentage of support given by the community varies over time and is influenced by what 'atrocities' the 'other side' are perceived to be responsible for at any given time. There are very clear and well documented parallels between the increase in recruits and sympathy for the paramilitaries, the introduction of internment without trial and the Bloody Sunday massacre, to name but two examples.

Secondly, it is my feeling that Heaney makes it quite clear in this poem that there is indeed continuity between the earlier armed struggles and the present day one, when he writes of the 'unquiet founders', walking again. The nationalist community as a whole

believes in this continuity, it is taken as given and therefore no Irishman or woman feels the need to spell it out.

Murphy is quite correct when he writes about the contentiousness surrounding which paramilitary group is the legitimate heir to the IRA who broke the link with Britain. However the issue of legitimacy is of far more importance to each individual paramilitary grouping than it is to the community as a whole who view each splinter group as offspring of the original parent group.

Murphy's charge that Heaney is ambiguous in this poem and ambivalent over the course of 'Triptych' as a whole is unsurprising because both ambiguity and ambivalence are to be found throughout Heaney's work, irrespective of which end of the continuum he is vacillating towards, i.e., tribal values or the primacy of art, in other words, whether he is being true to the collective historical experience or to the recognition of the emerging self. The two armed young men in this poem manifest the problem of the 'command to participate actively in history' in that their active participation succeeds only in perpetuating the inflexible commands of the 'unquiet founders' whose voices are mythologised in Ireland and live on in perpetuity. While Heaney was aware of this and while he was trying to stand back from the abyss of the violence and act as a truth-telling witness, my view is that the fact that Heaney's attitude towards the actual IRA appeared so ambivalent at that period in his life, was part of the fundamental wound behind his many festering political anxieties.

In 'Sibyl', part two of 'Triptych', Heaney hopes 'forgiveness finds it nerve and voice', yet when he examines his native ground he finds only a 'flayed or calloused' corpse whose voice has been strangled in blood. (Heaney. S., *Field Work* , 1979, p. 13). Heaney's island is 'full of comfortless noises'. Heaney is looking for rejuvenation. He asks a young 'Sibyl', a youthful Nerthus, laden with fruits of the earth, "what will become of us?". She advises him to turn from over contemplation of the cycles of death and violence to contemplation of the ancient mysteries.

> 'My tongue moved, a swung relaxing hinge.
> I said to her, "What will become of us?" ...

She began to speak ...

Unless forgiveness finds its nerve and voice,
Unless the helmeted and bleeding tree
Can green and open buds like infants' fists
And the fouled magma incubate

Bright nymphs ... My people think money
And talk weather. Oil-rigs lull their future
On single acquisitive stems. Silence
Has shoaled into the trawlers' echo-sounders.

The ground we kept our ear to for so long
Is flayed or calloused, and its entrails
Tented by an impious augury.
Our island is full of comfortless noises'.

(Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 13).

The poet must 'go barefoot, foetal and penitential, / And pray at the water's edge' for the revitalisation of his people. (Heaney. S., *Field Work* , 1979, p. 14). Unless the Irish people can forgive, the 'Sibyl' warns, there will only be a decline of the race. Heaney appears to indict his people here by suggesting that they only talk about money and the weather, the rest is silence. This links back to the previous chapter of this study where 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing'. It is not that the Irish are particularly mercenary or particularly fascinated by the weather, it is because these are the 'safe' subjects to talk about in a country where the terrible, ludicrous cycle of butchery is an everyday occurrence.

Tony Curtis writes that 'Sibyl' ends 'with a grim image of Ireland as a body torn apart ... What passes for religion is no more than sectarian hatred: there is no true piety evident'. (Curtis. T., 1982, p. 109). What Curtis says is true but what Heaney is doing here is stressing the need for change for Ireland, for his people, for himself. I agree with E. Andrews when he argues that Heaney is attempting 'to free himself from the ground ... it is as if the wingless poet is attempting to take flight from the diseased earth' in his desire

to 'achieve imaginative freedom', it is part of Heaney's process of trying to distance himself from the violence in *Field Work'*. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 216).

The concluding part of 'Triptych' is a brooding poem. We find Heaney visiting three islands in Lough Erne, County Fermanagh, his duality and ambiguity are again to the fore here. The first island he visits is Devenish and Heaney writes,

> 'On Devenish I heard a snipe
> And the keeper's recital of elegies
> Under the tower. Carved monastic heads
> Were crumbling like bread on water'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 14).

It is not just the 'carved monastic heads' that were crumbling in nineteen-seventies Ireland, law and order were breaking down and with it the old order. There was no going back following Bloody Sunday on the thirtieth of January nineteen-seventy-two, Catholics would no longer be submissive in the face of oppression. The second stanza finds Heaney on Boa Island. Heaney is looking for answers to his dilemma and to Ireland's but he does not get any here, all there is, is silence and graves, silent figures and elusive meanings among the ruins. The God is 'two-faced and trepanned' and highlights Heaney's disillusionment with the political and religious turmoil of the day where beliefs are uncertain and unstable and the level of distrust high in the community. This God also reminds Heaney of his own ambiguous stance, his own silence and inability to find his 'place'.

The third stanza is a forceful reminder that Northern Ireland is an occupied country.

> 'From a cold hearthstone on Horse Island
> I watched the sky beyond the open chimney
> And listened to the thick rotations
> Of an army helicopter patrolling'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 14)

The helicopter stands for provocation and oppression by a foreign force. It conjures up memories from nineteen-seventy-two when Heaney in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday joined in the peaceful protest marches that took place throughout Ireland. The Bloody Sunday massacre by the British Army threw the Catholic population of Ireland, North and South into the new era, an era in which they would no longer tolerate injustice and oppression and no longer meekly accept being second class citizens in their own country. Heaney desperately wants to make a difference, to help his people. He considers praying and he remembers the oppression and submissiveness of his people prior to the Bloody Sunday massacre. He remembers too how in the wake of British violence, when the majority of his people including himself made peaceful protests, the agents of the State, the British Army and the RUC darkly and threateningly shadowed their every step, peaceful steps taken in protest against the killings and for equality, justice and civil liberties.

Murphy accuses Heaney of being unwilling to take the advice given in the previous poem by the Sibyl to forgive and to forget. I disagree with Murphy. Heaney, and indeed the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland are willing to forgive, although forgetting is far more difficult because they still suffer the oppression. It must also be remembered that the majority prefer peaceful means and the protest marches were peaceful. 'The sacred, irrevocable steps' were taken to try to improve the human lot and challenge injustice in a peaceful way. If peaceful protest is suppressed and submission to oppression is no longer an option, the result ultimately will be to swell the numbers of those involved in the violence. Murphy again criticises Heaney for his ambivalence and continues 'we might ask ourselves, whether the defiance of the protest march is continuous with the bracing defiance of the gunmen with whom Heaney opens the poem?' (Murphy. A., 1996, p. 57). My feeling is that it is self evident that the peaceful protest marches are continuous with the violent protest but they are at the other end of the continuum, the peaceful end, and as such, must be seen as legitimate. If Murphy views peaceful protest as illegitimate, the whole concept of democracy is in danger and civil liberties can be regarded as dangerous and therefore dispensable luxuries. Heaney's attitude is clearly ambivalent but, in my view, is ultimately conciliatory. Heaney is promoting change, peaceful change because change is not only necessary, but inevitable in Northern Ireland.

Alien intrusion into Heaney's native landscape is the issue in 'The Toome Road', the presence of foreign soldiers, a conquering colonial power. The sense of shock and horror that were present in the introductory lyric to *Wintering Out* and which was repeated in Section IV of 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing' in *North* are evident here again.

> 'One morning early I met armoured cars
> In convoy, warbling along on powerful tyres,
> All camouflaged with broken alder branches,
> And headphoned soldiers standing up in turrets.
> How long were they approaching down my roads
> As if they owned them? The whole country was sleeping ...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p.15).

There is again the sense of disbelief that it has come to this, the situation has deteriorated so rapidly that the invasion of foreign forces has happened almost overnight while 'the whole country was sleeping'.

James Simmons is harsh in his criticism of Heaney here, he writes 'I am amazed at Heaney's hatred of the soldiers ... his identification with paramilitary nationalism ...' (Andrews, E., 1992, p. 63). Hatred is not evident in this poem but Heaney's helplessness and frustration are, he doesn't know what to do or where to turn, 'whom should I run to tell?' There is some bitterness here certainly, but I would argue that this is a justifiable and normal human reaction when one sees one's own country overrun by foreign soldiers, and it does not necessarily equate to Heaney identifying with paramilitary nationalism, in fact one could argue the opposite is true here. Heaney draws parallels between the Roman Empire and the British Empire,

> 'Sowers of seed, erectors of headstones ...
> O charioteers, above your dormant guns,
> It stands here still, stands vibrant as you pass,
> The invisible, untoppled omphalos.'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work,* 1979, p. 15).

What Heaney seems to be saying is that the Roman Empire is no more, given time, so too the patience and resources of the native Irish will ultimately outlast the British colonial regime. I can find no evidence of Heaney promoting militant nationalism here, instead he is suggesting that the defeat of colonialism will be effected through the feat of simple endurance on the part of the Irish people.

In 'The Strand at Lough Beg' Heaney recalls a specific victim of political atrocity in Northern Ireland; he confronts the random sectarian killing of his second cousin, Colum McCartney, a carpenter and farmer.

In the first section Heaney describes the murder or how he imagined it to have happened,

> 'Leaving the white glow of filling stations
> And a few lonely streetlamps among fields
> You climbed the hills towards Newtownhamilton
> Past the Fews Forest, out beneath the stars –
> Along that road, a high, bare pilgrim's track …
> What blazed ahead of you? A faked roadblock?
> The red lamp swung, the sudden brakes and stalling
> Engine, voices, heads hooded and the cold-nosed gun?
> Or in your driving mirror, tailing headlights
> That pulled out suddenly and flagged you down
> Where you weren't known and far from what you knew:…'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 17).

The appalling, unnatural circumstances in which this death occurred is powerfully recorded, the 'blood and roadside muck' in which McCartney is covered. His only apparent mistake is driving away from the safety of his home community. In the second section Heaney discusses McCartney's ill-suitedness for the world of terrorists. McCartney, like so many other innocent victims, is guiltless, he is an ordinary man caught up in the dire exigencies of life in a beleaguered state. He is portrayed as a peaceful man, frightened even of the spent shells of the duck hunters whose gunfire violated the tranquillity of his childhood home. There is also the suggestion in this section that McCartney is the victim of a new type of conspirator in Ireland, those who are indeed

capable of cracking the whip and seizing the day, those who are part of the tribal legacies of the 'unquiet founders' from both tribes. On this point, Parker writes 'despite their long and deep resentment against Unionist rule, few among the rural Nationalist population ... would ever have dreamt of shaping their grievances into direct, violent action. Their agenda was headed by "haycocks and hindquarters" rather than the vexed question of how to achieve an United Ireland. For McCartney's killers, however, the belief that he shared that common Catholic aspiration was sufficient to justify his murder'. (Parker, M., 1993, p. 160).

In the third section Heaney describes a dream sequence of the two men crossing a field. Heaney imagines that after his cousin has been the victim of the random sectarian killing, he leads him to the shore at Lough Beg when he cleans his wounds with moss and dew before laying him out.

> 'Across that strand of yours the cattle graze
> Up to their bellies in an early mist
> And now they turn their unbewildered gaze
> To where we work our way through squeaking sedge
> Drowning in dew. Like a dull blade with its edge
> Honed bright, Lough Beg half shines under the haze.
> I turn because the sweeping of your feet
> Has stopped behind me, to find you on your knees
> With blood and roadside muck in your hair and eyes,
> Then kneel in front of you in brimming grass
> And gather up cold handfuls of the dew
> To wash you, cousin. I dab you clean with moss
> Fine as the drizzle out of a low cloud.
> I lift you under the arms and lay you flat.
> With rushes that shoot green again, I plait
> Green scapulars to wear over your shroud'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 18).

This final section of the poem has created much discussion and criticism among Heaney's foes and fans alike. In section eight of the title sequence of his next volume *Station*

Island, Heaney gives voice to C. McCartney himself, and his cousin accuses him of having failed to fulfil his obligations of kinship and of having romanticised his death in the elegy. McCartney explicitly rebukes Heaney for having 'whitewashed ugliness' by employing 'the lovely blinds of the *Purgatorio*'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 83).

Murphy criticises Heaney writing that this poem 'has more in common with the mythologising poems of *North* than it has with its companion pieces on political violence in *Field Work*'. He continues, 'we might recall, for instance, the image of the murdered woman in 'Punishment', her body metaphorised into an aesthetic object ... Similarly the consolation offered here – like the consolations and reconciliation's offered in *North* – is metaphorical and highly mythologised'. (Murphy. A., 1996, p. 59). Heaney himself picks up on this very issue when he returns to consider McCartney's death once more in *Station Island*.

Murphy's criticism will be explored fully in chapter five of this study on *Station Island*, for the purpose of this chapter suffice it to say that Heaney in this poem is examining evils. He chooses not to describe McCartney's death in journalistic detail because to do so would be to sensationalise the poem and turn towards propaganda. One can also argue that the plaiting of the green scapulars was for Heaney an intimate part of the grieving process, and was bred by an emotional need at that time. Heaney marks McCartney's death by an Irish ritual: the native greenery of the landscape represents the hope of Irish regeneration that Heaney brings to bear on the despair occasioned by the loss of a loved one.

In my view this poem is a good example of poetic freedom gaining the upper hand over tribal demands. Andrews writes that Heaney is seeking to 'enact a liberating lyricism' in this poem. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 217). He is searching for a resolving image, one that will best express the specific emotional matrix from which both grief and consolation arise. Deane, in contrast to the condemnation of McCartney, Heaney himself and others, praises Heaney's poetry particularly in *Field Work* and subsequent works for 'changing our conception of what writing can be because it is facing up to what writing, to remain authentic, must always face – the confrontation with the ineffable, the unspeakable thing for which "violence" is our helplessly inadequate word'. (Deane. S., 1985, p. 186).

'A Postcard from North Antrim', Heaney's memorial poem to his friend, Sean Armstrong is another poem which emphasises the murderous actuality of Heaney's home; and worse again the unpredictable intrusion of violence even into relatively unpolitical lives. Armstrong was a friend of Heaney's from Queen's University. He had returned to Belfast in the early nineteen-seventies and had become involved in social work, having spent some time in Sausalito in a commune. Armstrong, like Heaney's cousin McCartney was another innocent victim murdered by an unknown gunman of the Protestant tribe, the 'other side', in yet another 'random sectarian killing'. He was part of Ulster's 'old decency'.

> 'Yet something in your voice
> Stayed nearly shut.
> Your voice was a harassed pulpit
> Leading the melody
> It kept at bay,
> It was independent, rattling, non-transcendent
> Ulster – old decency...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 20).

Armstong's death resulted from the political situation in Northern Ireland, his 'candid forehead stopped / A point blank teatime bullet'. (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 19). The 'teatime bullet' reminds one of the 'neighbourly murders' of 'Funeral Rites' in *North*, it is a frequent, familiar event, part of everyday living in Northern Ireland.

> 'Drop-out on a come-back,
> Prince of no-man's land
> With your head in clouds or sand,
> You were the clown
> Social Worker of the town
> Until your candid forehead stopped
> A point blank teatime bullet'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 19).

Armstong's only sin was being 'the clown/Social worker of the town' an innocent bystander, who for one reason or another refused to get embroiled in political battles. These deaths call the political situation into more immediate question. Armstrong like McCartney, and many other innocents who try to avoid the Troubles, and go about their everyday business as if nothing unusual is happening, usually end up dead. So inconceivable does Heaney find it that his friend is dead he calls on him to 'Get up from your blood on the floor'. (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 20). However, unlike the 'unquiet founders' who return in the form of the armed young men who make these innocents their victims, Heaney's friend Armstrong and his cousin McCartney will not rise, they will never return.

This poem is a heartbreaking example of everyday life in Ulster, where song and suffering co-exist. Heaney weaves both together here, the 'old decency / And Old Bushmills' together with 'the concrete vents / Of a border check-point. / Cold zinc nailed for a peace line'. (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 20). The poem highlights the juxtaposition of, and often the simultaneous existence of, good and evil in Northern Ireland, and the everyday reality that those who would seem to bring a volume of good into Northern Ireland are cruelly snuffed out by those bent upon evil.

This is a good example of Heaney learning the lessons of Czeslaw Milosz and Anton Chekhov, writers he admires and whose influence is very evident throughout his next volume *Station Island*. Heaney, during the end of this difficult decade in Northern Ireland is learning that the artist cannot escape the massacre and remain an artist, that the artist must come face to face with the suffering and violence that plagues his or her culture, that the artist must deflect ideology's guilt and avoid the immediate political gesture in favour of a battle that strikes at the very heart of humanity's suffering. Parker praises Heaney's effort here and writes that this elegy 'demonstrates Heaney's refusal to allow the bullet and the bomb to have the final word'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 159).

The importance of the poet's song is clearly seen in 'Casualty' where Heaney meditates on the death of Louis O'Neill. O'Neill was a drinking friend of Heaney's, blown up by the IRA in a retaliation bombing three days after Bloody Sunday. Here Heaney faces again the suffering and grief that threaten to mute his song. The IRA imposed a curfew after thirteen Catholics were killed by British paratroopers on Bloody Sunday. O'Neill's only crime was succumbing to the lure of a drink after curfew. 'Casualty' highlights the

unfreedom of Ulster society and confronts the deep moral conflicts to which the violent campaign gives rise. O'Neill, an ordinary fisherman, cannot simply go his own way, for despite his solitude he is drawn into the pattern of random violence. He died because of his refusal to suppress individuality and comply with the tribal dictate.

> 'He was blown to bits
> Out drinking in a curfew
> Others obeyed, three nights
> After they shot dead
> The thirteen men in Derry.
> PARAS THIRTEEN, the walls said,
> BOGSIDE NIL. That Wednesday
> Everybody held
> His breath and trembled.
>
> II
>
> ...
>
> But he would not be held
> At home by his own crowd
> Whatever threats were phoned,
> Whatever black flags waved.
> I see him as he turned
> In that bombed offending place,
> Remorse fused with terror
> In his still knowable face,
> His cornered outfaced stare
> Blinding in the flash'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, pp. 22 – 23).

Heaney's recounting of the wall in Belfast after Bloody Sunday recalls again the 'neighbourly murders' of 'Funeral Rites' in *North* and the 'point blank teatime bullet' of the previous poem in this volume. The important point to note here is that this murder was carried out by the victim's 'own crowd'. O'Neill's refusal to obey a curfew imposed

by the IRA, by tribal dictate, led to his being in a pub when the bomb went off. Now the sects turn on themselves and one is reminded of the dark warning of the 'Sibyl' in 'Triptych';

> 'The ground we kept our ear to for so long
> Is flayed or calloused, and its entrails
> Tented by an impious augury.
> Our island is full of comfortless noises'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 13).

'Casualty' raises the crucial question of culpability.

> 'He had gone miles away
> For he drank like a fish
> Nightly, naturally
> Swimming towards the lure
> Of warm lit-up places,
> The blurred mesh and murmur
> Drifting among glasses
> In the gregarious smoke.
> How culpable was he
> That last night when he broke
> Our tribe's complicity?
> "Now you're supposed to be
> An educated man,"
> I hear him say. "Puzzle me
> The right answer to that one".'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 23).

The IRA might argue that O'Neill knowingly and wilfully violated the 'tribe's complicity' and might view him as not only having broken their 'law', but of being disrespectful to the dead. However the IRA have no interest in freedom and civil liberties and do not accept that their 'law' is not the law of the land.

James Simmons, always among Heaney's fiercest critics, writes that 'this poem underlines how deep Heaney's commitment is to violent nationalism. Setting off the bomb is not questioned. The victim is imagined as feeling guilty'. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 62). Nowhere in this particular poem can I find Heaney committing himself to 'violent nationalism', what I find is Heaney sympathising with the victim of violence and facing up to the act of violence more directly than in previous volumes. Andrew Waterman goes further in his defence of Heaney, he argues that the issue of 'Heaney's own politics, has lurked unresolved in previous poetry ... Heaney had tended too much to crave his tribe's endorsement; from inside had hesitated to push painfully against its limits... "Punishment" in *North* ambivalently presented the poet as someone who could "understand the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge". To understand does not absolve from responsibility to judge; the Irish, with their Republican or Loyalist cultural solidarities, are apt to be over-lenient towards their own tribal constraints, rites, and indeed revenges, and here Heaney's moral blankness before what, lucidly evaluated, as a repellent atrocity, leaves his "understanding" of a tarring-and-feathering redolent of tacit moral complicity ... But in "Casualty" he grasps the nettle he left unplucked in "Punishment" and offers a decisive answer to the question posed about the "culpability" of breaking "our tribe's complicity" '. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 27). However harsh Waterman is on Heaney in his critique of 'Punishment' from *North*, I agree with him that in 'Casualty' Heaney is far more direct and decisive. In 'Casualty' Heaney elegises a member of the Catholic community but also rebukes that community's terms and ethics by celebrating O'Neill for renouncing tribal expectations and for his non-conformity to putative tribal values. There are parallels here between O'Neill and Heaney, the poet admires the independence of the fisherman whose work is implicitly likened to the poet's in its dependence on rhythm, remoteness and freedom. That freedom must take Heaney beyond the tribe's constraints, that freedom as we have seen in 'Casualty' carries a terrible risk, yet it also brings joy;

> 'As you find a rhythm
> Working you, slow mile by mile,
> Into your proper haunt
> Somewhere, well out, beyond ...'

(Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 24).

This poem highlights again Heaney's dilemma, of the wish to perfect his art and the obligation to speak for his community. T. C. Foster suggests how unenviable Heaney's position is when he writes; 'one faction may demand wisdom, insight, or perspective, another, as manifested by Colum McCartney, may demand propaganda, rage, or revenge. To satisfy one is to outrage the other; he cannot mollify all sides even among these representatives of Catholic Ulster. His dilemma points to the difficulty of his society at large: there are no answers that will satisfy all parties'. (Foster. T.C., 1989, p. 126). I would argue that it is in this poem, 'Casualty' that Heaney reaches full awareness of his own 'proper haunt' beyond any socially ordained constraint, the area that is his by choice and not dictated by circumstance. What is of importance here is that although Heaney's loyalties are very finely balanced, he takes some steps towards escaping tribal dictate by facing more directly than previously, the complex issues of personal and collective morality, by sympathising with O'Neill and challenging the justice of his fate.

In 'In Memoriam Sean O'Riada' Heaney writes of the passing of his friend, the composer and instrumentalist, Sean O'Riada, whose personal and artistic courage Heaney greatly admires. O'Riada (1931 – 1971) was one of Ireland's most acclaimed composers and despite the brevity of his life he rejuvenated Irish traditional music and made a contribution to the national culture and offered Ulster a certain level of cultural legitimacy.

> 'He conducted the Ulster Orchestra
> like a drover with an ashplant
> herding them south.
> I watched him from behind,
>
> springy, formally suited,
> a black stiletto trembling in its mark,
> a quill flourishing itself,
> a quickened, whitened head'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p., 29).

Heaney's bond with O'Riada is evident, there are parallels between Heaney's father and O'Riada, as O'Riada 'herds' his orchestra with his baton, just as Patrick Heaney once

herded cattle in County Derry. Heaney explores the connection between art and politics and religion in this poem, O'Riada was; 'our jacobite / he was our young pretender'. He resembled the defeated Catholic James II rather than William of Orange and his Protestant followers. There are parallels here between O'Riada and Heaney himself. O'Riada went South with his orchestra, just as Heaney moved South to live. In the Republic both men had a larger audience where the arts have a history of greater standing. Both O'Riada and Heaney, because of their prominence in their fields became public property and at different times had to bear the attendant burdens of this in terms of the pressures of the community's expectations and criticisms. Heaney therefore could identify strongly with O'Riada and this in a sense was a source of release from the pressures he felt at that time. Also the fact that Heaney refers to O'Riada as 'our Jacobite' and 'our young pretender' highlights the other side of the equation, Heaney to whom the community look to as a focal point, himself as a part of that community, also needs a focal point, a role model.

Heaney celebrates O'Riada's uninhibited commitment to his song which allowed him to make a difference in the lives of others. This is what Heaney desperately wants to do himself. Heaney admires O'Riada's risk taking, his courage in courting the muse through risky submission. Although Heaney at this stage still lacks the certainty and self-confidence of O'Riada, he realises the need for such courage and conviction, he realises that he too will have to trust 'the gift' and risk the 'gift's undertow' if he wants to live in his own 'proper haunt' and if he wants to make a difference in people's lives and reduce suffering and dilute or diminish evil.

O'Riada is of specific importance as a role model for Heaney because he took the two very different traditions of Irish music and classical music and from them created a new music. This new music, his artistic endeavour was therefore less a reconciliation of different traditions than the co-existence of the two traditions expressing his own experience. There is an important lesson for Heaney here in that O'Riada demonstrated that differences can be productive for artists who are attuned to their times and their influences. This poem therefore marks a further shift in Heaney, in celebrating a renewed belief in the redemptive power of art, and in demonstrating a preparedness to trust and to take risks for the sake of Art.

In 'Elegy', Heaney acknowledges his debt to the American poet Robert Lowell who died in nineteen-seventy-seven, referring to him as 'the master elegist' and 'welder of English'. (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 31). Lowell is an obvious influence and exemplar for Heaney, a master spirit, one of Heaney's artistic fathers.

> 'You were our night ferry
> thudding in a big sea,
>
> the whole craft ringing
> with an armourer's music
> the course set wilfully across
> the ungovernable and dangerous'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 32).

Heaney's friendship with Lowell developed in the early to mid nineteen-seventies. As with O'Riada, Heaney admires Lowell's courage and conviction, his belief in himself and in art.

> 'The way we are living,
> timorous or bold,
> will have been our life'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 31).

In other words, what we are doing is going to be what we will have been. Lowell was another poet Heaney could identify strongly with; Heaney like Lowell is both liberated and constrained by a severe conscience. Lowell's honest self-scrutiny and his guilt around the poet's conflicting responsibilities to society, to art and to family encourage Heaney to mine a rich new vein, Heaney's self-interrogatory, self-accusing style is similar to Lowell's. Heaney wrote of Lowell in nineteen-seventy-eight, 'He was and will remain a pattern for poets in his amphibious ability to plunge into the downward reptilian welter of the self and yet raise himself with whatever knowledge he gained there out onto the hard ledges of the historical present, which he then apprehended with refreshed insight and intensity'. (Hart. H., 1993, p. 123). There are other important similarities between

Heaney and Lowell. For Lowell the legacy of the American Civil War is present in the racial strife in his contemporary Boston, just as for Heaney the legacy of the 'unquiet founders' is present in contemporary Ulster / Ireland. These legacies highlight old divisions in both poets' nations and in their personalities. The duality one finds in Heaney is also there in Lowell who is similarly divided between despair and the tribal or instinctive urge to go to battle, and fight for moral reformation. It is the old dilemma, art or action, Milosz's motionless point.

Heaney also admires Lowell for what he calls his 'bull-headedness'. Heaney said of Lowell at his memorial service in London, 'I loved the ignorance, I loved the destruction he had practised upon the lyric ... the bull-headedness, the rage and the uncharmingness of the writing attracted me enormously'. (Corcoran. N., 1986, p. 36). Parker writes that 'though it is generally accepted that the influence of Lowell is most evident in *Field Work*, the attitudes he (Heaney) speaks of admiringly would seem to apply to many of the poems in *North*'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 122). Andrew Murphy enlarges on this, writing that, 'Heaney's conception of Lowell's project has much in common with his own expressed ambition that in *North* he wished to "take the English lyric and make it eat stuff that it has never eaten before" '. (Murphy. A., 1996, p. 89).

'Elegy' is part of Heaney's slow journey further along the road to trust, trust in the 'self', in the muse and in the redemptive power of Art. He is as aware as Lowell was that the 'muse is often a siren, dragging the artist down to oceanic depths', yet Heaney admires and celebrates Lowell's courage in taking the risk of being pulled under. In his article 'Current Unstated Assumptions About Poetry', Heaney praises Lowell and equates him to Osip Mandelstam for 'heroically standing up to the political terrors of his time, suffering for his beliefs, and remaining sacrificially devoted to his poetic vocation'. (Hart. H., 1993, p. 174).

The last of Heaney's memorial poems is to Francis Ledwidge, whom Heaney did not know personally, nor was he a contemporary of Heaney's, but who died in nineteen-seventeen, in World War One at Ypres. He was killed by shell-fire and buried in Artillery Wood Cemetery in Belgium. Ledwidge was born in eighteen-eighty-seven in the village of Slane, County Meath, in the Boyne Valley. From the age of twelve years, Ledwidge worked on the estate of Lord Dunsany as a labourer. He later became the protégé of

Heaney and Lowell. For Lowell the legacy of the American Civil War is present in the racial strife in his contemporary Boston, just as for Heaney the legacy of the 'unquiet founders' is present in contemporary Ulster / Ireland. These legacies highlight old divisions in both poets' nations and in their personalities. The duality one finds in Heaney is also there in Lowell who is similarly divided between despair and the tribal or instinctive urge to go to battle, and fight for moral reformation. It is the old dilemma, art or action, Milosz's motionless point.

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Dunsany, an Anglo-Irish Lord and Unionist peer who introduced his first book of poetry to the public.

This poem reveals Heaney's feelings of affinity with Ledwidge and the awkwardness and complexity of the dead poet's situation. Heaney's and Ledwidge's political, religious and cultural colourings are not dissimilar. Ledwidge was a Catholic from Southern Ireland, he was a loyal Irish man, whose political sympathies ran toward Irish nationalism, he supported the Easter Rising of nineteen-sixteen, but his personal sensibilities led him to fight for England during the First World War, having joined the British Army in October nineteen-fourteen. For Heaney, Ledwidge is a composition of contraries, he represents divided loyalties between Catholic and Protestant, British Unionist and Irish Nationalist, between North and South.

> '... you belonged, among the dolorous
> And lovely: the May altar of wild flowers,
> Easter water sprinkled in outhouses,
> Mass-rocks and hill-top raths and raftered byres.
>
> I think of you in your Tommy's Uniform,
> A haunted Catholic face, pallid and brave,
> Ghosting the trenches with a bloom of hawthorn
> Or silence cored from a Boyne passage-grave'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, pp. 59 – 60).

Heaney makes the point that Ledwidge was not a typical soldier, he belonged to Catholic Ireland not to Flanders. He belonged to the May flowers that had to be gathered for the May altars, to the Virgin Mary, the Easter vigils where water was/is blessed and sprinkled over the congregation as a purification rite and to the Mass-rocks where open-air Mass was heard during the Penal Laws. The contradictoriness of Ledwidge's position is brought powerfully home to us when Heaney refers to his 'Tommy's uniform' and 'haunted Catholic face'. That face, 'haunted, pallid and brave' sets him apart from his fellow soldiers who are British and Protestant. Ledwidge died fighting upon the same ground as those who would subdue his native soil, those who were antagonistic toward his political convictions.

' "To be called a British Soldier while my country
Has no place among nations ..." You were rent
By shrapnel six weeks later. "I am sorry
That party politics should divide our tents."

In you, our dead enigma, all the strains
Criss-cross in useless equilibrium
And as the wind tunes through this vigilant bronze
I hear again the sure confusing drum

You followed from Boyne water to the Balkans
But miss the twilit note your flute should sound.
You were not keyed or pitched like these true-blue ones
Though all of you consort now underground'.

(Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 60).

We are reminded of Heaney's crossed pieties and the difficulty of Ledwidge's situation, when one remembers that, while Ledwidge was fighting for Ireland's traditional enemy his fellow Irish men and women were dying fighting against the British in the nineteen-sixteen Easter Rising. Ledwidge was fulfilling a duty of what some have called 'questionable authenticity', while his country had 'no place among nations'. Parker writes that Ledwidge's 'attitude modified somewhat after the suppression of the Easter Rising when he returned to Ireland ... He contributed to a book of verse for the dependants of the prisoners of the Rising'. Parker continues that when Ledwidge 'six weeks before his death ... expressed his sorrow that "party politics should divide our tents", he could not have imagined how soon those same racial, cultural and ideological differences would lead to the division of his land'. (Parker. M., 1993, pp. 174 - 176). Parker here is referring to the Treaty signed on the sixth of December nineteen-twenty-one which created the border and partitioned Ireland into North and South, and which turned the whole island of Ireland into a kaleidoscope of shifting emotions and ambivalences.

Hart is severe on both Ledwidge and Heaney. Of Ledwidge, Hart writes that he 'betrayed his community's trust by following the English Army on a massive Orange Day march

into World War One'. (Hart. H., 1993, p. 128). Ledwidge himself did not see the situation in those terms. Ledwidge fought with the British Army because he felt that it 'stood between Ireland and an enemy common to our civilisation'. (Jeffares. A.N., 1982, p. 184). Hart is not alone in his somewhat blinkered sentiment, it was a sentiment shared by many Irish men and women during World War One and World War Two; men and women whose vision was obscured by their hatred of the British and who were deluded into thinking that had Germany won the respective Wars, she would have allowed Ireland freedom and democracy, and, others again who neither thought nor cared about possible outcomes so long as Britain was defeated. Hart criticises Heaney, arguing that Heaney, 'resurrects Ledwidge as spokesman for his own Catholic and Republican pieties ...' and by witnessing 'exemplary figures of the past he also announces his own sectarian proclivities?' (Hart, H., 1993, pp. 127 - 128). My own feeling is that this poem is a further attempt by Heaney to redress Ireland's wounds, it is a meditation on old divisions in an attempt to come to terms with them.

Heaney himself appears to be somewhat harsh on Ledwidge when he refers to him as 'our dead enigma' in whom 'all the strains / Criss-cross in useless equilibrium'. However when one bears in mind that Heaney identifies with Ledwidge on several levels, that both poets are rent by ambivalence, guilt and crossed pieties, by divisive responsibilities to the tribal community, to society as a whole, to the collective historical experience and to art, then Heaney's criticism may be seen as directed more towards himself than towards Ledwidge.

'Ugolino', Heaney's closing poem in *Field Work* is about Dante's Count Ugolino. It is long, tragic and nightmarish, and I read it as a charge against Ireland where so much blood has been shed for no apparent good. Heaney became attracted to Dante as a writer in the late nineteen-seventies. Dante, like Heaney experienced political unrest and its consequences. Dante's influence confirmed and corroborated Heaney and helped him to find a sense of himself as a poet.

In an interview with Carla De Petris in Rome in nineteen-eighty-nine, Heaney explained Dante's influence on him. 'It is the Joycean example, a way into free space, to dodge instead of allowing the English tradition - imperial politically - imposing culturally - to marginalise the Irish poet. The strategy that Joyce viewed was to marginalise that Anglo-Saxon Protestant tradition by going to the Mediterranean, by going to Greece ... but for

me it is not just a tactic. It has to do with the psychic imprint of the Catholic faith. In Ireland we grew up as rural Catholics, with little shrines at the cross-roads, but deep down we realised that the whole official culture had no place for them. Then I read Dante and I found in a great work of world literature that that little shrine in a corner had this cosmic amplification'. (Petris. C.D., 1989, p. 69). Heaney elaborated further on Dante's influence on him in an essay *Envies and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet.* 'What I first loved in the *Commedia* was the local intensity, the vehemence and fondness attracting to individual shades, the way personalities and values were emotionally soldered together, the strong strain of what has been called personal realism in the celebration of bonds of friendship and bonds of enmity. The way in which Dante could place himself in a historical world yet submit that world to scrutiny from a perspective beyond history, the way he could accommodate the political and the transcendent, this too encouraged my attempt at a sequence of poems which would explore the typical strains which the consciousness labours under in this country'. (Heaney. S., *Envies and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet*, 1985, p. 12).

'That sequence of poems' which Heaney refers to above is *Station Island* and is the topic of the next chapter of this study. What is important here for Heaney is that Dante could 'accommodate the political and the transcendent' and in Henry Hart's opinion, this is what stimulated Heaney to 'emulate the exiled, embittered Florentine poet'. Hart continues that Dante's 'exploration of political and psychological divisions makes him seem Heaney's contemporary ally rather than his ancient master'. (Hart. H., 1993, p. 122).

Dante's Ugolino encompasses all the elements of betrayal, abandonment, revenge, hatred, the slaughter of innocents and innocence, victors' cycles and legacies, punishment, death and living hell, all of which are everyday facts of life in Heaney's Ireland and particularly in the Northern Ireland of the nineteen-seventies. Ugolino made himself master of Pisa twice by treacherous means, he was finally betrayed by the Ghibelline leader, Ruggieri del Ubaldini. The traitorous Ugolino who betrayed his countrymen was imprisoned in the Pisan tower named 'della fame', 'of the hunger', and starved to death. However, also included in this atrocity were his four children, innocent young boys. Dante curses Count Ugolino and his homeland, calling down a purifying flood upon Pisa as punishment for the murder of the innocent along with the guilty;

'... For the sins
Of Ugolino, who betrayed your forts,
Should never have been visited on his sons.
Your atrocity was Theban. They were young
And innocent: Hugh and Brigata
And the other two whose names are in my song'.

(Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, pp. 63 – 64).

Ugolino, because of his sin of betrayal is trapped in the ninth circle of hell with his executioner Archbishop Roger, he is welded onto the back of his enemy in a frozen hole of ice, eating out his brain. Ugolino is very near the absolute bottom of hell in the midst of those who have betrayed their nation, here he will suffer eternally.

'We had already left him. I walked the ice
And saw two soldered in a frozen hole
On top of other, one's skull capping the other's,
Gnawing at him where the neck and head
Are grafted to the sweet fruit of the brain,
Like a famine victim at a loaf of bread.
So the berserk Tydeus gnashed and fed
Upon the severed head of Menalippus
As if it were some spattered carnal melon.
"You", I shouted, "you on top, what hate
Makes you so ravenous and insatiable?
What keeps you so monstrously at rut?
Is there any story I can tell
For you, in the world above, against him?
If my tongue by then's not withered in my throat
I will report the truth and clear your name" '.

(Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 61).

The line 'like a famine victim at a loaf of bread' conjures up something of Ireland's experience during the Great Famine of the eighteen-forties, however it also reminds one

of Ireland's 'innocent and guilty inhabitants, plagued by moral famine, spiritual dearth'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 177). Parker comments that 'one quickly adjusts to the surreal violence, the familiar, intractable territory. The two figures ... locked in an all-consuming hatred, might easily be a Republican and a Loyalist paramilitary, an IRA man and a Brit'. (Parker. M., 1979, pp. 176 – 177). It is unclear whether Ugolino killed his children and ate them, or whether he ate them after they died, or indeed if he ate them at all, but Dante certainly suggests that possibility.

> '... That day and the next stole past us
> And earth seemed hardened against me and them.
> For four days we let the silence gather.
> Then, throwing himself flat in front of me,
> Gaddo said, "Why don't you help me, father?"
> He died like that, and surely as you see
> Me here, one by one I saw my three
> Drop dead during the fifth day and the sixth day
> Until I saw no more. Searching, blinded,
> For two days I groped over them and called them.
> Then hunger killed where grief had only wounded...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 63).

Ugolino's punishment therefore is eternal cannibalism, gnawing his enemy 'where the neck and head / Are grafted to the sweet fruit of the brain'. (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 61).

Further parallels to Ireland may be drawn from Dante's suggestion that Ugolino may have eaten his children, it reminds one of Mother Ireland, Kathleen ni Houlihan, devouring her children as they go out to fight for her and die killing each other. It also reminds one of how the agents of the State betray the innocent as in the case of the three Maguire children, referred to earlier in this chapter, who were killed at the hands of an IRA man whose car went out of control when he himself was killed by the British Army. In the story of Ugolino, Heaney found a perfect emblem of betrayal and of the inadequacy of human justice, all the suffering and torments, the conflicting drives of hope and despair and the dehumanising power of political and religious vengeance are here in this poem,

and it is yet another example of how a country's political realities effect the lives of all innocent and guilty alike. The 'Sibyl's' stark warning for Ireland is also here again, unless Ireland learns the lesson of Ugolino so too Ireland's 'future's veil' will be rent. (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p., 62).

Garratt writes that both Ugolino and his enemy are 'traitors', but Ugolino is on top of Archbishop Roger because 'the winner of their political struggle, had doomed Ugolino to a torment which could – and most probably had – annihilated in him all bonds of human love. Archbishop Roger had betrayed the most sacred icon of man. Therefore in moral terms, he is more culpable than the Count'. (Garratt. R., 1995, p. 42). There are many innocent victims in Ireland who have suffered horrendous fates at the hands of those who have had 'all bonds of human love' annihilated in them. The person betrays the State, and the political forces of the State then betray the individual and often innocent human life. Robert Welch writes, 'this translation, charged with relevance to the human suffering created by the situation in Ireland, carries the force of a moral reality. Dante's conversations with the dead revolve around what right action in life is, because the way we are living will have been our life. Poetry aspires to be a field of force in which human motivation and action will be weighed and measured. A simple, direct and powerful insight reveals itself in Heaney's version of Dante'. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 172). Welch concludes by noting that Heaney's insight revolves around the fact that 'there are limits to punishment, that certain excesses are evil; and that their effects go on and on'. (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 172). For Heaney the Ugolino story is a mirror image of the situation in Northern Ireland in the late nineteen-seventies, ongoing betrayal, as a result of prevarication, is at the root of that ongoing, mortal ritual of violence.

CONCLUSION

Parker comments that Heaney is acutely conscious of 'the gulf between his experience of suffering and that of others and is determined to give others a voice, to "report the truth." ' (Parker. M., 1993, p. 176). Field Work does this and in a far more balanced way than North. In this volume Heaney is listening in to the suffering and grief of others and the poetry is profound and moving in his respect for dead friends. In Field Work Heaney comes to the realisation that song and suffering, Art and Life co-exist, and just as the cyclical violence engendered by the 'unquiet founders', which is the brutal political

reality, effects peoples lives for the worst, so also the artist's song can affect those same lives for the better. In this vein the speaker in 'The Singer's House', a poem Heaney wrote to his friend David Hammond after the incident in the recording studio, which was referred to earlier in this chapter, encourages the singer/artist to raise his or her voice in song. Even though such questions as 'what do we say anymore / to conjure the salt of our earth?' seem unanswerable. (Heaney. S., Field Work, 1979, p. 27) However the speaker senses something of value in the singer's raised voice:

> 'When I came here first you were always singing,
> a hint of the clip of the pick
> in your winnowing climb and attack.
> Raise it again, man. We still believe what we hear'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 27).

Thus song and suffering do not completely eclipse one another, but nonetheless shadow each other. The artist's voice, meagre heat as it may be is most needed at moments of suffering and despair. Although certainly not the grand gesture or one of coming as a meteorite, it is the gesture of the freedman who has gained the power to articulate his voice. The poet has it within his power to ensure that his 'poetry added to the volume of good in the world'. (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. xix).

In my view, Heaney, despite his promise to open a 'door into the light' in *Field Work*, does not achieve this. Like his two precursors, Lowell and Dante, he continues to give time to the darknesses he finds in himself and in others. There is however a shift towards the light in *Field Work* and this shift helps to redress the balance somewhat away from tribal dictate, which had the upper hand in *North*, towards the primacy of Art. There is in much of *Field Work* an attempt by Heaney to follow the demands of his own imagination. In this volume, Heaney accepts Lowell and Dante as his role models and he begins to place his trust in art's ability to confront conflicts between freedom and responsibility. He commented to Frank Kinahan that 'the shift in *Field Work* from *North* is a shift in trust: a learning to trust melody, to trust art as a reality, to trust artfulness as an affirmation and not to go into the self-punishment so much'. (Hart. H., 1993, p. 121). However, despite Heaney's comments above he continues to chastise himself in *Field Work* for evading commitments and failing to have more impact on the situation he left

behind. The nature and potential of Heaney's 'escape' from the North is therefore heavily qualified from the beginning; and the note of escape brings a countervailing sense of abandonment and betrayal, which culminates in Dante's story of Ugolino, with which Heaney closes this volume. For a long time Heaney has been tormented by the conflict between embracing his responsibility as a poet or accomplishing his tribal duty of political commitment, and this theme, as we shall see, carries on into his next volume, *Station Island*. Both choices imply a different kind of treason. Dante's Ugolino was important for Heaney, the moral and political significance of the story has been summarised by Natalino Sapegno: 'From every page of these two cantos xxxii and xxxiii there should spring forth the firm condemnation, no longer of this or that political party, but of the the methods and the forms of the entire political life of the age viewed and judged in its entirety'. (Sapegno. N., 1968, p. 356). Thus the Ugolino story is a comment on contemporary violent division in Northern Ireland; in addition it draws attention to the political inertia, the traitorous lack of political will on the part of the various British Governments of the period, who betrayed and abandoned the people of Northern Ireland; while also reminding us of the terrible fate that awaits the Irish people if betrayal as the utmost consequence of hate continues to be the only germinal force of human life.

CHAPTER FIVE

REAPPRAISAL AND REASSESSMENT

IN

STATION ISLAND

'Keep at a tangent.
When they make the circle wide, it's time to swim
out on your own and fill the element
with signatures on your own frequency'.

Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, pp. 93 – 94.

INTRODUCTION

The topic of this chapter is Heaney's sixth volume *Station Island* which was published in nineteen-eighty-four. The volume is divided into three parts and for the purpose of this chapter I intend to analyse the volume's centrepiece and title sequence 'Station Island'. 'Station Island' follows the direction 'Casualty' in *Field Work* indicated, that of the imaginative path beyond the tribe's complicity 'beyond the control and manipulation of parties, churches and governments'. (Taylor. C. N., 1990, p. 214). Heaney's 'proper haunt / Somewhere, well out, beyond'. (Heaney. S., *Field Work*, 1979, p. 24). 'Station Island' continues that shift away from *North* which begun in *Field Work*, however this volume is far more searching and more sceptical than its immediate predecessor.

The 'Station Island' sequence is also filled with victims and perpetrators of the ongoing violence, the prayers of the pilgrims and sections of the mass resonate throughout the poems along with the voices of violence and suffering. The sequence highlights again the pressures on Heaney, and especially those from within his own community, and looks at the 'question of the problematic relationship between freedom, faith and creativity'. (Taylor. C.N., 1990, p. 211). The influence of guilt upon the psyche of the poet acts as a motivating factor in many of the poems, the entire 'Station Island' sequence, on one level, involves the poet's attempt to purge the guilt of surviving when violence and death befall others around him. In 'Station Island' Heaney questions beliefs and practices that have moulded him and faces again the suffering that threatens to mute his song. He comes face-to-face with the ideologies of his community and reassesses his own position in relation to them, all the while examining and questioning the constraints of religious and political obligation. The fundamental opposition between orthodoxy and artistic freedom operates throughout the sequence.

In 'Station Island' all the old doubts, fears, ambivalence and duality continue; throughout the sequence a number of different perspectives, points of view, experiences and influences collectively act as a chorus in the poet's life. The purgatorial journey to and from Station Island leaves Heaney feeling 'like a convalescent'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 92). Heaney was uncertain of his religious beliefs at the time of writing *Station Island*, and that crisis of religious belief and the acknowledgement of a certain failure of belief and a certain failure as a poet and a person is clear in the volume. In 'Station Island', Heaney re-examines his allegiances and his responsibilities as a poet, his

religious, political and cultural inheritance all come under intense scrutiny. Here, Heaney is very much concerned with issues of reappraisal and reassessment and with the interrogation of old beliefs and fidelities. What is clear from the sequence is that Irish Roman Catholicism and the forces or Irish society leave no room for independence of thought or action.

In 'Station Island', Heaney narrates his pilgrimage to Lough Derg, known as St. Patrick's Purgatory, a traditional rite of passage for many Irish Catholics. During his pilgrimage the poet meets ghosts; friends, relatives and three masters, W. Carleton, P. Kavanagh and J. Joyce, all of whom offer advice or direction. In Chapter Four of this study Dante's influence on Heaney was discussed, Dante encouraged his 'attempt at a sequence of poems which would explore the typical strains which the consciousness labours under in this country'. (Heaney. S., *Envies and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet*, 1985, p. 12). That sequence of poems is 'Station Island' and the 'typical strains' which torment Heaney are fully, painfully and honestly explored here. Heaney's torment is laid bare, the torment of the conflict between embracing his tribal duty of political commitment or embracing his responsibility as a poet.

My argument in this chapter is that there is a big shift towards the primacy of art and away from tribal dictate in the 'Station Island' sequence. What Heaney moves towards here is not so much a commitment to his political responsibilities as a renewed and revitalised commitment to his poetic craft. In this third phase of his career, Heaney's conception of the role of the poet changes again. At the time Heaney was writing *North* and *Field Work* his conception of the role of the poet in contemporary Ireland was in fact Druidical. The great poet was the one who could 'accommodate the political and the transcendent' which was part of Dante's attraction for Heaney. In 'Station Island', Heaney challenges this conception, since then it changed and has become more painfully mature, realistic, controversial and doubtful. By the end of 'Station Island' Heaney has a renewed belief in the power of art but he is also aware of its limitations and of the limitations of the poet's role.

James Joyce, the final ghost in the sequence is given the last word, he gives Heaney sound advice but in effect reiterates what the poet already knows. Joyce is a confirmatory shade, freeing Heaney and encouraging him to 'write / for the joy of it' and to 'strike your note' to 'keep at a tangent' and 'swim / out on your own and fill the element / with

signatures on your own frequency'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, pp. 93 – 94). After having been in the living hell of Northern Ireland, stuck in the ice as Ugolino, around the purgatory of sharp public rebuke, Heaney seems at the end of this sequence to have reached a sort of resolution. The poet's responsibility to life consists in the devotion to his craft, 'the free artist must speak truths that lie beyond the control and manipulation of the tribes, parties, churches and governments', but the free artist must also be aware of the limitations of both his art and of his role. (Taylor. C.N., 1990, p. 214). The poet of the 'Station Island' sequence has not and does not plan to 'escape the massacre', he instead sees he must face the massacre, and in doing so in this sequence Heaney takes a large step towards setting himself free of the forces and pressures of Irish society, Joyce's 'trolls', to pursue his own artistic vision, the responsibility of his own song, to follow the demands of his own imagination.

CONTEMPORARY BACKGROUND

An awareness of the contemporary political, religious and cultural context in Ireland at the time Heaney was writing *Station Island* is of critical importance to an understanding of the 'Station Island' sequence.

This was again a period of high tension in Northern Ireland and of major political change, but it was also a period of dangerously high temperatures for the rest of Ireland. The previous chapter of this study referred briefly to the first of March nineteen-seventy-six which heralded the end of 'special category' status for Republican prisoners for offences committed against the State after that date. From that day on, no further prisoners were admitted to the compounds, which retained their prisoner-of-war status. New prisoners were expected to serve their sentences in the H-Blocks of the Maze Prison, Long Kesh, to wear prison uniform and to conform to prison discipline. This decision heralded a new form of warfare which broke out in the Northern Ireland prison system and which was to have far reaching political effects.

Ciaran Nugent, a young IRA volunteer who had been sentenced for hijacking a van, made history. Nugent informed the prison authorities that if they wanted him to wear the prison uniform, 'they would have to nail the clothes to my back'. This defiance caused Nugent to become the first of the 'blanket men' and thus began the 'Blanket Protest' which led to

the 'Dirty Protest' and to the hunger strikes of nineteen-eighty and nineteen-eighty-one, and to one of the 'most bitter and polarising crises of the Troubles'. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 180). The 'Dirty Protest' was first brought to public attention by Cardinal O'Fiaich who, having visited the prison on the first of August nineteen-seventy-eight, issued a lengthy statement detailing how appalled he was at what he had seen. The 'Dirty Protest' continued until nineteen-eighty-one, by which time Amnesty International and civil liberties groups were roundly condemning the British Government and the Northern Ireland Office. The protest was eventually called off to focus attention on the hunger strikes that were to follow. The long-term significance of these protests and hunger strikes was that much of the Nationalist population in Ireland as a whole, came to support the IRA, and, Sinn Féin became a potent political force. From nineteen-seventy-six to nineteen-eighty, while the blanket and dirty protests carried on, the violence in Northern Ireland intensified. The Nationalist prisoners claimed that they were being mistreated by prison officers and the IRA leadership outside the prisons responded to this by targeting the prison officials for assassination.

In March nineteen-seventy-nine Airey Neave was blown up by an INLA bomb placed under his car in the House of Commons car park. Late August nineteen-seventy-nine saw the murder of Earl Mountbatten along with his fourteen-year-old nephew and his friend, they were blown up by an IRA bomb at Mullaghmore, County Silgo. The same day saw the slaughter of eighteen British Army paratroopers who were blown up by two Provisional IRA bombs at Warrenpoint, County Down. As a consequence of these murders and the revulsion they occasioned, Pope John Paul II, who visited Ireland in September nineteen-seventy-nine, stayed away from the North of Ireland. However, during an open-air Mass to two hundred and fifty thousand on the twenty-ninth of September nineteen-seventy-nine, the Pope did appeal to the men of violence to lay down their arms and also, significantly, to the politicians to find a peaceful solution to Ireland's crisis. The IRA rejected the Pope's appeal but, in the surge of controversy that followed, a debate began between the political leadership of the militant Republicans and the Irish Roman Catholic Church which was to be of great significance in the years to come. The debate in effect contained the seeds of a new approach, the germ of what later became known as 'the Pan-Nationalist Front' idea and about the responsibility for developing an alternative strategy, other than violence, to solve the Irish problem. However, in the short term the Republican – Irish Roman Catholic Church controversy caused further cracks within the Church itself between those who supported the IRA and those who did not.

The North of Ireland was now boiling like a political cauldron. Nineteen-eighty was marked by the growth in importance of the H-Block issue. In pursuit of their demands for political status, the prisoners began a hunger strike in October nineteen-eighty. It appeared, wrongly, that the situation had been defused on the eighteenth of December nineteen-eighty when the strike was called off because the prisoners were led to believe that concessions were on the way, in effect they had been outmanoeuvred by the British Government. Therefore on the first of March nineteen-eighty-one, Bobby Sands launched the second hunger strike in the H-Blocks.

Hunger striking is the obverse side of the IRA's medal of infliction: endurance, and is a practice that has its roots deep in Irish history, when earlier Celts used self-immolation by starvation as a means of discrediting someone who had done them a wrong. The period of the hunger strikes could be taken as epitomising the cultural and religious differences between the Irish and the English. The Irish demonstrated both their defiant natures and their sense of identity in a manner which gave a new definition to the term 'back to basics' with prisoners secreting messages to the outside world and vice-versa in the most basic of ways. The British on the other hand fought with order, rule book, discipline, their propaganda conveying a sense of disdain at some of the bizarre and repellent behaviour in the surroundings of one of the most modern prisons in Europe.

In a previous study I wrote that the IRA leadership prolonged the hunger strike and maximised its emotional appeal. This was an over-simplification of the very complex situation. Part of the IRA, including Gerry Adams and the newer figures in the Republican leadership did not welcome hunger strikes. They felt that the hunger strikes created an emotional focus which detracted from a military campaign, and there was always the risk of an adverse effect if the strike failed. However a current of opinion built up in the H-Blocks in favour of a strike, the IRA leadership inside the prison sent out word that the IRA leadership outside the prison was out of touch with the intensity of feeling in the prison. The only thing that would resolve the crisis they felt was a hunger strike, especially as efforts by Cardinal O'Fiaich and the National H-Block Committee had failed. Therefore, far from urging on a hunger strike for publicity purposes, the IRA leadership outside the prison at first tried to prevent one occurring, however, the volume of IRA prisoners inside the prisons during that period constituted too large a proportion of the IRA as a whole to be ignored. Therefore the outside leadership of the IRA reluctantly conceded that a hunger strike was inevitable. It was decided that Bobby Sands, who had

succeeded Brendan Hughes as the prison leader, would begin the second strike in March nineteen-eighty-one, followed at intervals by other prisoners, including INLA prisoners. The first of March nineteen-eighty-one was chosen because it was the fifth anniversary of the ending of special category status.

The summer of nineteen-eighty-one thus became one of the bloodiest periods of the Troubles with continuing violence, heightened and intensified because of the hunger strike. The IRA's double-sided coin, with the one side imprinted with endurance and the other infliction, was illustrated during that summer of nineteen-eighty-one as has rarely been seen before or since. The hunger strikes created a vortex of emotion and the potential for destabilisation through the arousal of public sympathy, not just in the six north-eastern Irish counties but throughout the entire thirty-two counties, was enormous. 'Sands came to epitomise the type of young Catholic who got caught up in the Troubles', and such was the sympathy and support for him and the strike that he was put forward as a candidate in the South Tyrone by-election in March of nineteen-eighty-one. (Toolis. K., 1995, p. 354). Sands won the seat on the fourth of April nineteen-eighty-one. The significance of this cannot be overstated and was the 'beginning of Sinn Féin becoming a powerful political party' in Ireland. (McGuinness. C., 1995, p. 37). Sands died at seventeen minutes past one o'clock on the morning of Tuesday the fifth of May nineteen-eighty-one. He had wanted the strike to end with his death, but in the fevered atmosphere generated by the strike, the IRA leadership inside the prison carried on. The second hunger striker to die was Francis Hughes who was twenty-five years old. Hughes was a neighbour of the Heaney's and well known to all the family. In section IX of the 'Station Island' sequence, Heaney writes about this young man.

In all ten hunger strikers died between May and August nineteen-eighty-one. The long-drawn-out agony of the 'Ten Men Dead' as they became generally known, had something of the same effect on six county nationalism as the long-drawn-out executions of the nineteen-sixteen leaders on the twenty six counties. All ten were young men and their ordeal occasioned a high degree of emotional stress and suffering, for them, their families and the Irish nation as a whole. As the skeletal figures passed away into the pantheon of Irish history, sometimes being followed to their graves by as many as one hundred thousand people, 'the stories of how they had endured, spread not only around Ireland but throughout the world'. (Rowan. B., 1995, p. 109).

Throughout the strike the British Premier of the time, Margaret Thatcher, remained impervious to both international gestures of solidarity with the strikers and to high level appeals for compromise from the Southern Government, Church leaders and various intermediaries from within Ireland and around the world. Although Thatcher won the battle of the hunger strikes, she lost the war. The victory was to prove a pyrrhic one not only for her policy but for the course and cause of Unionism. Against the accusations of racketeering, drug-dealing and God-fathering, the IRA could now make the irrefutable point: 'the Mafia don't starve themselves to death for an ideal'. (Mallie. E., 1996, p. 20).

The complexity of the Irish inter and intra group/tribe relations was again highlighted when to the chagrin of some sections of the IRA leadership, 'some sections of the Catholic Church, who were active behind the scenes throughout the strike', began to be increasingly effective in their efforts to persuade the families of the strikers to use their influence to end the strike. (Dillon. M., 1997, p. 151). The end of the strike came on the third of October nineteen-eighty-one. The five strikers still fasting were ordered off and the following statement was sent out from the H-Blocks on behalf of Republican prisoners:

'Mounting pressures and cleric-inspired demoralisation led to interventions and five strikers have been taken off their fast. We accept that it is a physical and psychological impossibility to recommence a hunger strike after intervention by the families. A considerable majority of the present hunger strikers families have indicated that they will intervene and under these circumstances, we feel that the hunger strike must for tactical reasons be suspended'. (*Irish Times*, 5 October 1981).

The new Secretary of State, James Prior begun to put the 'Portlaoise Solution' into effect three days after the IRA's announcement and subsequently all the prisoners demands were conceded. The extreme complexity of the situation in Ireland was commented on by Padraig O'Malley who wrote in nineteen-ninety:

'The hunger strikes caught the South in the middle of a social transformation. A new order was emerging as the country changed from a producer to a consumer society ... The older visions of self that sustained the producer society, hard work, thrift, sacrifice in the name of a higher law, ideals of duty, honour, integrity, the sublimation of self-needs, were being pushed aside for the newer vision of personality with its emphasis on self-

fulfilment, self-expression, self-gratification. But the old order did not yield willingly, and the hunger strikes became a powerful symbol of the old values, the hunger strikers silent accusers, adding to the sense of dislocation, compounding the stirrings of latent guilt' (O'Malley. P., 1990, p. 145).

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

It was against this background of intense unease and of mounting political depression that Heaney wrote *Station Island.* It was a period of much activity and change for the poet himself also. After resigning his post at Carysfort in nineteen-eighty-one, he accepted a five year contract to teach one semester a year at Harvard, a post which began in January nineteen-eighty-two. The same year saw him receive an honorary doctorate at Queen's University, Belfast, and he also edited *The Rattle Bag* with Ted Hughes.

In nineteen-eighty-three he co-founded Field Day Publishing with his friend, the playwright Brian Friel and the poets Tom Paulin, Seamus Deane and others. Field Day Publishing, published Heaney's *An Open Letter* in nineteen-eighty-three which aroused a huge amount of media attention at the time. In this pamphlet poem, Heaney objects to his inclusion as a 'British' writer in the nineteen-eighty-two Penguin book of *Contemporary British Poetry.* In the pamphlet, Heaney reminds us that: 'be advised / My passport's green. / No glass of ours was ever raised / To toast *The Queen'.* (Heaney. S., *An Open Letter,* 1985, p. 7). Heaney's ambivalence and duality were very apparent when he was questioned about this pamphlet in nineteen-eighty-six by Neil Corcoran. Heaney then voiced his doubts about the advisability of having published it at all. Heaney explained to Corcoran 'I advance and retire from any conscious or deliberate entry into that public life. I've got so much attention that my impulse is to retreat rather than to go forward at this stage. I don't know whether that's an irresponsibility or a salutary piece of survival. I just don't know; these are questions that I'm not too clear about myself'. (Corcoran. N., 1986, p. 41). However, by nineteen-ninety-three, Heaney was far clearer about 'those questions' and about why he had written that pamphlet. He explained to his Oxford audience that he believed in the 'possibility of a new commonwealth of art, one wrested out of the old dramas of conquest and liberation, annexation and independence, one that I wrote about ten years ago in *An Open Letter...* This took up the whole question of naming, what it means to call oneself or another person British or Irish, and in the course

of it I alluded to different reviewers who had touched upon the duality ... In that same letter, I wrote that my passport was green ... I wrote about the colour of the passport, however, not in order to expunge the British connection in Britain's Ireland but to maintain the right to diversity within the border, to be understood as having full freedom to the enjoyment of an Irish name and identity within that Northern jurisdiction. Those who want to share that name and identity in Britain's Ireland should not be penalised or resented or suspected of a sinister motive because they draw cultural and psychic sustenance from an elsewhere supplementary to the one across the water'. (Heaney. S., *The Redress of Poetry*, 1995, p. 201).

Nineteen-eighty-four was a difficult year for Heaney because his mother, to whom he was very close, died. However nineteen-eighty-four also brought further recognition when he was elected to the prestigious Boylston Chair of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard. Finally nineteen-eighty-four saw the publication of *Station Island* where Heaney embarks on a 'poetic pilgrimage of life and art in an attempt to grasp the complex truths of his own history and native culture'. (Taylor. C.N., 1990, p. 214).

STATION ISLAND

I wrote earlier in this chapter that the entire 'Station Island' sequence on one level can be read as Heaney's attempt to purge himself of the guilt of surviving while he was surrounded by victims of violence and by death. It is, in addition, an attempt to purge the anxiety of tergiversation. I believe however, that a reading of 'Station Island' is enriched if viewed as an intellectual and aesthetic journey into Heaney's 'native realm'; in which he comes face-to-face with Ireland's violence and suffering and with his own past, as he meets ghosts, influences and various voices from the grave and memories of past experiences.

While the Dantean influence on Heaney's poetry is indisputable, the influence of Chekhov can also be seen in the 'Station Island' sequence. Before beginning the discussion of the 'Station Island' sequence therefore, one of the poems that precedes the sequence 'Chekhov on Sakhalin' needs to be discussed. This is an important poem because it asserts the artist's need to be involved in and aware of all aspects of his or her culture, not just the fashionable or artistically enlightened aspects. This is the lesson Heaney learnt

from Chekhov and from Czeslaw Milosz which chapter four of this study referred to, that the artist needs to 'come face-to-face with the suffering and violence' that plagues his or her culture. (Milosz. C., 1980, p. 119).

In 'Chekhov on Sakhalin' Heaney reconstructs the experience of the Russian writer travelling to the prison island of Sakhalin in eighteen-ninety, to record the conditions under which the prisoners lived, and subsequently publish a book about his experiences. Heaney explores and analyses whether Chekhov found release in his experience. Chekhov, a doctor as well as a writer was the grandson of a serf, and found himself confused between the images of freedom and the images of bondage with which he was confronted on the island. The ringing sound of his smashed cognac glass blurs into the rattle of the convicts' chains; he, a free observer, is burdened with his very freedom when confronted with the sufferings in the prison. The luxury of the cognac, the luxury as a writer, 'to try for the right tone – not tract, not thesis - / And walk away from floggings', these luxuries cannot be afforded by his conscience. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 19). Against the therapeutic ambition of writing the inherited ailment may prove too tenacious: 'He who had thought to squeeze / His slave's blood out and waken the free man / Shadowed a convict guide through Sakhalin'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 19). Something of the dilemma presented through the figure of Chekhov is reproduced in Heaney's own person in the 'Station Island' sequence. Chekhov's voyage into suffering and human degradation parallels Heaney's journey to Station Island. The lesson of Chekhov is that the artist has a responsibility, perhaps even a need to encounter what Stephen Daedalus called 'the reality of experience', and while the reality of experience can, of course, include the aesthetic it must never deny the place of human-made suffering.

In his nineteen-eighty-eight prose publication *The Government Of The Tongue*, Heaney again refers to Chekhov and his visit to Sakhalin, Heaney explains that Chekhov undertook his journey to Sakhalin partly because of his; 'consciously adhered to beliefs about the necessity to work for a good and just future and partly, no doubt, because of his unconscious identification of something in himself with his serf grandfather. It was this oppressed shadow-self, with whom he was compelled to struggle, that he hoped to lay to rest on the island of Sakhalin… The Sakhalin journey would be a half-conscious ritual of exorcism of the slave's blood in him and an actual encompassing of psychic and artistic freedom; it would be a bid for "inner-freedom"; the "feeling of being right" '. (Heaney.

S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. xvii). The above passage, in my opinion, equally applies to Heaney and his journey/pilgrimage to Station Island.

Station Island is an island in Lough Derg, County Donegal, a place of severe penitential pilgrimage where, reputedly, Saint Patrick fasted to expel demons. Patrick supposedly initiated a three-day vigil of fasting, praying and mortification, in a deep cave on the island. Lough Derg grew in popularity during the nineteenth century, in what has been seen as a local manifestation of the devotional revolution. By this time the cave had been sealed, and the focus of the modern pilgrimage, differing from the Western model in its exclusive focus on penitence, continues today between June and August. Heaney made the actual pilgrimage three times as a boy. The barefoot pilgrims must make nine circuits of the island's holy places, many of which contain jagged stones. There is a communal religious atmosphere, fasting, sleep deprivation, repetitions of prayers, confessions, renunciations and circuits of the jagged 'beds'.

Heaney in the 'Station Island' sequence is the poet-pilgrim, he is caught up in the dilemma of conformity and attribution where he remains uncertain of whether he is 'to guide / or to be guided', whether he is to 'strike' his own 'note' or adhere to the orthodoxies and probities of Irish Catholic culture as well as to the literary models which ultimately perpetuate them. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, pp. 92 – 93). In *Envies and Identifications*, Heaney explained that 'the choice of Lough Derg as a locus for the poem did, in fact, represent a solidarity with orthodox ways and obedient attitudes, and that very solidarity and obedience were what had to be challenged'. (Heaney. S., *Envies and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet*, 1985, p. 5). In 'Station Island' Heaney speaks through the mouths of antagonists and his methods are excruciatingly self-reflective.

'STATION ISLAND'
SECTION I TO XII

The first ghost Heaney encountered on his pilgrimage was Simon Sweeney. Sweeney was an Irish 'tinker', someone on the fringes of Irish society, socially excluded, an 'old Sabbath-breaker / who has been dead for years'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 61). Sweeney's advice to Heaney at the beginning of the sequence is similar to the advice

Joyce gives him in the closing section of the sequence, to "stay clear of all processions!" (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 63). Though not as exhaustive a litany as Joyce's, Sweeney warns the most vehemently against the dangers of pursuing the 'drugged path' of the pilgrim's procession and the attitude of submission it implies. For the unregenerate Simon Sweeney, as for the later ghosts of W. Carleton and J. Joyce, there exists the need to break the constraints of Irish society and Irish Roman Catholicism to 'damn all you know' to seek freedom from the community and its obligations and values. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 61).

However, at this early stage of the pilgrimage Heaney appears unable or unwilling to take Sweeney's advice, he compromises, according to Sweeney's standards and joins the procession to the island, falling in behind the other pilgrims.

> 'As I drew behind them
> I was a fasted pilgrim,
> light-headed, leaving home
> to face into my station.
> "Stay clear of all processions!"
>
> Sweeney shouted at me
> but the murmur of the crowd
> and their feet slushing through
> the tender, bladed growth
> opened a drugged path
>
> I was set upon.
> I trailed those early-risers
> who had fallen into step
> before the smokes were up.
> The quick bell rang again.'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 63).

There is a strong sense here that Heaney is compelled by the influence, the gravity, of religious faith to stay in line and obey the call of the bells. The action is almost robotic,

that of someone who is brainwashed or sleep-walking, there is no room for choice or independent action or thought.

The blind obedience to religion is further condemned by the second ghost Heaney meets, that of William Carleton. Carleton is appalled to learn that Heaney is on his way to the island and furthers Sweeney's sentiment when he exclaims, "O holy Jesus Christ, does nothing change?" (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 64). William Carleton (1794 – 1869) is an interesting figure, he was the son of a County Tyrone tenant farmer, he was intended for the priesthood but travelled instead as a 'poor scholar'. Carleton was a convert from Catholicism to Protestantism and wrote *The Lough Derg Pilgrim* in eighteen-twenty-eight, which is a rather caustic story about the pilgrimage, denouncing the barbarities of the penitential custom. Carleton had a similar background to Heaney, both grew up near 'the reek of flax', both witnessed victims of Protestant and Catholic feuds.(Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 65). Carleton became disenchanted with Irish Roman Catholicism and was vehemently against all forms of pious devotion. He wrote in eighteen-twenty-eight about the superstitious absurdity of the pilgrimage, 'it is the first exercise of that jealous spirit of mistaken devotion, which keeps the soul in perpetual sickness, and invests the innocent enjoyments of life with a character of sin and severity'. Carleton further contended that 'there is not on earth, with the exception of the pagan rites ... a regulation of a religious nature, more barbarous and inhumane than this. We know that nothing acts so strongly and so fatally upon reason, as an imagination diseased by religious terrors'. (Carleton. W., 1881, p. 23).

Carleton is so enraged by Heaney's intention to go on the Lough Derg pilgrimage that he offers a ruthlessly scientific and grotesque explanation of all rites of purification as rites of putrefaction. According to Carleton we are worms eating through the earth to renew its body and our own, and when we die only maggots will purify our flesh. While Carleton may have avoided the 'drugged path' of religion he wandered onto another 'drugged path', that of the 'obedient strains' of politics.

> ' "I who learned to read in the reek of flax
> and smelled hanged bodies rotting on their gibbets
> and saw their looped slime gleaming from the sacks –

hard-mouthed Ribbonmen and Orange bigots
made me into the old fork-tongued turncoat
who mucked the byre of their politics.

If times were hard, I could be hard too.
I made the traitor in me sink the knife.
And maybe there's a lesson there for you." '

(Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 65).

Carleton's ambition, his lust for fame, or perhaps simply his instinct to survive in very difficult times, compelled him to be used as a tool by the anti-Catholic evangelical Reverend Caesar Otway, editor of *The Christian Examiner*, who first published Carleton's stories. Carleton, unlike Chekhov did not therefore distinguish between tone and tract and thesis but instead made himself a composition of contraries. Carleton, while accusing Heaney of grovelling through old rituals that are masochistic, life-denying, meaningless and distracting speaks for Heaney's artistic conscience, which is painfully at odds with 'those two other internal gorgons', his political conscience and his religious conscience. (Pasco *et al.*, 1994, p. 43).

Despite the similarities between Carleton and Heaney, one very important difference remains. Each has taken a different course politically, Carleton admits that he was an 'old fork-tongued turncoat' and 'the traitor', he chose the aggressive active path in which 'their politics', the politics of 'the other side', became a weapon he could use against his own people. Heaney on the other hand, has 'no mettle for the angry role' (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 65). This will not be the last time Heaney defends himself for not heeding the 'harp of unforgiving iron / the Fenians strung' (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, pp. 65 – 66).

Section three of 'Station Island' sequence finds Heaney 'back among bead clicks and the murmurs / from inside confessionals ...' This encounter Heaney informs is us a 'hiatus', 'I knelt. Hiatus. Habit's afterlife ...' (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 67). Earlier Heaney described the pilgrimage as a 'drugged path', echoing Marx's famous denunciation of religion as an opiate and Freud's as a consoling illusion. Now Heaney describes the pilgrimage as 'habit's afterlife', the dead, perfunctory ritual of the church.

This section of the sequence is about a toy shell trinket once owned by Heaney's Aunt Agnes who died of tuberculosis, as a child in pre-inoculation rural Ireland in the nineteen-twenties. Here, Heaney explores the connection between veneration of the dead and the power of prayer. Agnes was rarely spoken about except in prayer, the trinket becomes the symbolic image of the dead young girl. The veneration of the dead can reach a point of religious ardour whereby the 'individual is eclipsed by the symbol representing that person's absence or loss'. (Sharpe. E., 1992, p. 27). The danger of the venerated dead has already been highlighted by the 'unquiet founders' whose names and deeds still influence the living and whose spirit will return in section IX of the sequence, when Francis Hughes martyrs himself for the IRA, thus securing a place for himself among those 'unquiet founders'.

The interrogation of Heaney's religious sense of self finds focus again in section IV of 'Station Island' sequence when Heaney encounters the ghost of an old school friend and neighbour Father Terry Keenan. Keenan was a young clerical student when Heaney knew him, he left behind the religiosity of Ireland to perform missionary work in the rain forests of South America. Keenan did not survive long in the mission, he died within two years of his posting, a disillusioned man and aware of the fallibility of the Irish Catholic Church. Heaney meets this ghost just as he is about to begin his renunciation.

> 'ready to say the dream words *I renounce* ...
>
> Blurred oval prints of newly ordained faces,
> "Father" pronounced with a fawning relish,
> the sunlit tears of parents being blessed'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 69).

It is not at all clear just what Heaney is about to renounce here. A first reading might lead one to deduce that Heaney, having lost his religious faith, is about to renounce Christianity, however, another reading could suggest that he is about to renew his faith by renouncing the devil as in the rite of baptism in which the participants proclaim, 'I renounce Satan'. The disillusioned priest on the other hand explains to Heaney that what he 'thought was chosen was convention'.(Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 70). The priest trained obediently and was 'doomed to do the decent thing'. His story is a

confession of failure and disenchantment, his faith broken by the rigours of life in a foreign jungle.

> ' "The rain forest," he said,
> "you've never seen the like of it. I lasted
>
> only a couple of years. Bare-breasted
> women and rat-ribbed men. Everything wasted.
> I rotted like a pear. I sweated masses ...
>
> On that abandoned
>
> mission compound, my vocation
> is a steam off drenched creepers" ... '
>
> (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, pp. 69 – 70).

The racism of the priest is regrettable and repulses one all the more coming as it does not only from a man of the cloth but from an Irish man, and may perhaps go some way to explaining his failure, and indeed the failure of the Irish Catholic Church as a whole, in its very narrow view of the indigenous populations whose souls it was attempting / attempts to save. Heaney accuses the priest of having as a clerical student encouraged the spurious religiosity of the Irish people and of having helped them to ignore the facts around them, promoting and reinforcing their unthinking obedience and keeping them in submission. The priest however counters Heaney's accusation by cutting to the very heart of the 'Station Island' sequence as he directly queries the nature and purpose of Heaney's pilgrimage.

> ' "And you", he faltered, "what are you doing here
> but the same thing? What possessed you?
> I at least was young and unaware
>
> that what I thought was chosen was convention.
> But all this you were clear of you walked into
> over again. And the god has, as they say, withdrawn.

What are you doing, going through these motions?
Unless ... Unless ... .

Unless you are here taking the last look." '

(Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, pp. 70 – 71).

The priest is genuinely baffled as to why Heaney is on the pilgrimage. Having been deceived by religious fictions himself he now wants hard facts. The priest admits that his vocation was a futile surrender to convention but he at least was young and unworldly, unlike Heaney, who is by now a middle-aged and worldly wise man. Keenan receives no answer to his questions, all Heaney will admit to here is that his 'arms were open wide' but he 'could not say the words'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 69). We do not know whether Heaney was about to renounce or renew his faith, all we know here is that the poet could not bring himself to say the faithful words. Is Heaney simply going through the motions as Keenan asks? Is he taking a last look, emptily visiting as he had accused the priest of doing? My own feeling is that Heaney is intent on establishing where he has come to in middle-age, he is attempting to sort out his spiritual, religious, emotional, political and artistic baggage to ascertain what should be jettisoned. At this point in the pilgrimage he is still uncertain of what to keep and what to abandon, but he is clearly disenchanted with Irish Roman Catholicism.

Section IV closes as did section I of the 'Station Island' sequence with Heaney falling in behind the priest as he continues on his pilgrimage. Heaney is not yet able to distinguish between what he thinks is his free choice and what is merely his tradition, spiritually and artistically, religiously and politically. While Heaney's feelings about his religious inheritance are complex, I suggest that the poet here is about to renounce his faith, he is critically examining Irish Roman Catholicism, he is disillusioned with it and highly sceptical of it and aware of its injurous effects and the unfreedom it propounds. The conflicting elements at play in Heaney's Irish psyche are apparent in this section, however in my view, Heaney is here attempting to free himself of the influence of the Catholic Church, although the pull of conventional piety is still strong. In section V of 'Station Island' sequence, Heaney meets three further ghosts. The first is that of Barney Murphy who taught Heaney at Anahorish School as a boy. Murphy, a liberal educator, was liked

and admired by Heaney and the boys. He taught them to think for themselves and gave them a way of bettering their lives through education. He had been a reassuring, encouraging presence to Heaney as a boy and this is his purpose here again. The old school building has fallen into a dilapidated state but Murphy's boys have grown into questioning adults and as Heaney 'fell in behind' this ghost he finds himself 'faced the wrong way / into more pilgrims absorbed in this exercise'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 73). For the first time Heaney is facing the opposite way to his fellow pilgrims, indicating that the poet is no longer blindly trailing 'those early risers' on their 'drugged path' (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 63). Heaney is now dissociated from the other pilgrims by the physical position in which he finds himself.

The tutelary ghost of Patrick Kavanagh then appears to remind Heaney that he is repeating religious and poetic exercises that he himself had completed forty-two years previously. Kavanagh also visited Lough Derg, his own *Lough Derg* predicts Heaney's concerns with religious fictions. Kavanagh humorously mocks Heaney for following in his footsteps.

> ' "Sure I might have known
> once I had made the pad, you'd be after me
> sooner or later. Forty-two years on
> and you've got no farther!" '
>
> (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 73).

There is a sense in the final line that Kavanagh expects Heaney to know better, know more, to have learnt from previous pilgrims. A travelled man, with a University education, what is he doing here? It is a repetition of Carleton's exclamation "O holy Jesus Christ, does nothing change?" and feeds into Sweeney's allegation that religion is addictive, a mere opiate of the masses that necessarily excludes all notions of choice or conscious commitment. Kavanagh ends with a humorous note "In my own day / the odd one came here on the hunt for women". (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 74).

Kavanagh's comments lead onto section VI of 'Station Island' sequence where Heaney remembers an erotic experience from his teenage years, with a young girl/friend with whom he shared 'secrets' and 'whispered to. When we were playing houses'. (Heaney.

S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 75). The well known Irish guilt around sexual attraction is illustrated here and one recalls Carleton's earlier condemnation of Irish Catholicism for investing 'the innocent joys of life with a character of sin and severity'. (Carleton. W., 1881, p. 203). The boy Heaney in the poem was sexually frustrated 'mad for it', but 'all that ever opened / Was the breathed-on grille of a confessional'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 76). Thus healthy, normal sexual attraction and excitement are linked with guilty 'secrets', secrets for which the plea '*Don't tell. Don't tell,*' is made. This is an oblique comment on Irish Catholicism, this guilt can be explained by the moral entente between the Irish Catholic Church and the Irish State. The Church and State in independent Ireland consolidated a normative environment in which sexuality was directed into orthodox Christian channels, its active expression being restricted to marriage, and within marriage, its enjoyment morally subservient to the procreative function. The extraordinary level of control of sexual activity exercised by the Irish Catholic Church and State meant that sexual activity outside of marriage was rare in the extreme and something one never admitted to. Heaney however shuts out the sound of the church bell on the island as he remembers his boyhood experience of sexual frustration and the subsequent release. Having abandoned the young man's vain attempts to purge sexual love altogether in confessionals, Heaney glimpses the good life of healthy sexuality. He then finds himself, not surprisingly, facing the opposite way to his fellow pilgrims again.

> 'I shut my ears to the bell.
> Head hugged. Eyes shut. Leaf ears *Don't tell. Don't tell.*
>
> A stream of pilgrims answering the bell
> Trailed up the steps as I went down them ...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 75).

There is a suggestion here that Heaney's attitude to life runs contrary both to the ascetic attitude dictated by a religious pilgrimage and to the sublimation of normal, healthy sexual instincts which the Irish Catholic Church advocates. This section of the sequence ends with a quotation from Dante's inferno and with love rather than debauchery, with a sense of renewal and freedom that comes from love. Heaney feels renewed and empowered, and is ready to embrace his responsibility as a poet, the current day pilgrim,

to take courage and to face the task at hand. Armed thus Heaney continues on his pilgrimage to struggle with the questions of politics and violence in his subsequent encounters.

The next section of the sequence directly focuses on a victim of sectarian violence. Here Heaney confronts the ghost of a murdered shopkeeper, his friend, William Strathearn with whom he had gone to college and with whom he had played football. Strathearn was murdered by two off-duty policemen who were subsequently caught and imprisoned. Heaney's shock is tangible when he comes face-to-face with this ghost who has the top of his head blown off.

> 'I turned to meet his face and the shock
>
> is still in me at what I saw. His brow
> was blown open above the eye and blood
> had dried on his neck and cheek'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 77).

The shock and horror are intensified when one learns how Strathearn, a decent human being, was tricked into opening up his shop in the middle of the night, in response to a bogus call for help for a sick child, only to become yet another innocent victim of the political turbulence of the North of Ireland. As Strathearn explains to Heaney what happened we are confronted again with the political reality and violence of day-to-day living in Northern Ireland. There is a sense of horror that this was yet another 'neighbourly murder'. Strathearn knew his killers and the ruthlessness of the killing is brought home in the following lines. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 7).

> ' "Did they say nothing?" "Nothing. What would they say?"
> "Were they in uniform? Not masked in any way?"
> "They were barefaced as they would be in the day,

shites thinking they were the be-all and the end-all." '

(Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 79).

Agents of the State gone mad, corrupted absolutely by their absolute power in the Northern Ireland statelet of the time. Towards the end of this section we come to the real crux as Heaney broaches what most concerns him, his own political and poetic ambiguities, as he seeks Strathearn's forgiveness.

' "Forgive the way I have lived indifferent –
forgive my timid circumspect involvement",

I surprised myself by saying...'

(Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 80).

The ghost of Strathearn answers Heaney directly and humorously, "forgive / my eye" ... "all that's above my head". Having said this Strathearn 'trembled like a heatwave and faded', leaving Heaney alone with a strong sense of the inadequacy of his own response, feeling culpable for his 'timid circumspect involvement' in Northern Ireland's affairs and feeling that he has condoned, albeit unintentionally, rather than deterred atrocities.

Heaney's friendship with the archaeologist Tom Delaney is memorialised in section VIII of 'Station Island' and reveals a different face of death. Here Heaney is again the guilty survivor as he remembers his friend who died of cancer aged thirty-two years in nineteen-seventy-nine. A valuable life truncated and a valuable relationship squandered. Delaney had worked at the Ulster museum in the antiquities department, and had introduced Heaney to the world of archaeology in the early nineteen-seventies. He had risen above partisan tribal affiliations in his work and in his appreciation of Ireland's communal past. Heaney describes their last meeting when he visited Delaney in hospital, and the inadequacy and guilt he felt then and now, scared by cardiac monitors and hospital equipment and by the fact that his friend's death was imminent. Heaney's guilt and inadequacy are heightened when Delaney's ghost speaks,

'I felt that I should have seen far more of you
and maybe would have – but dead at thirty-two!
Ah poet, lucky poet, tell me why
What seemed deserved and promised passed me by?'

(Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 82).

The unfairness of such a death recalls Keenan's words in section IV 'and the god has, as they say, withdrawn'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 70). Heaney is all too aware of how lucky he is and of the gulf between his and others experience of life and suffering, and this also feeds his anxiety and disquiet. The crux of this section is the same as the last, Heaney is seeking forgiveness for, be they real or imagined, what he considers 'broken / covenants, and failed' obligations. Heaney is guilty about his inability to express his feelings and emotions, about having cut his last visit with his friend short, guilty that his friend died as he did and the poet could do nothing to prevent it. Heaney is guilty about living when Delaney and others are dead, yet Delaney holds out a kind of middle-ground here, all he asks of Heaney is to try to make some sense of events in his professional / poetic capacity.

There is a sense here that Heaney is being too harsh on himself, almost over-analysing what he considers to be his defects of character, to a state of near paralysis. The very rhetoric of questions such as 'tell me why what seemed deserved and promised passed me by?' suggests their insolubility. This harsh self-analysis and self-criticism continues and is very evident when Heaney meets the next ghost of this section of the sequence, Colum McCartney.

Delaney's ghost is quickly replaced half way through section VIII of 'Station Island' sequence by a 'hunkering' presence. The subject here again is Heaney's second cousin Colum McCartney, whom Heaney commemorated in 'The Strand at Lough Beg' in *Field Work* , which was discussed in chapter four of this study. McCartney reappears in this section to condemn the poet for his allusive description of sectarian violence.

'... you whitewashed ugliness and drew
the lovely blinds of the *Purgatorio*
and saccharined my death with morning dew'.

(Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 83).

The fact that Heaney returns to reconsider his cousin's death or more particularly his treatment of it in *Field Work* highlights how important an issue this is for the poet. Heaney here continues to conduct his own exacting self-scrutiny. In 'The Strand at Lough Beg' the issue was the numbing inevitability of violence and suffering, and the pointless waste of an innocent and young life, highlighting the brutal reality of Ulster life and the legacy of the 'unquiet founders' from both sides of the divide. The crucial issue here is the poet's sense of inadequacy and failing and his guilty concern about the proper role of poetry and the responsibility of the poet.

In section VIII of 'Station Island' McCartney castigates Heaney on several counts, firstly for being in privileged surroundings with strangers who were more upset by the news of his death than Heaney appeared to be on the day he was murdered, and for staying there with them instead of returning home. McCartney, in effect, accuses Heaney of indifference and of having failed to fulfil his obligations of kinship. The poet tries to justify his behaviour and to defend himself against these accusations.

' "But they were getting crisis
first-hand, Colum, they had happened in on
live sectarian assassination.
I was dumb, encountering what was destined." '

(Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 83).

Heaney explains his own action / inaction / reaction in terms of his grief process while he accuses the others of responding to the sensationalism of the moment. McCartney however brushes this aside to go onto the harshest attack so far.

' "You saw that, and you wrote that – not the fact.
You confused evasion and artistic tact.
The Protestant who shot me through the head
I accuse directly, but indirectly, you
who now atone perhaps upon this bed
for the way you whitewashed ugliness and drew
the lovely blinds of the *Purgatorio*
and saccharined my death with morning dew." '

(Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 83).

This is the central point, this is what is really concerning Heaney, and again it comes towards the end of the section and Heaney makes no attempt here to defend himself against this particular charge. This accusation of McCartney's marks the crisis of 'Station Island' sequence, he is in effect saying that Heaney's life-work and his effort, in particular, in 'The Strand at Lough Beg', to fulfil, poetically, his obligation to home, family and tribe, has actually been an avoidance. McCartney attacks the very beauty of the elegy in *Field Work* as a betrayal of the truth of his ugly murder, 'you confused evasion and artistic tact'. McCartney is an angry young man, and one can understand why, however, by accusing the poet of complicity through his timid response, he is in effect demanding vengeance, retribution and anger, but Heaney has already told us in section II of the sequence that he has 'no mettle for the angry role' (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 65). To satisfy McCartney would be to go down the road of propaganda and revenge, another 'drugged path'. This highlights yet again the pressures on Heaney 'to say something' about the Northern Ireland situation that will satisfy the old racial and religious instincts of his own tribe, his own family in this instance. However, Heaney is no propagandist and having learnt his lesson with *North* he now meditates on the more inclusive conflict of artistic imagination and public duty. He continues to reconsider his allegiances and responsibilities as a poet and as a human being, to concentrate his mind on reappraisal and reassessment which is the central purpose of this sequence.

Throughout the sequence there are suggestions of guilty fear and anxiety around Heaney's artistic career and poetic role and these come to a head here. The fear that he has betrayed his art to the butchery of the Northern Ireland conflict encompassing as that

does all the elements of Irish politics, history, religion and, conversely, that he has stood idly by as others have suffered and died.

What is clear is that Heaney has not escaped the massacre. It lives with him, haunts him, and influences his thoughts and feelings, just as the influence of religion and politics persist in his consciousness. As this sequence unfolds Heaney appears guilty about everything including living while others have died around him. However, unless Heaney is to apologise for not being dead, he must concede that hearing of his cousin's death, and of the other deaths, is in fact, 'encountering what was destined'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 83). That destiny, the legacy of the 'unquiet founders' continues to be played out in the next section of the sequence. This section closes with Heaney alone, displaced and estranged 'among more pilgrims whom I did not know / drifting to the hostel for the night'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 83).

The poet is now about to encounter the most nightmarish of all the ghosts, that of Francis Hughes, who is the subject of section IX of the sequence.

> 'My brain dried like spread turf, my stomach
> Shrank to a cinder and tightened and cracked.
> Often I was dogs on my own track
> Of blood on wet grass that I could have licked.
> Under the prison blanket, an ambush
> Stillness I felt safe in settled round me.
> Street lights came on in small towns, the bomb flash
> Came before the sound, I saw country
> I knew from Glenshane down to Toome
> And heard a car I could make out years away
> With me in the back of it like a white-faced groom,
> A hit-man on the brink, emptied and deadly.
> When the police yielded my coffin, I was light
> As my head when I took aim'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 84).

Here Heaney comes face to face with the starved, tortured, hallucinogenic thoughts of Francis Hughes, a neighbour of the Heaney's from Bellaghy and a member of the IRA. Hughes had been arrested and imprisoned by the security forces. He joined the hunger strikes and was the second to die after fifty-nine days of fasting, on the twelfth of May nineteen-eighty-one. Hughes was both a victim of the 'unquiet founders' legacy and perpetuator of it.

Heaney was again in privileged surroundings at the time of Hughes' funeral, this time in Oxford, staying in Sir Keith Joseph's rooms; while Heaney's family attended Hughes' funeral in Bellaghy, where Martin McGuiness in his funeral oration praised Mrs. Hughes and equated her to Mother Ireland. Heaney later explained his reasons for not attending Hughes' funeral or any of the hunger-strikers or IRA funerals when he finally clarified his position in relation to the IRA in nineteen-ninety-five. Heaney made it clear that he did not and would not attend such funerals, even of people who at one time had been his neighbours and were known to him, because it would be taken as a tacit support for the IRA and their methods. Heaney wrote that he was 'wary of the political implications of attendance' and that he did not want to endorse 'the violent means and programmes of the Provisional IRA' (Heaney. S., *The Redress of Poetry*, 1995, p. 187). The same piece highlights the fact that Heaney is a constitutional nationalist and not a militant one. It also illustrates how this decision, not to attend the funerals, caused further agonising conflict and self-division, a duality felt by many liberal and peaceful Irish people at the time when faced with 'the triumphalist, implacable, handling of the affair by the Thatcher Cabinet. It was a classic moment of conflicting recognitions, self-division, inner quarrel, a moment of dumbness and inadequacy when it felt like a betrayal to be enjoying the hospitality of an Establishment College and occupying, if only accidentally, the room of a British minister. And yet the bind in which I found myself mirrored exactly the classic bind of all Northern Ireland's constitutional nationalists'. (Heaney. S., *The Redress of Poetry*, 1995, pp. 187 – 188).

> 'This voice from blight
> And hunger died through the black dorm:
> ...

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'

(Heaney. S., *Station Island,* 1984, p. 84).

It is impossible to underestimate the resonance of human starvation upon the Irish psyche. Because the Great Famine of the eighteen-forties has long been a powerful factor in Irish consciousness, the image and the very idea of ten men starving themselves to death for 'the cause' cut to the very heart of the Irish Catholic identity. Padraig O'Malley in his book *The Uncivil Wars,* traces the actions and thoughts of the hunger strikers, back through history to the 'unquiet founders': 'The hunger strikes were a metaphysical ritual, a symbol: re-establishing the link with the historical past, and reaffirming the legitimacy of the cause and the movement by reaffirming the means. They were an excuse for the murders of tomorrow, romantic delusion, the sublimation of reality, an aggravated assault on the national psyche, a last desperate attempt to mobilise public opinion by cheating life, an atavistic gesture of impotence to orchestrate a symphony of grief, a callous ploy to infiltrate the hidden recesses of the national consciousness, a reaching back to tribal allegiances, to the myth of martyrdom and redemption'. (O'Malley. P., 1983, p. 203).

The hunger strikers were also yet another example of the power and cruelty of Kathleen ni Houlihan, Mother Ireland, and the appalling extremes to which her deluded children, Irish men and Irish women, will go to for her, thinking that they are carrying on a noble tradition. Yet these 'emptied and deadly' men succeeded in orchestrating 'a symphony of grief' and they triggered the Irish tendency to venerate the dead, a veneration which is tied to the need for vengeance and the command to set things right. (Heaney. S., *Station Island,* 1984, p. 84). In Ireland, 'veneration of the dead and the power of martyrdom work in conjunction with political and religious antagonism' and vengeance in order to forge a race's conscience unified only by its contradictions. (O'Beirne Ranelagh. J., 1983, p. 193).

Francis Hughes along with the other hunger strikers obeyed the command to participate actively in history, he fed the circular logic of martyrdom, and the undeniable destiny that makes his sacrifice inevitable is brought bleakly home in the following lines.

> 'As if the cairnstone could defy the cairn.
> As if the eddy could reform the pool.
> As if a stone swirled under a cascade,
> Eroded and eroding in its bed,
> Could grind itself down to a different core.
> Then I thought of the tribe whose dances never fail
> For they keep dancing till they sight the deer'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 86).

This is the self-fulfilling prophesy of the tribe, whose dance never fails because it's members keep dancing until the deer is sighted, the cyclical violence engendered by the 'unquiet founders' and their legacy.

All of this heightens Heaney's sense of inadequate responsiveness and he calls himself to task, repenting his 'unweaned life that kept' him 'competent / To sleepwalk with connivance and mistrust'. If Heaney cannot hope to deny or halt such powerful forces, does he then give in to them, acquiesce to the inevitable destiny? The answer I think, is no, because Heaney then sees a 'lighted candle' which 'rose and steadied up' and he felt he was 'no more adrift', his 'feet touched bottom' and his 'heart revived'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 85). In addition 'still there for the taking' was a trumpet he had played with as a child. The candle and the trumpet represent the redemptive power of art, as does the mug in the next section of the sequence, where an ordinary mug from a shelf in Heaney's boyhood home, was temporarily translated as a result of its use in a play. Heaney here neither condemns nor condones Francis Hughes' action but the appearance of the candle, trumpet and the mug, remind one that violence may be one way, one course of action, but it is not the only course.

The next shade Heaney meets is the ghost of a well-travelled monk to whom he had made his confession years before. The monk admonishes the poet and instructs him to 'read poems as prayers', to translate a poem by St. John of the Cross, as his penance. The

translation is not a wholly religious act, it is also an artistic endeavour. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 89). The monk's comments to Heaney to 'salvage everything, to re-envisage / the zenith and glimpsed jewels of any gift / mistakenly abased ...' link Heaney's continued sense of obligation with the power of artistic translation and expression. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 89).

The final ghost, and I think the most important one for Heaney in the 'Station Island' sequence is James Joyce. Joyce (1882 – 1946), left Ireland in nineteen-hundred-and-two to live in Paris in an attempt to escape the narrow-mindedness of Irish Catholicism and of Irish society. To escape the nets of religion, nationality, language, the nets of Church and State. He believed that he could not pursue his art in his native land, he therefore entered a state of perpetual exile through which he could break free of the forces, what he called the 'trolls', that threatened his integrity as a writer. Joyce is important in the sequence I think, because he is given the last word urging Heaney to individuate and to swim out on his own. Joyce is also important because like Heaney he had a certain ambivalence toward Ireland. At times he was affectionate, even sentimental, about Ireland, at other times extremely caustic, but all the while, like Heaney, he was undoubtedly pulled by the gravities of Ireland. Joyce of all people can understand and, to a certain extent, identify with Heaney's ambivalence and his duality. Both have had experience of the nets of Ireland and both struggled / struggle with them.

Joyce is a tutelary figure, the ultimate ghost and adviser to confront Heaney on his pilgrimage. Here in the last section of the 'Station Island' sequence the physical, spiritual and emotional effects of the pilgrimage leave Heaney feeling 'like a convalescent', but Joyce is there to offer him a helping hand back onto the solid ground of the mainland.

> 'Like a convalescent, I took the hand
> stretched down from the jetty, sensed again
> an alien comfort as I stepped on ground
>
> to find the helping hand still gripping mine,
> fish-cold and bony, but whether to guide
> or to be guided I could not be certain'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 92).

One senses that Joyce is as annoyed as Carleton to see Heaney here, he admonishes the poet but also offers advice which is both direct and specific. Joyce advises Heaney not to take life so seriously, to stop worrying about those questions and topics that have concerned him and other writers so much to date. Joyce reminds Heaney that he is at his most vulnerable now that he is at the end of the pilgrimage, 'fasted' and 'light-headed'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island,* 1984, p. 93). Joyce's influence on the poet is great and Heaney addresses him as 'old father'. Joyce continues with his advice to Heaney;

> '... don't be so earnest,
>
> let others wear the sackcloth and the ashes.
> Let go, let fly, forget.
> You've listened long enough. Now strike your note ...
>
> You lose more of yourself than you redeem
> doing the decent thing. Keep at a tangent.
> When they make the circle wide, it's time to swim
>
> out on your own and fill the element
> with signatures on your own frequency...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *Station Island,* 1984, pp. 93 – 94).

Joyce therefore releases Heaney from his sense of failed responsibility and inadequate responsiveness. Heaney does not have to worry about writing in English, that particular concern was sorted out years before by Joyce and others. Furthermore Joyce dismisses Heaney's 'peasant pilgrimage' as a waste of time and is impatient with Heaney for being penitent and for feeling so inadequate. His advice is to get on with his writing and his life and to let others 'wear the sackcloth and the ashes' for a change. Joyce urges Heaney most strongly, picking up on Sweeney's advice at the beginning of the sequence to 'steer clear of all processions', to get away from the 'trolls', the gravities of Ireland, tribe, church, state. If Heaney dances with the tribe he will loose himself, if he swims against the current he will eventually drown, survival is achieved by swimming across the current by keeping 'at a tangent'. Heaney must therefore stay away from all rituals, including those at Station Island, that distract him from his art. Joyce's advice is not actually

instructing Heaney in anything new but it is reaffirming what he already knew, and more importantly, giving him the permission he feels he needs to follow his own course, a wisdom Joyce had learnt years before, his 'voice eddying with the vowels of all rivers'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 92).

Although Heaney admits that Joyce's advice made him feel 'as if I had stepped free into space', the sequence ends with the poet again standing alone in what feels like limbo. One is left with the feeling that although Heaney has reached a sort of resolution he has not quite reached a destination. Will he take Joyce's advice which is also that of Sweeney and Carleton? All three ghosts point to the folly of Heaney's pilgrimage; religion and expressly Irish Roman Catholicism can be apprehended only in terms of constraint or limitation. The 'religious path' retraced by the pilgrims and the 'aesthetic path' pursued by Joyce and Carleton 'are not easily reconciled'. (Sekine. M., 1985, p. 165). Most often, the values which bind the group into a homogeneous unit necessarily conflict with and restrict the growth of the individual consciousness and the literary identity. Similarly the artist must avoid being one of the tribe who dances until the deer is sighted. Instead, the artist must tack his or her own course as Joyce advises, because the artist must always remember that to be alive is often also to be violated, that the freedman is often shadowed by the convict.

The ambiguous pronoun 'they' in Joyce's words 'When they make the circle wide, it's time to swim / out on your own', implies that a poet's scope or range is dictated or controlled by others who can, for their own reasons, choose to 'make the circle' wider or by extension make the circle narrower. Joyce's 'they' equates to all the pressures of Ireland that Heaney feels, the pressures of tribe, society, State, Church, which threaten his integrity as an artist. Heaney is merely a man, but he is a man caught up in, even trapped by, daily existence, the poet's duty then is to render his non-idealised vision of the lives that surround him, he must be socially responsible and at the same time creatively free.

CONCLUSION

Station Island – Lough Derg, has served as a meeting place for Irish society from pre-history to the present day, 'it functions naturally as a microcosm' where the religious, political, historical and cultural affiliations of 'the tribe' are brought to the forefront and

where the issue of commitment becomes all the more crucial. (Tierney. M., 1972, p.7) Sweeney, Carleton and Joyce, the three voices of dissent in the 'Station Island' sequence, all attack the orthodoxies represented and perpetuated by the island. In the sequence Heaney is invariably caught between the antithetical and often incompatible claims of religious or political orthodoxy and artistic independence, between the desire to do 'the decent thing', and the need to move out on his own, between the exigencies of bondage and the privileges of emancipation, between the authority of the community and the rights of the individual. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 93). Heaney, too, is critical of the claims of orthodoxy, he is critical of the way in which those outward forms and rituals and the corresponding pressures of conformity preserve and perpetuate an attitude of submission that is symptomatic of Irish Roman Catholicism which does 'not cater for those possessed by that rare, dangerous, and uneasy passion, the passion for liberty'. (Huxley. A., 1927, p. 187).

'Station Island' sequence is dominated by self-accusation as Heaney searches for clearer self-definition, he commented in nineteen-eighty-seven that 'as Eliot says we hope to write the poems that are appropriate to the stage of life we're at ... as you get towards your fifties ... a certain rethinking of yourself, a certain distancing from your first 'self' occurs'. (Corcoran. N., 'From the Frontier of Writing', 1987, p. 681).

The 'Station Island' sequence is Heaney's attempt to do this as he critically reassesses and re-appraises the potentially claustrophobic world of dogmatic faith, unexamined habit, the fractured cultural values of Northern Ireland and the complexities of human nature. In the course of the 'Station Island' sequence a number of voices have been heard, various perspectives and experiences shown and many contrasts rendered. Like Chekhov who let the horrors of Sakhalin prisoners and the indifferent bureaucracy of the prison officials speak for themselves, Heaney gives each voice and each perspective its due. He listens to McCartney's accusations but does not give in to them, he hates the image of himself in the morning mirror for, among other things, his 'timid, circumspect involvement' but he recognises the posturing implicit here. He acknowledges Joyce's courageous example and he presents his purism, without judgement and without specific comment. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 80). Heaney enters purgatory to encounter his personal, social, political, religious and literary history, he is often the somewhat unwitting and unwilling party to his encounters with the ghosts. He challenges the 'drugged path', obedience and hollow conformity of Irish Roman Catholicism and the expectations and

conflicting demands made by the forces of Irish society. He frets again and again about the poet's role in the world, the poet's relation to his past and his environment, his milieu, all the while preoccupied with the political realities in Ulster and with seeking the truth. Through the pilgrim persona of 'Station Island', Heaney is able to dramatise his own very real struggle, as a poet, to achieve and assert his independent voice and artistic integrity. Like the rich young man who is told by Christ that he must give up everything he owns to be saved, Heaney finds himself at a similar cross-roads in terms of his poetic career.

Heaney in section I of 'Station Island' informs us that he is a 'fasted pilgrim, / light-headed, leaving home / to face into my station'. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 63). The poet of 'Station Island' certainly does face his station, at the end of which no epiphany occurs that will place everything in perspective, unify and bind all discord. However, the realisation that an ordinary household mug can be artistically translated, and being so, can 'salvage everything' and that 'what came to nothing could always be replenished', holds some promise for art and for the future. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 89). Just as Sweeney and Carleton represent the possibility for renewed growth and inspiration, Joyce, Heaney's 'old father', at the end of the sequence, offers not only artistic fosterage but also the potential for healing and renewal.

The introduction to this chapter alluded to the fact that Heaney's view about the role of the poet and the function of poetry changes again during this second phase of his career. His early faith in poetry remains solid; his mid-life, mid-career experience which brought him into confrontation with the 'brutality of the historical onslaught' and the struggle with the question of how he might encounter it in his work as in *North*, leads to a renewal of his faith in poetry. However, that faith now becomes tempered by a knowledge of poetry's limitations; by a recognition that the transcendence that poetry offers is never more than tentative. While aware now that poets / poetry are 'not about to set times wrong or right', he believes that the force of poetry is still valid, still in some fragile way, efficacious. (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 20).

Heaney's metaphor of the poet circling on the sharp rocks of St. Patrick's purgatory aptly embodies his agonising conundrums. At the end of the 'Station Island' sequence, Heaney is clearly sceptical of religious rituals commemorating God's word, and aware that he has to get out beyond the forces of Irish society, the 'trolls' that threaten his integrity as a writer. After 'Station Island', Heaney begins to strip away the burden of 'seed, breed and

generation' that he has carried for so long. *The Haw Lantern*, the topic of the next chapter of this study sees Heaney beginning this process of stripping himself of the cultural dissonance that constitutes the conscience of his race, in order to start again and to see things anew, it is a practice of unwinding and re-envisioning that will persist even into his most recent volumes as he continues to attempt to understand the very complex truths of his culture and history.

CHAPTER SIX

ALLEGORICAL VENTURES AND SECOND THOUGHTS

IN

THE HAW LANTERN

'Is it any wonder when I thought
I would have second thoughts?...

I was the march drain and the march drain's banks...

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

Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern*, 1987, pp. 4 – 5

INTRODUCTION

While Seamus Heaney did not respond to Joyce's voice at the end of the 'Station Island' sequence, *The Haw Lantern,* which is the concern of this chapter and which was published in nineteen-eighty-seven, may be interpreted, in my view, as his creative response to the challenge to be independent.

In *The Haw Lantern* as so often before in Heaney's work, the public and the private contend for space but here the latter gains the upper hand. This volume is intensely personal, in particular the sonnet sequence 'Clearances', about the death of the poet's mother. In *The Haw Lantern,* Heaney returns to familial relationships and agricultural beginnings, however his recurrent preoccupations about political realities in Ulster, the conflicting demands made by the forces of Irish society, and the seeking of truth, also continue in this volume, albeit to a lesser degree than in the preceding four volumes. There is a significant shift in this volume as Heaney follows the demands of his own imagination and moves from the contemporary events and actual Irish persons of the 'Station Island' sequence to the political parables of *The Haw Lantern.* Michael Parker makes an interesting observation, stating that Heaney makes an inversion in this volume, he writes that, 'previously Heaney employed myths and metaphors as a way into examining political realities; here he turns that process on its head, using political realities as metaphors for the troubles faced by Irish writers'. (Parker. M., 1993, P. 214). Helen Vendler notes that *The Haw Lantern* 'is Heaney's first book of the virtual, a realm that the poet will continue to explore in *Seeing Things*'. (Vendler. H., 1998, p. 113). In a Channel Four interview shown on the twelfth of December nineteen-ninety-eight, Heaney himself admitted to his interviewer that a change had occurred in him and in his work in the mid to late nineteen-eighties. He explained that '*Station Island* was immersed in the past and present of Ireland, ... this subject is tragic but remember there should be other things, other than civic affliction and civic suffering in poetry ...' (Channel Four interview, December 1998). Those 'other things' mainly preoccupy Heaney in *The Haw Lantern* and will dominate *Seeing Things.*

In *The Haw Lantern,* Heaney employs the allegorical mode which allows him both a distance from and a closeness to his topic. By referring to beliefs and practices in such poems as 'From the Canton of Expectation' and 'From the Republic of Conscience', Heaney portrays and evaluates certain defining characteristics of Irish conscience without

focusing upon any particular person, event or belief. Furthermore Heaney uses allegory and parable as devices for imaginatively travelling back to places he knows quite well, places that have stamped their imprint upon him. The allegorical mode thus allows the poet to unwind various influences acting upon him and gives him a space for second thoughts. Only a very small number of the poems of *The Haw Lantern* advert in any way to the situation in Northern Ireland and how that impacts on daily living / lives. It is these political parables however that will occupy this chapter of the study. The chapter will concentrate on these parables only, because for reasons of space the other aspects of Heaney's poetry cannot be treated here and because the central concern of this entire study is Heaney's politics in the broadest sense of that word.

My argument in this chapter is that the social, political and religious issues, the conflicts of tribe that Heaney painfully explored for so long, are in this volume and the following volume overtaken in a sense, by a new type of poetry. Heaney in the mid to late nineteen-eighties began to favour a poetry that focuses upon the ordinary and the everyday. I do not suggest that Heaney has abandoned the Irish question or his heritage in favour of a transcendent or neo-romantic aesthetic, such was not the case in the early poetry / career and I am doubtful that it will be the case in the future. However at this particular point in phase three of his career there is a new frontier of writing and of perception for the poet which begins to be played out in *The Haw Lantern* and which entirely occupies *Seeing Things*. This volume is not entirely insulated from social, political and religious influences but invariably carries with it vestiges of the past. The question to be asked, is what will be emphasised from now on? My feeling is that from *The Haw Lantern* on, although Heaney's questioning and self-reflection continue as key activities in his poetry, the questioning seems to me to be less a cross-examination, the self-reflection less a challenge to accepted personal beliefs and cultural practices than they were in earlier volumes. However his abiding anxiety over the social function of poetry and the quarrel between moral urgency and aesthetic form remain fundamental aspects of his thought.

The Haw Lantern embraces a broader focus than previous volumes. It is the poet's attempt to be socially responsible and artistically free. However it continues to illustrate as do his previous volumes, the daunting pressures and responsibilities on him, as a poet and as a person. It is indicative of the broader focus the poet embraces in this volume that he found himself at that time drawing much inspiration from the Eastern Bloc poets, Herbert, Holub and Milosz. The effect on Heaney's poetry of this work has been to

render it more abstract thus broadening his artistic canvas, while at the same time widening his political canvas. Although there is a turning away from the immediate political concerns of Ireland, Heaney is still concerned with Northern Ireland's affairs but he now looks at the Irish Troubles in the broader context of human suffering and difficulty. The experience of the Eastern European poets highlights for Heaney that Northern Ireland is not the only place on earth where peace, justice and truth are not generally at work in society. The Eastern European poets acted as tutelary guides to Heaney at a time when he was at a cross-roads in his artistic career. By reflecting upon the exemplary conduct of these poets, who had also lived through and suffered the barbarity of their times, Heaney found excellent role models.

This chapter is not suggesting in any way that Heaney's turn away from Irish politics in this volume signals the advent of an apolitical Heaney, in my view it indicates, if anything, a broadening of his political and artistic scope. Rather than leave Ireland for good as Joyce had done, to escape the nets of nationality and religion, Heaney stays put, living most of the year in Ireland, and begins to unravel the influence of those nets. In so doing he follows the demands of his own imagination and begins to transcend the nets of his native territory where he has felt caught between opposite extremes and where he now has 'second thoughts' about the values and culture of home.

CONTEMPORARY AND PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Some knowledge of the violent non-constitutional backdrop against which the constitutional events of the period occurred is again important because it was against this continuing background of violence in Northern Ireland that Heaney wrote *The Haw Lantern*. Throughout this period the indices of terrorist violence increased. The numbers of dead continued to mount as paramilitary violence, particularly that of the IRA became an end in itself. Sinn Féin's electoral performance was seen as an endorsement of violence, and the party's connection with the IRA was used to provide respectability for IRA violence, especially in the United States. 'Spectacular' terrorist attacks 'designed to attract publicity and generate support', particularly among Irish-Americans, became a feature of IRA activity during the mid nineteen-eighties. (Hoffman. B., 1998, p. 42). There was, in short, little to encourage inter-communal warmth or to improve relations between Belfast, London and Dublin.

While the terrorists were brutally taking life, the main initiatives in the region of new ideas about the future of Northern Ireland, and its relations with the South, took place in Ireland itself, especially in the New Ireland Forum in Dublin. James Prior gave The Forum Report a welcome but guarded response when it was debated in the House of Commons on the second of July nineteen-eighty-four. In November nineteen-eighty-four, the British and Irish Governments met in a second summit of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council, and agreed on a statement full of good intentions about security, community relations and the rest of the issues which make up the Northern Ireland problem. However, immediately after the meeting Margaret Thatcher gave a press conference and somewhat aggressively denounced the options put forward by the New Ireland Forum Report as 'out, out, out'. Her deliverance and the style of this announcement were very much at variance with the attempts being made by many ministers on both sides to talk to each other in reasonable terms. However despite Thatcher's style, despite terrorist and Unionist unwillingness to make any concessions, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed on the fifteenth of November nineteen-eighty-five at Hillsborough Castle by Mrs. Thatcher and Garret Fitzgerald, the Irish Taoiseach. This agreement gave the Irish Republic the right 'within the principle of consent' to put forward views and proposals about the government and administration of the North. Predictably the agreement was overwhelmingly condemned by Unionists and terrorists alike. The terrorists reacted against the agreement by scaling up their bombing campaigns and assassinations. The Unionists, outraged and panicked, concentrated their efforts on subverting the agreement. They withdrew from the Northern Ireland Assembly and proceeded to stage every form of riot and demonstration known to political protest in a vain attempt to wreck the agreement. However, if the agreement stood, the Assembly did not. On the third of March nineteen-eighty-six the Unionists called a strike against the agreement and eventually as the Northern Ireland Office, cut off both staff and access, the British Government dissolved yet another Northern Ireland parliamentary experiment on the twenty-third of June nineteen-eighty-six.

During the same period, the government and the people of the Irish Republic were also very much occupied with other serious concerns which related to the changing nature of Irish society, which the new emerging order in the Republic was bringing to a head. While bitter polarisation over the nineteen-eighty-one hunger strikes characterised the early nineteen-eighties in the Republic, the mid to late nineteen-eighties were 'characterised by a passion and vindictiveness' that had echoes of the post Treaty Ireland

of nineteen-twenty-two. (Hesketh. T., 1990, p. 11). The cause of such divisiveness were the referenda which took place in Ireland in nineteen-eighty-three and nineteen-eighty-six, on abortion and divorce respectively. The referenda highlighted the ineptitude and, in some cases, the deviousness of the Irish political leadership. Also highlighted was the 'radical conservatism and narrowness of the Irish electorate' following years of unthinking subjugation to the Irish Catholic Church. (Woshinsky. O., 1995, p. 144). More importantly a spotlight was thrown on the relationship between the Irish Catholic Church and the State, who were at loggerheads with each other at this time, and whose relationship following this period was never again to be as cosily collaborative and collusive as had been the case up to that date. A speech made by Peter Barry, Minister for Foreign Affairs, in September of nineteen-eighty-five on Church-State relations, is illuminating and summed up the feelings of many politicians in Ireland at that time. Barry referred to the very close relationship between the Irish Catholic Church and the Irish Governments since the foundation of the State, but noted in retrospect that 'the alliance of Church and State was harmful for both parties'. (Hesketh. T., 1990, p. 300). Barry went on to assert the right of all Church leaders to alert the consciences of their followers to what they perceived to be the moral consequences of any proposed legislation. However, Barry, also strongly affirmed the right of members of the houses of the Oireachtas / Irish Parliament to legislate in accordance with their conscience, in what they considered to be the best interests of the Irish people. The Irish Catholic Church won the day in both of the referenda and neither abortion nor divorce were passed at that time. The victory however proved to be a pyrrhic one and marked the beginning of the end of the Catholic Church's dominance of politics in the Republic. While the influence of the pulpit is still a force to be reckoned with in the Ireland of the late nineteen-nineties, it is fortunately but a shadow of its former self.

While these political, religious and social themes were being played out on the larger stage, in nineteen-eighties Ireland, Heaney wrote *The Haw Lantern*. Between nineteen-eighty-four and nineteen-eighty-seven he divided his time between Harvard, where he taught for four months of every year, and Sandymount in Dublin. Heaney's experience in America factors among the several influences leading to the newer poetic style of *The Haw Lantern*. The poet explained that 'the distance and the slight permissiveness, the slightly gravitiless life that I have had here has freed me in some ways to be more chancy in writing. In the new book there are a number of poems that are kind of parable poems ... I would say the American experience may have confirmed and assisted that ...'

(Corcoran. N., 'From the Frontier of Writing', 1987, p. 681). In effect Heaney's physical distance from Ireland helped an emotional and psychological distance at this period of his life and career, which, while it did not negate the importance of his origins or the validity of his earlier experiences, helped him to cast the past in a new frame of reference which is played out in *The Haw Lantern.*

Another factor which played no small part at this period of his life was the death of his parents. The previous chapter noted that Heaney's mother died in nineteen-eighty-four. In October nineteen-eighty-six the poet's father, Patrick Heaney died. Coming so soon after his mother's death this had a very profound impact on the poet. Heaney tried to explain his loss and grief to Blake Morrison stating that 'the most important thing that has happened to me in the last ten years is being at two death beds'. (Morrison. B., 1991, p. 26). The awful grief occasioned by the loss of both parents during this period along with the other influences at work, played no small part in *The Haw Lantern's* shift in direction and concentration on the private rather than the public. Parker writes approvingly of the more open style of this volume, stating that 'critics have noted and Heaney himself has commented on, a greater sense of ease and release within' *The Haw Lantern* and *Seeing Things*, 'a freeing up which may not be unconnected with bereavement. No longer constrained perhaps by his feeling for parental feelings, he appears less tentative, more candid in his observations on Catholic and Nationalist tradition'. (Parker, M., 1993, pp. 211 – 212).

THE HAW LANTERN

The first of the parable poems of this volume, 'From the Frontier of Writing', echoes the bleakness and desolation of the dedicatory poem of *Wintering Out*, which was repeated in *North* in 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing', and which was discussed in chapters two and three of this study. It describes what is a frequent occurrence for many of the inhabitants of Northern Ireland but in particular for the Catholics of that province, who live in fear and subjugation and whose basic liberties are eroded daily by the tyranny of an occupying power. 'From the Frontier of Writing' also describes an actual experience Heaney himself had and how that affected him and his work. Helen Vendler suggests that the physical roadblock in this poem may 'be a metaphor for a creative block' and asks 'did the subjugation of the writer at a real roadblock make him aware of an inner equivalent

when writing?' (Vendler. H., 1998, p. 117). Bearing in mind Parker's comment that in this volume Heaney is 'using political realities as metaphors for the troubles faced by Irish writers', one could perhaps extend Vendler's point and suggest that the roadblocks and attendant lack of civil liberties and niceties of civic society were the actual cause of the mental block or blocks.

'From the Frontier of Writing' can be divided into two halves. The first describes the paralysingly frightening experience of a driver being stopped by armed soldiers at a roadblock. They hold him at gun point while interrogating him and checking his papers before finally allowing him to continue with his journey. The second half of the poem describes how one feels once through this sort of situation. It happens again, literally because it is an everyday occurrence in Northern Ireland, but it also happens again in the form of internalised interrogation, as imaginatively the speaker relives the experience and writes of it.

The sense of oppression and fear are captured in the opening line of the poem.

> 'The tightness and the nilness round that space
> when the car stops in the road, the troops inspect
> its make and number ...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern*, 1987, p. 6).

The entire poem is expressive of the armed tension present in Northern Ireland and of the menacing, overcast, electric atmosphere that the inhabitants live in,

> '... as one bends his face
>
> towards your window, you catch sight of more
> on a hill beyond, eyeing with intent
> down cradled guns that hold you under cover
>
> and everything is pure interrogation
> until a rifle motions and you move
> with guarded unconcerned acceleration –

a little emptier, a little spent
as always by that quiver in the self,
subjugated, yes, and obedient.

So you drive on to the frontier of writing
where it happens again. The guns on tripods;
the sergeant with his on-off mike repeating

data about you, waiting for the squawk
of clearance; the marksman training down
out of the sun upon you like a hawk.

And suddenly you're through, arraigned yet freed,
as if you'd passed from behind a waterfall
on the black current of a tarmac road

past armour-plated vehicles, out between
the posted soldiers flowing and receding
like tree shadows into the polished windscreen'.

(Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern*, 1987, p. 6).

At the end of the first half of this poem the speaker is subjugated and obedient, he has no choice but to be so as he is held in the sights of 'cradled guns', 'eyeing with intent'. One senses the frustration that this subjugation occasions. However in the latter part of the poem passing through the roadblock the speaker acknowledges that he is 'through, arraigned yet freed'. This can be read on several levels. On one level the speaker is physically 'through' the roadblock and can drive away from it. On another level the fact that the speaker is 'through' could be read as the speaker being finished. That he has had enough of such tyranny and of struggling with it in his life and in his work. He now chooses to accept his freedom and move on. Beyond the roadblocks, the guns, the 'pure interrogation', the scrutiny, 'past armour-plated vehicles, out between...' (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern*, 1987, p. 6). On yet another level the physical roadblock has an equivalent mental / artistic block. The speaker moves beyond the artistic block here to reach his new frontier of writing, which is beyond the oppression exerted by a foreign

occupying force and beyond the oppressive / repressive scrutiny of Irish society and critics. As the soldiers and their guns recede from direct sight and become instead distorted shadows cast upon the car windscreen, there is a gradual clearing and opening of the way, a space for a new horizon. At the new frontier of writing 'it happens again', he relives the real and the mental blocks, but now writing acts as an agency of personal release and freedom. The speaker is no longer subjugated and obedient but creatively free.

This poem recounts an escape from the modern hell of Northern Ireland and from a creative paralysis, the speaker has not only to pass through real roadblocks but he has to confront as well the invisible roadblocks of consciousness and conscience. Heaney elaborated about this poem to N. Corcoran. He explained that this poem uses 'an encounter at a roadblock, a kind of archetypal, Ulster, Catholic situation. It turns it into a parable for the inquisition and escape and freedom implicit in a certain kind of lyric poem. You know, you cross the bar and you're free into that other region'. (Corcoran. N., 'From the Frontier of Writing', 1987, p. 681). In effect, the poet escapes from the subjugation of self when he enters the world of the lyric poem. The 'inquisition, escape and freedom' grow out of the commonplace, in Northern Ireland roadblocks are commonplace, and for the ethical writer, the effects of such gross intrusion make mental blocks perhaps more frequent than one would normally suppose. The poem reminds us at the same time of how much of Heaney's work has come about in a time of check points, scrutiny, suspicion and inspection, and of how that work stands for affirmation of humanity in the face of inhumane circumstances.

In the second of the parable poems of *The Haw Lantern*, 'Parable Island', Heaney critically examines the differences that abound in Northern Ireland, and also in similar societies and circumstances in other parts of the world. The sense is of frustration and impatience with the inhabitants and with their absolutist beliefs. There is also a certain distance here as Heaney mocks both 'the subversives and collaborators', the extremists of both tribes, for arrogantly presuming their version of Ireland's history and destiny is the only one, as he examines sectarian divisions in the North of Ireland. This is the first time a note of mocking, that is not directed at self, creeps into Heaney's work.

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

Somewhere in the far north, in a region
every native thinks of as "the coast",
there lies the mountain of the shifting names.

The occupiers call it Cape Basalt.
The Sun's Headstone, say the farmers in the east.
Drunken westerners call it The Orphan's Tit.

To find out where he stands the traveller
has to keep listening – since there is no map
which draws the line he knows he must have crossed...'

(Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern*, 1987, p. 10).

The natives have one name for a particular part of their country, the occupiers another, all of which leaves the outsider, and indeed very often the insiders too, confused as there are no reliable directions in this land. Ideological preconceptions rule in this place of moral, political and religious confusions.

'Meanwhile, the forked-tongued natives keep repeating
prophecies they pretend not to believe
about a point where all the names converge
underneath the mountain and where (someday)
they are going to start to mine the ore of truth.

II

In the beginning there was one bell-tower
which struck its single note each day at noon
in honour of the one-eyed all-creator ...'

(Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern*, 1987, p. 10).

The sectarian bigots find all of the differences that exist unpalatable and each stuck in their absolutist belief hark back to 'the one bell-tower', and attempt to elevate their own belief system above that of others and to the violent exclusion of any other.

> '... At least, this was the original idea ...
> But even there
>
> you can't be sure that parable is not
> at work already retrospectively,...'
>
> (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern,* 1987, p. 11).

Because such stories have been retold time and again one cannot be sure of their truth or of a point of origin. One cannot be sure that what is considered truth is not merely fiction, that history is not actually narrative glosses of other narrative glosses, and that origin is not actually a dream.

> 'Now archaeologists begin to gloss the glosses.
> ...
>
> like the subversives and collaborators
> always vying with a fierce possessiveness
> for the right to set "the island story" straight'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern,* 1987, p. 11).

Even the different schools of archaeology take part in the deception. By presenting their own interpretations of the past, they also contribute to the dissemination of half truths, lies and omissions with the same partisan abandon as the political mythmakers. All the while the different tribes vie 'with a fierce possessiveness' to set 'the island story straight'. They grind the axes of their competing ideologies with the Nationalists seeing themselves as an enclave of Irish Nationalism over-run by colonising usurpers and seeing their Northern Ireland as part of all Ireland. While the Unionists, on the other hand, see themselves as an out-post of the British Empire in the middle of a hostile nation and view their Northern Ireland as part of Great Britain.

Heaney closes this parable poem with a satirical and prophetic illustration.

> 'the elders dream of boat-journeys and havens
> and have their stories too, like the one about the man
> who took to his bed, it seems, and died convinced
>
> that the cutting of the Panama Canal
> would mean the ocean would all drain away
> and the island disappear by aggrandizement'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern*, 1987, p. 11).

Heaney highlights the dangers inherent in the isolationist exclusivist paranoia of the tribes' competing discourses, the old man of the story was so anxious that his island would no longer be an island that he overlooked the bigger picture, the greater danger of what would happen if the ocean did in fact drain away.

What is clear here is that no one side has the monopoly on truth, in fact the mutually exclusive discourses hide more than they reveal, do more harm than good, there is no hope and no future in them. My feeling is that Heaney has finally become disenchanted with the natives, with his own tribe as well as with 'the other side'. Both tribes make up Northern Ireland and their different ideologies, histories, truths combine to make up the whole. The answer therefore, the way forward, as Heaney explains in *The Redress of Poetry*, is for both sides to live in harmony with each other and to accept each other's differences and appreciate the richness of the diversities in the North. 'The British dimension ... while it is something that will be resisted by the minority if it is felt to be coercive; has nevertheless been a given of our history and even of our geography, one of the places where we all live willy-nilly ... So I would suggest that the majority in Northern Ireland should make an effort at two-mindedness, and start to conceive of themselves within – rather than beyond – the Irish element. Obviously it will be extremely difficult for them to surmount their revulsion against all the violence that has been perpetrated in the name of Ireland, but everything and everybody would be helped were they to make their imagination press back against the pressure of reality and to re-enter the whole country of Ireland imaginatively ... through the Northern point in the

quincunx'. (Heaney. S., *The Redress of Poetry*, 1995, p. 202). This poem goes beyond Heaney's work to date. It is an example of his emerging wider political canvas in that it not only records Northern Ireland's Troubles but is equally applicable to other areas of strife in the world, in particular South Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

In 'From the Republic of Conscience', the third parable poem in *The Haw Lantern*, Heaney again presents us with a generalised, abstract location; it could be the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland or equally one of many other places in the world. It is interesting to note however that the poet initially wrote this poem for the Amnesty International Irish sections' nineteen-eighty-five, Human Rights Day observance. When the speaker in this poem arrives in the Republic of Conscience, the power and draw of conscience almost immediately pervades him, there is an eerie silence and quietness.

> 'When I landed in the republic of conscience
> it was so noiseless when the engines stopped
> I could hear a curlew high above the runway.
>
> At immigration, the clerk was an old man
> who produced a wallet from his homespun coat
> and showed me a photograph of my grandfather.
>
> The woman in customs asked me to declare
> the words of our traditional cures and charms
> to heal dumbness and avert the evil eye.
>
> No porters. No interpreter. No taxi.
> You carried your own burden and very soon
> your symptoms of creeping privilege disappeared'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern*, 1987, p. 12).

Ireland, like many other countries has been afflicted by a system of privileges for centuries, a system introduced by and perpetuated by her conquerors. Yet, on the whole, the Irish people tend not to be much interested in the celebrated or the famous and the majority have 'little patience with the passion that afflicts so many to shake hands with

the great ones of the earth'. (Somerset Maugham. W., 1967, p. 350). The speaker in this poem has himself been appropriated by the anachronistic system of privilege. He is a celebrated poet, a national hero, yet now he finds his 'symptoms of creeping privilege disappeared' as pomp and ceremony are absent. There is a sense that he wants to atone for that system of privileges as the speaker declares the burden of his guilt to customs officials who represent his ever vigilant conscience.

In this imaginary land public officials and office holders are not placed upon, nor fawningly encouraged to place themselves upon, pedestals. Instead it is expected that;

> 'At their inauguration, public leaders
> must swear to uphold unwritten law and weep
> to atone for their presumption to hold office –
>
> and to affirm their faith that all life sprang
> from salt in tears which the sky-god wept
> after he dreamt his solitude was endless'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern*, 1987, p. 13).

The rulers, politicians, public officials are subject to the demands of ethical responsibility, conscience rules and the government of the tongue tacitly legislates. The speaker's encounters with the immigration clerk and the customs official are on a one-to-one basis as is any encounter with conscience. Individuals follow their conscience to a greater or lesser degree and the influence of conscience is a personal matter. One follows the dictates of one's conscience not because of any political or military or outside enforcer but because one knows them to be right.

> 'I came back from that frugal republic
> with my two arms the one length, the customs woman
> having insisted my allowance was myself.
>
> The old man rose and gazed into my face
> and said that was official recognition

that I was now a dual citizen.

He therefore desired me when I got home
to consider myself a representative
and to speak on their behalf in my own tongue.

Their embassies, he said, were everywhere
but operated independently
and no ambassador would ever be relieved'.

(Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern,* 1987, p. 13).

The speaker returns from this imaginary land where ethical probity and conscience inform public life, with nothing but himself, yet this is all he needs to proceed ethically in the harsh, politicised world of reality. He is now a dual citizen, the old man has requested that on his return home he should be a political representative and speech maker. The old man at immigration speaks for the speaker's conscience, he has a duty to speak conscientiously but he must also be himself, he must 'operate independently' as an ambassador of truth, justice and freedom. He must speak in his 'own tongue' and avoid the folly of the 'fork-tongued natives' of the previous poem. This charge is to be a lifelong duty / task as 'no ambassador would ever be relieved'. (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern,* 1987, p. 13).

Conscience is essentially silent and can gain public notice only when those who practice it elect to speak / write for it. Here Heaney anxiously returns to his ongoing concern that as a poet he does not do enough and that poetry 'makes nothing happen'. In my view this poem is one of the best examples of Heaney registering the moral imperative to speak out against the Troubles, not only of Northern Ireland, but of all such areas of the world where justice and truth are absent. Yet at the same time we are reminded that the speaking out must be honest and true, not propagandist, not as any one side's mouthpiece. Not, as Heaney writes in *The Government Of The Tongue,* giving 'consolation to papmongers or propagandists of whatever stripe' (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue,* 1988, p. 61). Again, there is a new dimension here as Heaney stands well back and takes what Corcoran calls 'a detached ... almost aerial' view of the situation. (Corcoran. N., 1998, p. 151). In these parable poems Heaney ponders the givens of

power, knowledge and moral conviction and considers whether they can ever be united in a civilised way.

Heaney's painful conundrums are apparent in the next parable poem, having just been charged with the task of being a spokesperson for this people, the power of silence and the distrust of speech inform 'From the Land of the Unspoken'. Odd as it may seem in a poet who celebrates language throughout his career, Heaney has always been wary of speech, fretting over the harm that language / speech can do and anxious not to rouse peoples' passions least they lead them into undesirable actions. However, one is not surprised at Heaney's wariness when one remembers that his forebears are the private, silent people of Northern Ireland, and Heaney himself has commented on the fact that his own father was silent to the point of taciturnity . Add to that Heaney's warning in *North* that 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing', and one can begin to comprehend the famous Northern reticence, in mad Northern Ireland one wrong word can get one killed. In life, Heaney himself is not always talkative, there is at times a sense that he is holding back, being very careful of what he is saying and of what facets of himself he is revealing, In a society such as that of Northern Ireland there is often an over exposure to harmful propaganda, to the false, empty speeches of politicians and to the exaggerated journalese of the mass media, all of which can have the effect of reinforcing the value of silence among the people. Yet there is a paradox here because Heaney, as we have seen throughout this study, has spent much of his career struggling against political quietism and worrying that it may be seen as condoning the atrocities of Northern Ireland.

> 'We are a dispersed people whose history
> is a sensation of opaque fidelity.
> When or why our exile began
> among the speech-ridden, we cannot tell
> but solidarity comes flooding up in us
> when we hear their legends ...
>
> When we recognize our own, we fall in step
> but do not altogether come up level.
> My deepest contact was underground
> strap-hanging back to back on a rush-hour train
> and in a museum once, I inhaled

vernal assent from a neck and shoulder
pretending to be absorbed in a display
of absolutely silent quernstones.

Our unspoken assumptions have the force
of revelation. How else could we know
that whoever is the first of us to seek
assent and votes in a rich democracy
will be the last of us and have killed our language?
Meanwhile, if we miss the sight of a fish
we heard jumping and then see its ripples,
that means one more of us is dying somewhere'.

(Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern,* 1987, pp. 18 – 19).

The Northern Irish diaspora, especially in garrulous capitalist countries like America, adhere to this habit of reticence, because it is part of their history and creates solidarity and to break from it would be divisive. The Northern Irish abroad are a very private people, they recognise and support each other but there is a silent code of 'unspoken assumptions'. Heaney here is continuing to unravel the Irish story rather than trying to set 'the island story straight' (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern,* 1987, p. 11). He is exposing the shallowness of the media, which to a large extent have pushed poets aside, and the simplistic rhetoric of politics / politicians. He is also taking a stand here in that he is critical of openly political poets. Heaney believes that there is a clear and present danger for openly political poets in that they can fall into linguistic corruption and become traitors to language and to the people. In the last verse of the poem Heaney speaks for apolitical poets declaring that 'the first of us to seek / assent and votes in a rich democracy / will be the last of us and have killed our language ...' (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern,* 1987, p. 19).

The discourse of parable therefore again allows Heaney an overview, removes him from the immediately journalistic. He chips away at all dangerously simplistic rhetoric and attempts to articulate the poets' / writers' ambiguous position in a society such as that of Northern Ireland, as he highlights how the Troubles there effect Irish writers both at home and abroad.

In 'From the Canton of Expectation', Heaney examines inter-generational conflict. He looks at two generations of Irish citizens, the last of the old school and the first of the new order and contrasts their conscience. The younger generation benefited from the 1947 Education Act of Great Britain, which allowed the Northern Irish urban working classes and the Northern Irish rural small farming classes, access to higher education for the first time. The poet himself belongs to the new, younger generation, he too benefited from the 1947 Education Act, yet the speaker in the poem is obviously one of the older generation.

> 'We lived deep in a land of optative moods,
> under high, banked clouds of resignation.
> A rustle of loss in the phrase *Not in our lifetime*,..
>
> Once a year we gathered in a field
> of dance platforms and tents where children sang
> songs they had learned by rote in the old language.
> An auctioneer who had fought in the brotherhood
> enumerated the humiliations
> we always took for granted, but not even he
> considered this, I think, a call to action.
> Iron-mouthed loudspeakers shook the air
> yet nobody felt blamed. He had confirmed us.
> When our rebel anthem played the meeting shut
> we turned for home and the usual harassment
> by militiamen on overtime at roadblocks'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern*, 1987, p. 46).

The older generation live in a world of passivity and ceremony, they carry on with the old nationalist ritual practices. The old stories are told and retold and are learned by heart by the children, these stories articulate the language of martyrdom and resignation. The older generation are a passive, patient people who have lost all intention of action, even though the 'usual harassment' goes on.

In contrast the younger generation scorn the elder generations' sense of success through failure, power through martyrdom.

'And next thing, suddenly, this change of mood.
Books open in the newly-wired kitchens.
Young heads that might have dozed a life away
against the flanks of milking cows were busy
paving and pencilling their first causeways
across the prescribed texts. The paving stones
of quadrangles came next and a grammar
of imperatives, the new age of demands.
They would banish the conditional for ever,
this generation born impervious to
the triumph in our cries of *de profundis*.
Our faith in winning by enduring most
they made anathema, intelligences
brightened and unmannerly as crowbars'.

(Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern*, 1987, pp. 46 – 47).

The new generation are activists, they will not tolerate the injustices of Northern Ireland. There has been an abrupt 'change of mood' as a new order slowly emerges, empowered by education and demanding self-expression and self-gratification, wanting more than mere ritualised reassurances of Republican rhetoric which confined an acquiescent solidarity of the dispossessed. However the poem clearly exposes the shortcomings of both generations. The passivity of the older generation may be regrettable in the face of the gross inequalities and injustices of the Northern Ireland system, however the desire for change of the younger generation has an inherent danger in that it can lead to repellent action, the extreme of which has led some of the younger generation into the arms of the IRA. The speaker in the final section of the poem is 'stricken' as he looks for someone who will give some sense of direction and hope. Such a person would be capable of dealing with, not only the violent upheavals and disasters that befall his society, but also with the profound prospects for change.

My feeling is that Heaney here is having second thoughts about the values and customs of home as he stands back and objectively observes the dualities and divisions of Northern Ireland and ponders how the political realities of the province affect all of its people. He sees in a clear and detached way that expectation, resignation and loss have 'corroborated

us' and made the elder generation all too susceptible to the would-be 'triumph in our cries of *de profundis*'. (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern,* 1987, p. 47). While in contrast, the younger generation have fed the negative aspects of the emerging new order, a consumer society, and the parallel order of violence. This parable poem allows Heaney to reassess his community, he sees with a sense of weariness and disenchantment the faults of both generations, and considers some of the baneful consequences of the unleashing of the rhetoric in IRA action, while seeming to be talking about wider, more abstract and more universal issues. Helen Vendler takes up this point, writing that 'the cunning and weariness here of the elder generation, their circumlocutions and defensiveness, their routine bravado and their pious aphorisms, mean that although the story of defeated political hopes and easy religious evasions may be a universal one, the language in which it is couched here is devastatingly particular to Ireland and gives the parable its locality and sting of contempt'. (Vendler. H., 1988, p. 68).

'The Mud Vision', the last of the parable poems of this volume, has been described by many as 'strange'. Vendler considers it to be 'the strangest' of all the poems in *The Haw Lantern* and Corcoran refers to it as 'the strongest and the strangest poem'. (Corcoran. N., 1998, p. 153). Corcoran feels that this poem suggests 'a disenchantment with the endless contentiousness of Irish historiography', while Vendler suggests that the poem arises from Heaney's desire to respect amplitude. (Corcoran. N., 1998, p. 153).

My own view is that 'The Mud Vision', in fact continues the theme of 'From the Canton of Expectation'. It describes very well the reality of Ireland in the nineteen-eighties as the new emerging order continued its dislocating struggle with the old order, and it highlights clearly the inter and intra-generational differences that abounded. While the familiar notes of recent Northern Irish history are sounded here, they are at the same time, shorn of specificity, freeing them from their locale. The old, the new, the secular, the violent, the religious, the political and the social aspects of life are satirised here as they hover indecisively between upwardly mobile modernity and atavistic anachronism.

> 'Statues with exposed hearts and barbed-wire crowns
> Still stood in alcoves, hares flitted beneath
> The dozing bellies of jets, our menu-writers
> And punks with aerosol sprays held their own
> With the best of them. Satellite link-ups

Wafted over us the blessings of popes, heliports
Maintained a charmed circle for idols on tour
And casualties on their stretchers. We sleepwalked
The line between panic and formulae, screentested
Our first native models and the last of the mummers,
Watching ourselves at a distance, advantaged
And airy as a man on a springboard
Who keeps limbering up because the man cannot dive'.

(Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern,* 1987, p. 48).

The disrupted people of this parable, are an impotent nation. They attempt to conceal their indecisiveness by deluding themselves that they are politically flexible. They experience a moment of authenticating vision but are unable to appreciate it.

'And then in the foggy midlands it appeared,
Our mud vision, as if a rose window of mud
Had invented itself out of the glittery damp, ...
We had heard of the sun standing still and the sun
That changed colour, but we were vouchsafed
Original clay, transfigured and spinning...

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

(Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern,* 1987, pp. 48 – 49).

Sadly these people are not equal to the vision, and so it disappears. The poem exposes their recalcitrance, they are true to form and find a way to equivocate any lesson or imperative the vision or sign conveys.

> 'We lived, of course, to learn the folly of that.
> One day it was gone ... As cameras raked
> The site from every angle, experts
> Began their *post factum* jabber and all of us
> Crowded in tight for the big explanations.
> Just like that, we forgot that the vision was ours,
> Our one chance to know the incomparable
> And dive to a future. What might have been origin
> We dissipated in news. The clarified place
> Had retrieved neither us nor itself – except
> You could say we survived. So say that, and watch us
> Who had our chance to be mud-men, convinced and estranged,
> Figure in our own eyes for the eyes of the world'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern,* 1987, p. 49).

Rather than embracing the mud vision as a sign of hope for the future, and of change for the better the people allowed it to disappear, thus highlighting their shortcomings and anachronistic beliefs. This poem attempts to get at truth symbolically and allegorically rather than through realistic description. Yet it is a clear critique of a people who have defined themselves by backing their way into a corner, into a narrow, self-perpetuated and overwhelmingly limited or 'hidebound' view of themselves and the world. The enervating influence of such views has led to that state of Irish paralysis in which 'we sleepwalked / The line between panic and formulae' unable to 'dive to a future'. (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern,* 1987, pp. 48 – 49).

'The Mud Vision' reflects a near despair of country and also to a certain degree of self, yet it also demonstrates how far Heaney has come. He is now capable of taking an overview and of making objective observations on Nationalism, on Catholicism and on his own tribe. He can relay with a certain detachment the cataclysmic news of a nation who, because of hesitation, allowed all opportunity to be lost at a critical moment in

history / time, while at the same time he reveals his own vision for the future of Ireland and his ambition for a better Ireland.

CONCLUSION

The Haw Lantern is consistent with Heaney's uncomplacent refusal to stay put in the same place poetically. In this volume he breaks new ground with his frequent essays into the allegorical. The parable poems of this volume have a satirical edge as Heaney takes a more objective view of the Irish tribes and of Irish society than ever before, and seem to suggest that all groups become self-parodic over time. *The Haw Lantern* expresses emptiness and absence but also a distance that has not been present in Heaney's work up to now. In the parable poems a weariness, frustration, impatience, disillusionment, and exasperation, with the impotency and narrowness of the Irish, the empty rhetoric and gestures and the missed opportunities of nineteen-eighties Ireland, is apparent as he searches for 'one among us who never swerved / from all his instincts told him was right action, / who stood his ground ...' (Heaney. S., *The Haw Lantern,* 1987, p. 47).

It is striking how open this volume is compared to Heaney's previous volumes. Hart, Corcoran and others attribute this to the influence of the Eastern bloc poets on him, at that time. Corcoran writes that Heaney 'finds in the Eastern bloc poets an analogous case for the Irish writer'. (Corcoran. N., 1998, p. 147). In *The Government Of The Tongue,* Heaney both endorses and feels endorsed by the philosophy of the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert, who had himself suffered the oppressions of soviet-dominated Poland. Herbert demonstrated how, through lucid, pared-down parables, Heaney could achieve a mode as simple as it was profound. Heaney found another exemplary role model in the person of the Czech poet Miroslav Holub, Heaney writes admiringly in *The Government Of The Tongue*, of Holub's 'laying bare of things', and of his 'pursuit of the fully exposed poem', and he is influenced by Holub's work towards a more candid style for himself. (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue,* 1988, p. 46).

There is a clear shift in *The Haw Lantern* as Heaney engages with the distant view in his attempt to be creatively free and socially responsible. As the poet used the discourse of archaeology in the past, in this volume he moves to the ethical and metaphysical discourse of parable. Both discourses allow an overview. Vendler writes that 'the poet

must find his own persona and tonal stance within his material: will he appear as his historical self, or as a generalized lyric speaker? Will he speak "objectively" or from an identifiable political or social position?' (Vendler. H., 1998, p. 7). It is clear in this volume what Heaney decided he should be; the allegorical mode thus allows him to speak objectively. While at the same time it allows him success in his attempt to illustrate how the Troubles effect the inhabitants of Northern Ireland in general, and writers in particular. Writers who must struggle to encounter 'all the messy, and it would seem incomprehensible obsessions in the North', in their own work. (Parker. M., 1993, p. 123). It remains true also however that the parables and allegories of *The Haw Lantern* give the poet a vantage point and a new mask, while he examines his second thoughts about the values and customs, dualities and divisions of home. In *The Haw Lantern*, Heaney begins to transcend the nets of his native territory where he has felt caught between opposite extremes. Whatever second thoughts Heaney is having, it is clear to me, that the lines he himself wrote in praise of Herbert's poetry apply equally to his own work which will never console 'papmongers and propagandists ... its whole intent is to devastate those arrangements which are offered as truth by power's window-dressers everywhere'.(Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. 61).

CHAPTER SEVEN

CREDITING MARVELS AND RETURNING TO EARTH

IN

SEEING THINGS AND *THE SPIRIT LEVEL*

'Things had moved on ...

it was user-friendly out back
Where we stood footloose, at home beyond the tribe,

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'.

September 1994.

Heaney. S., *The Sprit Level*, 1996, p.69

INTRODUCTION

The final chapter of this study will consider Heaney's two latest volumes, *Seeing Things*, which was published in nineteen-ninety-one, and *The Spirit Level*, which was published in nineteen-ninety-six. *Seeing Things* is different from Heaney's previous volumes in that the self-doubt, the guilt and the anguish which characterised key sections of his other work, are absent from this particular volume and are replaced by what Elmer Andrews calls 'uplift' (Andrews. E., 1992, p. 9). *Seeing Things* is also different in that it concentrates on what Heaney calls the 'marvellous'. (Heaney. S., *Crediting Poetry*, 1995, p. 20). The volume is about visionary seeing or re-seeing as Heaney continues the practice of unwinding and re-envisioning which he began in *The Haw Lantern*. In this volume the 'other things' of poetry continue to dominate as the poet takes flight into a buoyant commitment to a kind of vision which can 'credit marvels', 'Me waiting until I was nearly fifty / To credit marvels / .. Time to be dazzled and the heart to lighten' (Heaney. S., *Seeing Things*, 1991, p. 50). There is a sense of release, of freedom and of airiness in *Seeing Things*, as Heaney soars up to artistic freedom. This volume is more concerned with personal vision and personal history, with the private and familial sphere than with the larger political, civic and historical issues. It is suffused with his father's memory and in a sense marks the passage he has undergone through his parents' deaths as the poet learns to fully appreciate the miraculousness of the ordinary. Heaney has said of the volume that there is 'the sense of an airiness as well as the double take ... a downbeat, flat, looking-at-things mood, and, at the same time a hallucinatory experience, a dubiousness about what you're seeing when you're seeing things'. (Malloy. C., 1996, p. 21). In *Seeing Things* much of the cultural dissonance that reverberated through Heaney's earlier work is, if not absent, attenuated. In this volume the poet takes a respite from Northern Ireland and its 'neighbourly murders', and emphasises the private sphere. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 7).

By contrast *The Spirit Level* sees Heaney coming back down to earth and returning to the larger political, social and historical issues which *Seeing Things* seemed to make a point of avoiding. Vendler comments that 'one cannot forever bear one's "otherworldly" brow ... and so Heaney will come back, but not unchanged, in *The Spirit Level*'. (Vendler. H., 1998, pp. 152 – 153). In *The Spirit Level* the matter of Northern Ireland is once again prominently to the fore. This however is a Northern Ireland with a new, powerful ingredient. After twenty five years of what Heaney referred to in *Crediting Poetry*, as

'life-waste and spirit-waste'; hope, in the form of an IRA ceasefire followed by a Loyalist ceasefire, was introduced in nineteen-ninety-four. (Heaney. S., *Crediting Poetry*, 1995, p. 17). Many of the poems of *The Spirit Level* refer to Northern Ireland, and to the revision of fixed, antagonistic positions into mobile co-operation. For the purpose of this chapter and again because of the constraints of space, only three of the poems which advert to Northern Ireland will be examined. They are 'The Flight Path' which is, in my view, one of the most illuminating poems written by Heaney, and in which he categorically refuses to be drawn in by the IRA. 'Mycenae outlook' where Heaney highlights the inexplicable and apparently unstoppable recurrence of violence, murder and betrayal in human affairs; not just in contemporary Northern Ireland but also in other areas of the world and at other historic moments. The third very important poem of this volume is 'Tollund' which is Heaney's joyous celebration of the IRA ceasefire of the thirty-first of August nineteen-ninety-four. *The Spirit Level* provides an interesting comparison to *Seeing Things*, the poetry of the latter being so significantly concerned with the visionary and with the private, while the poetry of the former thrusts public preoccupations to the fore along with the reality of conflict.

My argument in this chapter is that Heaney learned a valuable lesson from the experience of *Seeing Things*. In that volume he achieved the artistic freedom he had long been searching for, however, he learned that too intimate an embrace with the visionary can diminish the actual just as too great an entanglement with the actual can threaten to destroy the visionary. There is of necessity an inter-dependency between the visionary and the actual. My feeling is that Heaney found the airiness, lightness , the pure visionary of *Seeing Things* hard to justify, and difficult to be comfortable with in a world of injustice and suffering, and in a Northern Ireland of 'neighbourly murders'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 7). Poets are not independent of the society which engenders them, yet in *Seeing Things*, Heaney follows the demands of his own imagination to such an extent that his imagination takes flight, attains visionary freedom, unfettered by any influences or pressures of life or of reality. It must be said however that while Heaney may at times stand back from, take a distant or aerial view of, and even respite from Northern Ireland, he never leaves politics for long. Despite taking a break from the incomprehensible tribal slaughters of Northern Ireland in *Seeing Things*, he is both unwilling and unable to 'escape the massacre' and he returns to earth resoundingly in *The Spirit Level*. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 67). In addition his abiding concern with the finding of an appropriate poetic voice or form for treating these issues of such ethical complexity is clearly present

throughout his work. In *The Spirit Level*, therefore, the voice of cautious reason, self-deprecation and doubtfulness returns but it is now tempered with and balanced by a certain freedom, optimism and hope for the future. The poetry of *The Spirit Level* is both socially responsible, to the monumental importance of the actual events of nineteen-nineties Northern Ireland, and creatively free, open to the possibility of perfected vision, in which the irreconcilables are finally, hopefully about to be reconciled in Northern Ireland.

CONTEMPORARY AND PERSONAL BACKGROUND

From nineteen-eighty-seven to nineteen-ninety-six, while Heaney wrote *Seeing Things* and *The Spirit Level*, the tragic detritus of war in Northern Ireland continued. This was a very important period in modern Irish history and this section of the chapter will attempt to briefly sketch in some of the more momentous events of those years. This period was characterised by much 'covert as well as overt activity' between Belfast, Dublin, London and Washington; between 'terrorists', politicians, diplomats and intermediaries of varying political hues. (Lydon. J., 1998, p. 395). During this time the bombs, punishment beatings and assassinations continued, but it was also a period of discussions, negotiations and deals, albeit along with sell-outs and side-lining. I believe that it is true to say that during much of that period the covert or underground activities and negotiations were often more fruitful than the overt or overground ones. The overt activities and negotiations were somewhat crowded with 'papmongers' and 'propagandists' and with the personalities whose own ideologies and prejudice, and at times the additional ingredient of political exigency, did little to help a province which had for so long been blighted by bloodshed. The one intellectual politician thrown up by constitutional nationalism in Northern Ireland throughout the quarter century of 'life-waste and spirit-waste' is John Hume, who was at school at St. Columbs at the same time as Heaney, and to whom Heaney pays tribute in *The Redress of Poetry*. His approach throughout these crucial years was very personal and fundamentally decent. Hume was one of the main personalities involved in bringing Sinn Féin in from the cold to the centre of main-stream politics. This was no small feat bearing in mind that during the mid nineteen-eighties the Republicans were regarded as 'pariahs', drowning in the groundswell of revulsion at the violence for which they were regarded as 'carrying the major share of the blame'. (Coogan. T., 1995, p. 162). Hume very courageously agreed to meet Gerry Adams on the

eleventh of January nineteen-eighty-eight for a lengthy meeting. The Hume-Adams meeting 'aroused great controversy' and Hume, who for twenty years had been the most respected political figure to emerge from the Troubles, 'became the object of severe and sustained criticism from all sides'. (Taylor. P., 1998, p. 304). Yet this initial meeting between Hume and Adams was the starting point of a series of talks involving delegations from the SDLP and Sinn Féin, and marked the beginning of the most significant discussions in formulating a new peace initiative in the North of Ireland. The Hume-Adams initiative as it became known was presented to the Irish Government on the twenty-fifth of September nineteen-ninety-three, and was a joint statement on their peace proposals. The importance of the Hume - Adams initiative cannot be overstated, despite the fact that John Major told Hume in November nineteen-ninety-three that it was not the way to proceed. Subsequently both John Major and Albert Reynolds decided to put some distance between themselves and the Hume-Adams initiative and proceeded instead towards a Joint Declaration, along the lines suggested by the Reynolds 'peace formula'. The meetings and the deals continued and on the twelfth of December nineteen-ninety-three the Downing Street Declaration was produced by Major and Reynolds.

There was another very important factor at play during this particular period, the powerful outside influence of the Irish-American lobby and its influence on the White House, which had helped in no small way to bring about the Downing Street Declaration. During the late nineteen-eighties and early nineteen-nineties the Irish Government, following years of neglect, once again cultivated into wakefulness the sleeping giant of Irish-American political clout. Irish-American opinion had been stirred to life from the time of the nineteen-eighty-one hunger strikes onward. When Bill Clinton entered the presidential race it flexed its muscles as it had not done, nor been asked to do, for a long time. Clinton himself had become aware of, and interested in, the Irish Question from being in Oxford at the time of the civil rights campaign in Northern Ireland, and he was cognisant of what had befallen that peaceful protest movement. To the rage of Unionists, who wanted to maintain the status quo in Northern Ireland, and to the intense anger of the British Government, who wanted no interference in a 'domestic issue', especially not from a president who was a democrat, Clinton now threw his hat into the ring.

Events of great moment were taking place in the affairs of Northern Ireland yet the path to peace was fraught with dangers and deceptions. Throughout this period Paisley, who had provoked Belfast's first riots of the nineteen-sixties, together with his ilk of Unionist

supremacists, continued to try to turn the clock backwards. They continued after a quarter of a century of horrific bloodshed, to deny the validity of the nationalist identity, which understandably led to much anger, resentment and frustration among the nationalist community. Despite all obstacles however, a ceasefire was announced by the IRA on the thirty-first of August nineteen-ninety-four, which came into effect from midnight of that day, and which was greeted with euphoria by the Irish everywhere. This was followed after an extensive process of consultation by the Loyalist paramilitary ceasefire on the thirteenth of October nineteen-ninety-four.

Another major step forward in the peace process occurred with the publication by the Irish and British Governments of the Framework Document on the twenty-second of February nineteen-ninety-five. The document envisaged far-reaching changes in existing structures involving Ireland and Britain, in relationships within the two parts of Ireland and within the North itself.

The process of making Sinn Féin respectable proceeded at a great pace from the IRA ceasefire in nineteen-ninety-four to February nineteen-ninety-six, when the ceasefire was broken by a horrific bomb in Canary Wharf in London. There was hugh commitment and enthusiasm in Ireland among nationalist politicians and diplomats, among the various paramilitary groups and intermediaries and among Irish-Americans and Clinton and his team in USA. However at the same time there was a somewhat begrudging, minimalist and at times, provocatively negative approach on behalf of the Conservative Government in London, and by a weak and vacillating British Prime Minister, who responded to pressures from the Unionists, the military establishment and to persons who, for their own reasons had a vested interest in seeing violence continue. In addition the majority of Unionists, often hand-in-glove with British intelligence personnel, did everything in their power to prevent, undermine and subvert a peace process that they did not want, because it would lead to an upheaval of the Unionist status quo. Heaney's 'Mycenae Outlook' is, in my view, a response to some of the sell-outs, betrayals and human frailties of that time, and also a grim warning that we need to learn from the lessons of history.

This was the background against which Heaney wrote *Seeing Things* and *The Spirit Level.* On a personal level these years were a busy period for Heaney also, although he was still working through the grief of losing his parents. In nineteen-eighty-eight *The Government Of The Tongue*, his second collection of essays, was published by Faber. Also in

so wholeheartedly in *Seeing Things*. It is the exercise of the creative faculty that ensures against undue enslavement to the past or to the actual, however this same freeing faculty may also lead to dream – truths that may be nothing more than illusion.

Heaney returns to the subject of Northern Ireland and to political and historical preoccupations in *The Spirit Level*. His broader political canvas which emerged in *The Haw Lantern* is again apparent in this volume in poems like 'To a Dutch Potter in Ireland', 'After Liberation' and 'A Sofa in the Forties', where he illustrates 'man's inhumanity to man' in other conflicts and at other points in history. The former is dedicated to Sonja Landweer and comments upon the horrific events of World War Two and war-time Holland where she grew up. Heaney makes a stark contrast between his own innocent childhood in nineteen-forties Ireland and Landweer's in nineteen-forties Holland. While Heaney did the 'small forbidden things - / Worked at mud-pies or gone too high on swings', Landweer witnessed the 'terrible event. / Night after night instead, in the Netherlands', and 'watched the bombers kill;' (Heaney. S., *The Spirit Level*, 1996, p. 3). This poem is immediately followed by 'After Liberation', which Heaney dedicated to the Dutch poet J. C. Bloem (1887 – 1966). Here Heaney celebrates Bloem's endurance and survival and, like Holub, his persistent and constant pursuit of the 'fully exposed poem' even through the bleak years of Nazi atrocities.

> 'To have lived it through and now be free to give
> Utterance, body and soul – to wake and know
> Every time that it's gone and gone for good, the thing
> That nearly broke you - '
>
> (Heaney. S., *The Spirit Level*, 1996, p. 4).

These moving lines remind one forcefully of 'the thing that nearly broke' and in some cases did break, so many in the North of Ireland, and their hope that, that too will soon be 'gone and gone for good'. Again 'A Sofa in the Forties' contrasts the innocent childhood of Heaney in Ireland with the reality of what was going on in Nazi Europe, about which he and indeed much of the world were ignorant of at the time. In this poem, a sofa the young Heaney imaginatively transformed into a train, is contrasted with the death trains into which the Jews were herded and packed for transportation and extermination in the concentration camps and gas chambers, 'Ghost-train? Death-gondola?... / We entered

history and ignorance'. (Heaney. S., *The Spirit Level,* 1996, pp. 7 – 8). There is no comparison between what the Jews suffered and what the Irish suffered / suffer but there are some parallels. Another time, another people who suffered horrors and atrocities in a society devoid of justice and humanity, but who as a race survived the dark night of Nazi terrorism, just as the Irish will survive the era of 'neighbourly murders'. (Heaney. S., *North,* 1975, p. 7).

That Heaney has returned robustly to earth is illustrated by two rather chilling encounters in a long, six part poem called 'The Flight Path'. In section four of this poem, the poet recounts a dream encounter and a real encounter with the IRA man Ciaran Nugent. Nugent, as noted earlier in this study, was the first IRA prisoner to be moved into the H-Blocks. In nineteen-seventy-six at the age of nineteen years, he responded to the denial of his political prisoner status, by initiating the 'blanket protest' which led to the 'dirty protest' in Long Kesh prison. Nugent had been sentenced for hijacking a van, which is how the IRA procure the vehicles they use in their campaign of violence. In Heaney's dream encounter Nugent asks him to drive, park and abandon a van, presumably containing a bomb, and then to make his getaway with an old school friend who would be waiting to pick him up and take him 'home ... as safe / As houses'. In the real encounter with Nugent, Heaney is accosted by him on a train to Belfast. Nugent of course wants Heaney to write IRA propaganda, Heaney refuses , and in no uncertain terms.

> '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'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *The Spirit Level,* 1996, p. 25).

'The Flight Path' goes on to describe Nugent's role in the 'dirty 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...'

(Heaney. S., *The Spirit Level,* 1996, p. 25).

Here Heaney refers again to Dante's 'Ugolino' with which he closed *Field Work* in nineteen-seventy-nine. It is only now in *The Spirit Level,* seventeen years on, that Heaney explains the political importance of that poem. With hindsight Heaney's 'Ugolino' was horribly prophetic of the early nineteen-eighties phase of Irish political history, because Nugent's protest eventually led to the nineteen-eighty/eighty-one hunger strikes and the death by hunger of ten men.

Heaney opens section four of 'The Flight Path' with a flat statement of fact, 'The following for the record, in the light / Of everything before and since: / One bright May morning, nineteen-seventy-nine'. (Heaney. S., *The Spirit Level,* 1996, p. 24). The poet makes it quite clear that neither in dream nor in reality has he ever had nor will he ever have, anything to do with the IRA. This at last is a response to his critics 'the anvil brains of some who hate me' as he had called them in 'Exposure' in *North.* (Heaney. S., *North,* 1975, p. 66). These critics, who variously accused him over the years of being too Catholic / Nationalist / Republican in his sentiments, and of not being involved enough in 'the cause'. Heaney may be drawn to comment on the oldest conflict, but he withdraws from propagandist or any other type of involvement in it. Heaney enlarges on his feelings towards the IRA in *Crediting Poetry* where he explains, 'the external reality and inner dynamic of happenings in Northern Ireland between nineteen-sixty-eight and nineteen-seventy-four were symptomatic of change, violent change admittedly, but change nevertheless, and for the minority living there, change had been long overdue ... While the Christian moralist in oneself was impelled to deplore the atrocious nature of the IRA's campaign of bombings and killings, and the "mere Irish" in oneself was appalled by the ruthlessness of the British Army on occasions like Bloody Sunday in Derry in nineteen-seventy-two, the minority citizen in oneself, the one who had grown up conscious that his group was distrusted and discriminated against in all kinds of official and unofficial ways, this citizen's perception was at one with the poetic truth of the situation in recognising

that if life in Northern Ireland were ever really to flourish, change had to take place. But that citizen's perception was also at one with the truth in recognising that the very brutality of the means by which the IRA was pursuing change was destructive of the trust upon which new possibilities would have to be based'. (Heaney. S., *Crediting Poetry*, 1995, pp. 16 – 17). Heaney also explains his duality when he admits in the same piece, '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 becomes, 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 envisage and conduct their lives. But it was only a moment'. (Heaney. S., *Crediting Poetry*, 1995, pp. 18 – 19). This is typical of Heaney's honesty, it goes a long way to explaining the duality which many thinking and peaceful Irish people experience, and again is a response to those critics who were appalled when Heaney in 'Punishment' in *North*, admitted that he would 'connive / in civilized outrage' while at the same time he could understand 'the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 31).

This is an important poem because for the first time in Heaney's work to date there is a direct and real one-to-one encounter between the poet and a member of the IRA. Heaney also makes his stance towards the IRA crystal clear here, there are no ambiguities, the request is made of him and very decidedly refused. The courage of the stand Heaney took should not be underestimated, particularly when one bears in mind the IRA dogma that 'those who are not with us, are against us', and the sort of punishments they mete out to their perceived 'enemies'. Heaney makes it clear here that he is a constitutional nationalist not a militant one. One is prompted to ask why Heaney waited so long to disclose his nineteen-seventy-nine encounter with the IRA man, and why he waited until this time to explain the significance of 'Ugolino' also written in nineteen-seventy-nine? My feeling is that it was because the Northern Ireland of nineteen-ninety-four – nineteen-ninety-six was a very different place to what it had been for a generation before. While Heaney was writing *The Spirit Level*, hope was abroad, a ceasefire was in place and a permanent peace finally seemed to have arrived. He was not to know at the time of writing that the peace would be shattered in February nineteen-ninety-six. If Heaney had

not believed peace to be permanent it is doubtful that he would have written about what occurred in nineteen-seventy-nine. It is for the same reason, I believe, that he felt confident in writing about the bloody betrayals and incomprehensible murders of 'Mycenae Outlook', which has as its plot the cycle of internecine violence.

The long tragic 'Mycenae Outlook' centres on the ten years Trojan war and its aftermath. It is the gruesome story of the inter-familial murders and betrayals of the House of Atreus. Heaney used the Greek drama, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* as his basis for this dark sequence. There are obvious parallels here to the bloody tribal conflict in Northern Ireland and its aftermath. It highlights the irrationality of historical event and justifies Heaney's own comment that 'history is about as instructive as an abattoir'. (Heaney. S., *Crediting Poetry*, 1995, p. 18). Once a conflict has begun it seems fatedly impelled by some unstoppable, irresistible and self-perpetuating momentum on its bloody trail through history. Vendler writes that 'Mycenae Outlook' is the 'emotional centrepiece of *The Spirit Level*' and 'speaks from the impotent position of the ordinary citizen caught in the crossfire of civil atrocity, and it predicts the endemic resurgence of violence in culture, as well as representing culture's reiterated attempts to cleanse itself of that violence'. (Vendler. H., 1998, pp. 156 – 157). Vendler continues that in her opinion the poem was meant to act 'as a summary of Troubles concluded – as representing an Afterwards'. (Vendler. H., 1998, pp. 156 – 157). Heaney suggests an alternative to the relentless cycle of war in this poem;

> 'And then this ladder of our own that ran
> deep into a well-shaft being sunk
> in broad daylight, men puddling at the source
>
> through tawny mud, then coming back up
> deeper in themselves for having been there,
> like discharged soldiers testing the safe ground,
>
> finders, keepers, seers of fresh water
> in the bountiful round mouths of iron pumps
> and gushing taps'.
>
> (Heaney. S., *The Spirit Level*, 1996, p. 37).

Heaney ends this violent sequence with an image of benign water rather than blood, with the hope that we may learn from history and that all the men of action may lay down arms and become men of peace.

There is another level in 'Mycenae Outlook', the parallel between the poet himself and the watch-man, who in Heaney's version has a much larger role than in the original Greek drama. Here again Heaney's concern about the proper role of poetry / poets is the issue, both the watch-man and the poet are observers and witnesses. Corcoran highlights the importance of the Watch-man's role writing that, 'the point is that the figure' of the watch-man, 'posted and forgotten as he may have been by the significant actors in the political drama is taking it all in and now, in the end, articulating it all for everyone's attention:' (Corcoran, N., 1998, p. 191). The watch-man is privy to all sorts of knowledge, the unwilling recipient of confidences and the unwilling observer of atrocities. He is a helpless bystander and witness, yet there is 'no such thing' says the watch-man 'as innocent / bystanding'. (Heaney. S., *The Spirit Level*, 1996, p. 30). Both the watch-man and the poet become burdened by the knowledge they possess, of the atrocities they have witnessed. It is an ever increasing burden and while 'the ox is on' the watch-man's tongue, the poet governs his tongue. (Heaney. S., *The Sprit level*, 1996, p. 29). At the conclusion of the original drama the watch-man says 'I speak to those who know; to those who don't / my mind's a blank. I never say a word'. (Corcoran. N., 1998, p. 200). Heaney's tongue may become 'burdened by the necessity to articulate atrocity' but he will do so in his own inimitable way as he does here, by looking to the examples of the past in the hope that the present perpetrators of violence may finally learn the lessons of humanity's grim history. (Corcoran. N., 1998, p. 201).

The penultimate poem of *The Spirit Level* is 'Tollund', a poem full of hope, relief and optimism, written following the IRA ceasefire of August nineteen-ninety-four. Most Irish men and women remember where they were and what they were doing, when that momentous, historical ceasefire was announced by RTE at eleven-twenty-five a.m., on the thirty-first of August nineteen-ninety-four. Heaney was in Denmark at Tollund visiting, as he had promised he would in nineteen-seventy-two, the site where the body of The Tollund Man, about whom he had written in *Wintering Out*, was found. At the end of 'The Tollund Man', Heaney had felt 'lost / Unhappy and at home' in the 'old man-killing parishes' of Jutland. (Heaney. S., *Wintering Out*, 1972, p.37). Now in 'Tollund', by contrast, the 'Jutland Fields' are 'user-friendly' because 'things had moved on'.

'... It was user-friendly outback
Where we stood footloose, at home beyond the tribe,

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'.
September 1994.

(Heaney. S., *The Spirit Level*, 1996, p. 69).

'Things had moved on' beyond the stalemate and stagnation of twenty-seven years of slaughter and 'neighbourly murders', just as Heaney also had moved on beyond the nets of tribal complexities, he is now 'at home beyond the tribe'. (Heaney. S., *The Spirit Level*, 1996, p. 69). Heaney did not know when he wrote 'Tollund' that the Irish dream was to be brutally interrupted by an IRA bomb in London in February nineteen-ninety-six. He was aware of this of course when the volume went to press, and he held to his conviction that *The Spirit Level* must close with this hopeful poem. That hope and optimism have proved right because the breakdown of the ceasefire was temporary, it was resumed in July nineteen-ninety-seven, along with 'all-party talks' and deals. As Vendler rightly comments 'sporadic breakdowns of the ceasefire do not invalidate the political closure it symbolized'. (Vendler, H., 1998, p. 157). One can but hope that there will be no more broken ceasefires or broken promises. Although 'History says, Don't hope / On this side of the grave', it happens that 'once in a lifetime / The longed-for tidal wave / Of justice can rise up, / And hope and history rhyme'. (Heaney. S., *The Cure at Troy*, 1990, pp. 77 - 78). Real peace is more than the absence of violence, it is the presence of justice. The people of Northern Ireland have tasted the absence of violence, there is now no going back, things must and will move on until the presence of justice is also part of that society.

CONCLUSION

There is a marked shift from *Seeing Things* where Heaney felt that it was 'time to be dazzled', to *The Spirit Level*, where although he encouraged himself to 'walk on air

against your better judgement', he recognised that the walking on air, the visionary, needed to be tempered with the actual. (Heaney. S., *The Sprit Level,* 1996, p. 40). In 'The Gravel Walks', Heaney wanted to establish himself 'somewhere in between' and in *Crediting Poetry,* he explains that he believes that poetry can be 'equal and true' at the same time. It can 'touch the base of our sympathetic nature while taking in at the same time the unsympathetic reality of the world to which that nature is constantly exposed'. (Heaney. S., *Crediting Poetry,* 1995, p. 29). My feeling is that Heaney did not fully trust the weightlessness of the purely visionary sphere of *Seeing Things,* that he felt an unease about what he calls 'the hallucinatory experience', 'the dubiousness of what you're seeing when you're seeing it'. (Malloy, C., 1996, p. 21). Heaney admitted that at a point in the mid to late nineteen-eighties he had felt that there should be 'other things, other than civic affliction and civic suffering in poetry', and he achieved this in *Seeing Things,* which is dominated by the 'other things'. My sense is that while Heaney undoubtedly achieved the well made poem in *Seeing Things,* and that these poems were ends in themselves, the visionary poetry of that volume became too independent of the society which engendered it. I suggest that Heaney, among whose role models are Mandelstam, Herbert, and Holub, felt an anxiety about so total an embrace of 'the other things', as Mandelstam would have done had he succumbed to Stalin's command to write odes to hydro-electric dams, while his people suffered and died under a repressive regime.

Heaney has consistently fretted about the proper role of poetry/ pòets, his ambition is to be creatively free and socially responsible. He achieved the former in *Seeing Things,* but there is a suspicion that he was concerned about a possible lack of the latter. My sense is that Heaney felt that concentration on the purely visionary was not wholly socially responsible, particularly at moments of great historic importance, that he was not fully satisfied that *Seeing Things* was both 'equal and true' at the same time. (Heaney. S., *Crediting Poetry,* 1995, p. 16). Heaney told John Walsh in an interview, that if there is too much 'uplift' in a work, 'it can become an alibi for doing almost anything – that well-intentioned kind of golf-club decency. It's dangerous for a writer to get involved in uplift – though black despair is not a happy alternative either'. (Walsh. J., 1990, pp. 2 - 4). Heaney therefore decided to return to earth in *The Spirit Level,* to return to the circumstances of the North of Ireland and of the world and to articulate once again the concerns and hopes of his community and of himself.

As a child Heaney had entered 'history and ignorance'. Now, as an adult he has full knowledge of past / present atrocities, he is fully aware both historically and politically, with the knowledge gained with age, maturity, history and literature. He knows both as a poet and as a person that he must have 'whole sight; or all the rest is desolation'. (Fowles. J., 1977, p. 3). He also knows that his poetry has been shaped by the remembered experiences of his past both real and imaginary and he therefore refuses to enter 'history and ignorance' again. (Heaney: S., *The Sprit Level,* 1996, p. 8). Heaney learned from *Seeing Things* that the actual can be diminished by too great an embrace of the visionary, just as the visionary can be threatened by too great an involvement with the actual. Freedom is attained through the actual, not evasion of it. Heaney writes in *The Government Of The Tongue*, that poetry 'is more a threshold than a path', occupying 'a space' between the actual, what is happening / 'going to happen', and the ideal, what one 'would wish to happen'. (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. 108). In *The Spirit Level,* the poet finds that threshold, he follows the demands of his own imagination, while at the same time he achieves the balance, the inter-dependency between the actual and the visionary or ideal. He makes 'a space', as he put it in *Crediting Poetry,* 'for the marvellous and the murderous'. (Heaney. S., *Crediting Poetry,* 1995, p. 20). *The Spirit Level* is more hopeful, optimistic and confident than any other work of Heaney's to date. He demonstrates again, that he is not limited to his own historic moment as he paints the broader political and artistic canvas. He is no longer intimidated, challenged, haunted or displaced by the past or by his memories, he is now 'at home beyond the tribe', he has transcended the nets, he has produced a poetry that is both equal and true. Things have 'moved on' both for Heaney and for Ireland. (Heaney. S., *The Spirit Level,* 1996, p. 69).

CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated how the political, religious, social and violent pressures of Ireland affected Heaney and his poetry and led to changes in the poet, his verse and in his perceptions about what the role of the poet and the function of poetry should be in a violent society and towards such social upheaval and political turmoil. The thesis has highlighted how Heaney was forced into becoming a poet of public as well as of private life, by historical and political circumstances from nineteen-sixty-nine onwards. These political, religious and social considerations of Heaney's own historic moment impinged on him and demanded that he engage with them in his work. As the situation in Northern Ireland deteriorated and the violence escalated, Heaney was thrust further into a public role, that he neither wanted nor liked, by his tribe who demanded that he be a spokesman for them. There were further pressures on Heaney from the Irish State, where he had moved in nineteen-seventy-two, which had its own political agenda. The state in the Republic has traditionally expected Irish writers to define exactly where they stand in relation to some or other concept of nationalism and cultural allegiance which is ultimately narrowing and exclusive. Heaney found himself the object of much criticism, as he failed to please both those who felt he was too involved with Northern Ireland, and those who felt he was not involved enough in the conflict. Darcy O'Brien comments that many of those who criticised Heaney were the 'politically correct persons in Irish-Catholic-Nationalist terms' and included 'IRA members and sympathisers, certain politicians, members of the clergy and academics – who publicly condemned sectarian and political murder but were quietly in favour of it. Subtly in print, more viciously in whispers' (Malloy. C., and Carey. P., 1996, p. 175). All of this fed the duality and guilt Heaney felt, which the pressures of Ireland had occasioned in him as they forced him to confront, the conflict between Art and Life/politics, between the essentially passive role of the poet / poetry and the active role of those who became engaged in the times. Heaney does not have a narrow political agenda that he wishes voiced through is poetry; he wishes to avoid monologic, exclusionary and restrictive discourses and avoid poetry that would recapitulate well established political agendas which feed the cycle of violence. The thesis illustrated how his battle to do this is clearly reflected throughout his work as he struggled to handle the dilemma of an artist in a tumultuous society. Heaney's poetry finds cultural stability in the development of the historical awareness that Paulin sees as comprising the vast territories of political poetry.

From his early days as a civil rights activist, Heaney had been acutely anxious about what the proper role of the poet should be, and the thesis has highlighted how Heaney, his work, and his views on the role and responsibility of the poet, and the proper function of poetry, changed over time as he investigated the relation between the political conscience and the artistic imperative in the reality of life in a troubled society. The thesis has considered how Heaney moved away from the easy sympathy and concordant hope engendered in the early poetry of the first phase of his career prior to the outbreak of the Troubles in nineteen-sixty-nine. The poetry of his first two volumes *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*, emphasised the more personal, domestic concerns of the poet, his Mossbawn home, family, country – life, with some trenchant comments and criticism on the condition of Irish women who are both invisible and voiceless within the warped culture of home. The thesis argued that these volumes also saw Heaney's first foray into his national past, in which he began to investigate aspects of his own and Ireland's inheritance. This scrutiny encompassed all the elements of his historical, colonial, linguistic, political, religious, social, ideological and sectarian heritage. During this investigation Heaney's political and artistic consciousness gestated and he became aware that the antagonistic tribes, cultures and perspectives with their attendant violence in Northern Ireland, were a cogent subject for his poetry. The thesis has shown that during this early period of his career Heaney believed that the role of the poet was to concentrate on the 'unregarded data of the usual life' and the function of poetry was to 'achieve the satisfactory verbal icon' (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. 8). (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 56).

This all changed in nineteen-sixty-nine when the tribes clashed violently on the streets of Northern Ireland, and Heaney was faced with the chaotic arena of contemporary culture and the extreme exactions of random killings. The role of the poet then changed to encompass both the 'political and the transcendent' and the function of poetry changed to become 'a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament', and to finding a 'field of force in which, without abandoning fidelity to the processes and experience of poetry ... it would be possible 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'. (Heaney. S., *Preoccupations*, 1980, pp. 56 – 57). Heaney was influenced by Dante during the second phase of his career from the late nineteen-sixties to the mid nineteen-eighties. He admired the way Dante could 'place himself in a historical world yet submit that world to scrutiny from a perspective beyond history, the way he

could accommodate the political and the transcendent ...' (Heaney. S., *Envies and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet,* 1985, p. 12). The problem for Heaney then became how to portray the conflict of his society in his work and how to adjudicate between the claims of his art and the demands of his community. I believe that the artist has a responsibility to the society in which he lives, and in addition ,the artist's work if he is to be true to himself must reflect that society. If there is a conflict in the society the artist is not absolved from portraying that conflict in his work, in fact it is all the more imperative that he do so and do so truthfully and objectively. It is against this context of the violence in Northern Ireland that Heaney and his poetry must be read from nineteen-sixty-nine onwards. The thesis has illustrated that in the volumes produced during this second phase of Heaney's career, the poet struggled to chart a course between his country's abiding demands and lyrical freedom, and to avoid the pressures to take a side. In most of *Wintering Out,* Heaney managed to achieve this balance. However, the demands of such adjudicating took their toll and in *North*, Heaney was overcome by the pressures of Ireland in a poetry that is at times ambivalent and ambiguous, and at other times tribal and restrictive, and where the poet's anger, guilt and duality are clearly apparent. The emotions registered in *North* reflect the emotions of the Catholic population of Northern Ireland in the nineteen-seventies, and their world which was continually subject to violation and atrocities. These volumes emphasised the public sphere and examined aspects of Ireland's traumatic past and present. They focused on territorial and linguistic colonisation, the subjugation of the Irish people, and the injustices they suffered at the hands of their British conquerors. Heaney drew parallels between the ritual killings of the past both in Ireland and in other violent cultures, and the contemporary victims of sectarian violence. The volumes emphasised how the senselessness of contemporary sectarian cruelty, inflicted in the name of the community, drained that community of all feeling and led to an ongoing cycle of violent, tribal retribution. These volumes also commented on Heaney's own personal and negative experiences of the Irish Church and State both as a child and as an adult. In addition they highlighted again how the unfreedom of Irish society, influenced by the ultra-conservatism of the Irish Catholic Church, blighted the lives of many Irish women who were often forced into inhumane practices to hide what was perceived of as socially unacceptable behaviour. The thesis has argued that these volumes were Heaney's complex response to contemporary Northern Ireland and highlighted the rival claims of art and action, of poetry and political accountability in a violent society.

Heaney's various audiences were united and vociferous in their condemnation of *North,* and in their horror at the mutilated, murdered bodies of the volume. They were most upset however by Heaney when he admitted in 'Punishment' to both connivance 'in civilized outrage' and at the same time an understanding of the 'exact / and tribal, intimate revenge'. (Heaney. S., *North,* 1975, p. 31). Heaney explained this duality of feeling in nineteen-ninety-five, as a conflict between the 'Christian moralist' in himself which deplored the 'atrocious nature of the IRA's campaign of bombings and killings' and the 'mere Irish' in himself which was 'appalled by the ruthlessness of the British Army' and the 'minority citizen' in himself that realised that 'change had to take place' but by peaceful, constitutional means. (Heaney. S., *Crediting Poetry,* 1995, p. 16- -17). The thesis has argued that *North* was born of the struggles which define Heaney's country and that Heaney underwent uneases about that volume after which he became increasingly concerned to analyse the problem of social responsibility. The study has highlighted how, after *North,* Heaney moved away from the 'mere Irish' sentiments that were uppermost in that volume. In *Field Work,* although the battle between embracing poetic responsibility or accomplishing the tribal duty of political commitment still raged, and although, some parts of *Field Work,* especially 'After a Killing', still reflected the ambivalence and narrow tribal attitude of the previous volume, Heaney did achieve a shift towards the pole of social responsibility in *Field Work.*

The thesis has argued that the third and current phase of Heaney's career, from the mid nineteen-eighties to the present, witnessed another change in the poet and his work. In the volumes published in the early part of this period, Heaney was in a despondent and critically self-reflective mood. During that period he continued to ponder how a 'lifetime's cloistered devotion to the composition of verses' could justify itself in the face of dire political and social exigency. (Burris. S, 1990, p.145). The thesis illustrated that in the 'Station Island' sequence Heaney returned to reconsider the larger political, religious, social and cultural meditations. He critically re-examined and re-evaluated his various inheritances and was clearly disillusioned with them, and in particular with the Irish Roman Catholic Church, which did not allow any freedom of thought or action, and which had failed the Irish people by it's lack of effective leadership. The thesis suggested that Heaney was so disenchanted with Irish Roman Catholicism that he appeared ready to renounce his faith. The frustration, doubt and guilt registered in various sections of the 'Station Island' sequence reflected the frustrations, doubts and guilts of the Catholic population in Northern Ireland in the early nineteen eighties when these poems were

written, and when the effects of the hunger strikes were most pervasive and had polarised Ireland. By the mid nineteen-eighties however, Heaney had reached a resolution about some of the conundrums plaguing his life and his poetry. Heaney realised and accepted that he had to escape from the pressures and influences of Ireland if he was to retain his integrity as a writer. Unlike Joyce, who exiled himself in Paris, Heaney instead remained in Ireland and attempted to transcend those pressures. He realised that poetry has its limitations, 'no lyric has ever stopped a tank', and that poets were not 'about to set times wrong or right'. (Heaney. S., *The Government Of The Tongue*, 1988, p. 107). (Heaney. S., *Station Island*, 1984, p. 20). He accepted that the transcendence offered by poetry is tentative but he still believed in the efficacy of poetry. The poet's role was to be 'equal and true' to the reality of the political and social world in which the poem was composed, to the poet and to art. The function of poetry changed to being a 'source of truth and at the same time a vehicle of harmony'. (Heaney. S., *The Redress of Poetry*, 1995, p. 193).

Heaney continued his critical analysis of himself and of his country, and for the first time in *The Haw Lantern* he achieved a distance and an objectivity. He used parable to illustrate how the Northern Ireland conflict affected the people of that blighted province. He was clearly disenchanted by and frustrated with the absolutist and anachronistic beliefs of his tribe and with their exclusivist and paranoid views. He exposed and criticised the empty rhetoric of the politicians and the 'harmful propaganda' and exaggerated journalese 'of the mass media', and he articulated the ambiguous position of writers in Northern Ireland. (Chomsky. N., 1988, p. 204). The thesis has outlined Heaney's second thoughts about the values and culture of home during this period and highlighted how he transcended the parochial squabbles of Northern Ireland, and broadened his political scope by considering Northern Ireland in the context of other areas in the world where conflicts rage. Heaney continued to distance himself from the pressures of Ireland throughout the late nineteen-eighties as the stalemate, stagnation and violence of the rotten society of Northern Ireland continued. The thesis has argued however, that in *Seeing Things*, the volume Heaney published in the early nineteen-nineties, he absconded from the reality of the political and social world into the purely visionary realm. This caused him further uneases about the way a poet should conduct himself at times of public crisis. Heaney realised that for the artist the dangers of self-indulgence continually threaten the integrity of the individual vision that would remain responsible to the culture that nourished it. The nineteen-nineties in Northern Ireland have been characterised by change as the tribes have begun to move away from the stasis

of the last quarter century towards a resolution of the ancient conflict. They have worked towards a peaceful settlement that would allow them to co-exist in harmony. Heaney was influenced by that change and that hope in Northern Ireland and in his latest volume *The Spirit Level*, he returned firmly to the issues of his native territory.

The thesis has highlighted how in this volume he clarified his position in relation to the IRA and went some way to answering his various critics of the past thirty years. Heaney further clarified this position in his latest prose volume when he explained 'the bind' he had found himself in over the years of conflict in Northern Ireland. 'The bind in which I found myself mirrored exactly the classic bind of all Northern Ireland's constitutional nationalists. Constitutional nationalists find themselves constantly wrong-footed or are forced to wrong-foot themselves because of a conflict between on the one hand their commitments to cultural and political ideals which are fundamentally Ireland - centred ... and on the other hand their disavowal of support for the violent means of the Irish Republican Army, an army which operates with pre-emptive and atrocious force in order to further similar cultural and political ideals' (Heaney. S., *The Redress of Poetry*, 1995, p. 188). Heaney also in his latest volume issued a warning to the tribes of Northern Ireland to learn the lessons that the bloody conflicts of history teach us, and he has celebrated those tribes for allowing things to move on. The thesis has further argued, that Heaney finally achieved his ambition of being both artistically free and socially responsible in his latest poetry, which is simultaneously 'equal and true' to the reality of the violently shattered society which nourished it and to the vision of the new possibilities emerging there for its people to accept their rich diversities and to live in peace and harmony with each other.

My purpose in this thesis has been to elucidate how the political, religious and social pressures of Ireland including the violence and atrocities in the North affected Heaney and how his verse responded to the complexities of his homeland. There was no 'escape from the massacre' of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland for Heaney as he struggled with the times and weighed his 'responsible *tristia*'. (Heaney. S., *North*, 1975, p. 66 – 67). When violence and crisis reign in the public domain the demands made on every writer are heightened and make urgent a lot of questions. How does a writer address the problems of a country whose political and cultural fissures have resulted in an apparently endless cycle of distrust, oppression and violence? Molino writes that 'creating a form of poetry commensurate with times of strident political turmoil is perhaps the greatest

challenge a poet can face'. (Molino. R., 1994, p. 153). It is the responsibility of the ethical writer to produce work that responds to the political issues of the day without sacrificing its aesthetic integrity and to attempt, as Heaney has done, to develop an untrammelled voice that will assert the primary of art's larger social responsibilities. Violent times do demand a poetry proportionate to their social and political upheaval but the overtly political or propagandist poem is not the answer. The answer is to avoid the trap of recapitulating the established political discourses in Northern Ireland. Heaney has avoided the trap by focusing on the various traditions in Ireland and how those traditions calcify into exclusivity, ideology, sectarianism, repression and violence; and, in turn, how those influences might be combated in order to forge an alternative path that would give Northern Ireland rational and coherent form. Heaney has held 'together in fragile unity two opposing positions, the right of poetry to an aesthetic autonomy; and the necessity of subordinating poetry to political or moral constraints'. (Murphy. A., 1996, pp. 5 – 6). After twenty five years and more of debilitating tribal warfare, Heaney suggests to the majority in Northern Ireland that they should 'make an ... effort at two-mindedness, and start to conceive of themselves within – rather than beyond – the Irish element'. He affirms that it is possible 'to reconcile the two orders' in Northern Ireland and that the 'frontier between them is there for the crossing'. (Heaney. S., *The Redress of Poetry*, 1995, pp. 202 – 203). Heaney's poetry does not simply register the voice of a single poet, but the ruminations and aspirations of an entire community.

APPENDIX

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS AND BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE

1939:	Seamus Justin Heaney was born on the thirteenth of April nineteen-thirty-nine, at Mossbawn near Castledawson, County Derry, Northern Ireland, to Patrick and Margaret Heaney; eldest of nine children, six brothers and two sisters.
1945 – 51:	Attended the local primary school at Anahorish, which catered for both Catholic and Protestant children, a mingling rarely found in Northern Ireland with its predominantly sectarian schooling.
1947:	'Northern Ireland Education Act' benefited the children of less-well-off families by making extended education more accessible to them. In Northern Ireland, specifically, it opened up educational opportunities for Catholics.
1951 – 57:	Boarder at St. Columb's College, Derry. Scholarship student. Among the other graduates of St. Columb's were the poet Seamus Deane, the playwright Brian Friel, and the Nationalist politician John Hume.
1953:	Family moved from Heaney's childhood home and birthplace Mossbawn, to 'The Wood', a farm at the far end of the parish, which Heaney's father had inherited from an uncle. Heaney's four year old brother, Christopher was killed in a car accident.
1957 – 61:	Attended Queen's University, Belfast. Received first class honours degree in English Language and Literature. Member of the University Gaelic Society and also of a local dramatic society. 'Féar a tigh' at the local céilidhe; wrote and published poems in undergraduate literary magazines. Offered a scholarship at Oxford University, but decided to become a school teacher instead.

1961 – 62:	Took Post Graduate teacher's training diploma at St. Joseph's College of Education, Andersontown, Belfast. Encountered the work of local poets such as John Hewitt.
1962:	Taught at St. Thomas's secondary school, Ballymurphy, Belfast. Michael McLaverty, the headmaster and short story writer, introduced him to the work of the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh.
1962 – 63:	Part-time graduate work at Queen's University, Belfast. 'Turkeys observed' published in *Belfast Telegraph*, 'Mid-Term Break' in *Kilkenny Magazine* and 'Advancement of Learning' in *The Irish Times.*
1963 – 66:	Lecturer in English at St. Joseph's College of Education.
1963:	Philip Hobsbaum established Belfast Group, a poetry workshop including Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, James Simmons and Stewart Parker.
January 1964:	The Campaign for Social Justice established in Dungannon by Dr. Con and Patricia McCluskey to collect data on discrimination and gerrymandering.
27 September – 3 October 1964:	Paisley's protest against flying of Tricolour lead to first riots of contemporary Troubles.
1965:	Belfast Festival brought Heaney exposure in *The Observer*; published 'Eleven Poems' Pamphlet, in connection with festival. Married Marie Devlin in August. Like Heaney, Marie Devlin was a beneficiary of the 1947 Education Act, and had studied English, speech and drama at a Teacher Training College, St. Mary's, Belfast, from nineteen-fifty-eight – nineteen-sixty-two. Until the late nineteen-sixties she taught at St. Columcille's at Crossgar, County Down.

14 January 1965:	Republic's Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, met Captain Terence O'Neill, six county Prime Minister, at first such meeting of Prime Ministers from both states.
February – June 1965:	First petrol bomb attacks on Catholics and assassination attempts by UVF. These caused fatalities in May and June, leading to the arrest of prominent UVF men, and banning of the organisation.
1966:	*Death of a Naturalist* published by Faber and Faber in May, won Geoffrey Faber Prize, Gregory Award for young writers and Somerset Maugham Award. Philip Hobsbaum moved to Glasgow. Belfast Group continued to meet at Heaney's and included younger members such as Michael Foley, Paul Muldoon and Frank Ormsby. Heaney joined Queen's Faculty. Son Michael born in July.
1966 – 70:	Lecturer in English (modern literature) at Queen's University, Belfast. Began contributing to BBC education broadcasts, radio and television with friend David Hammond. In London objections were made about the number of regional accents and Irish references in the programme, they became increasingly popular however with teachers and pupils, because they dealt with powerful themes and did not talk down to their listeners.
29 January 1967:	Foundation of Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association from ranks of groups such as the Republican Wolfe Tone Society and the Campaign for Social Justice.
1968:	Second son Christopher born in February.
1968 – 69:	Repression of Civil Rights Movement prompted a renewal of conflict in Northern Ireland and a lurch towards de-stabilisation of the statelet.

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1969:	*Door into the Dark* published by Faber and Faber in June, it became Poetry Book Society choice. Heaney discovered P.V. Glob's book *The Bog People.*
1 – 5 January 1969:	Loyalists continuously attacked People's Democracy march from Belfast to Derry, most notably at 'Burntollet ambush' on 4 January.
28 March, 23 April 1969:	First bombings of the period, Loyalists destroyed an electricity transformer and sabotaged Belfast's water supply. Explosions led to resignation of six county Premier, Captain Terence O'Neill.
August 1969:	Fierce rioting in Derry (the Battle of the Bogside), and in Belfast led to British troops being deployed on streets of Six Counties on 14 August 1969.
October 1969:	Loyalist rioters on Shankill Road, Belfast, killed, first policeman to die in Troubles, Constable Arbuckle. The riots were sparked off by the publication the previous day of The Hunt Report, calling for the disarming of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the disbandment of the Protestant militia, the 'B' Specials.
1970 – 71:	Guest lecturer, University of California, Berkeley; met Tom Flanagan (*The Year of the French*) and Conor Cruise O'Brien.
January 1970:	Sinn Féin Ard Fheis saw the party split into 'Official' and 'Provisional' wings, leading to foundation of Provisional IRA.
August 1970:	Foundation of the Socialist Democratic Party led by Gerry Fitt.
August 1971:	Internment without trial introduced in Northern Ireland. 1,576 people imprisoned by the end of the year.

September 1971:	Heaney returned to Northern Ireland; wrote of tension in Ulster at Christmas in *The Listener*.
October 1971:	Formulation of the Democratic Unionist Party, led by the Reverend Ian Paisley.
November 1971:	Harold Wilson, leader of the British Labour Party, presented a plan for the transition to a United Ireland.
January 1972:	Sunday the thirtieth of January, 'Bloody Sunday': during an illegal parade in Derry, organised by the Civil Rights Association, British paratroopers opened fire on the unarmed demonstrators, killing thirteen civilians and wounding twelve others. Seven of the victims were under nineteen years of age.
March 1972:	The British Government *announced direct rule over Northern* Ireland and discontinued Stormont.
7 July 1972:	Secret meeting in London between leaders of Provisional IRA and William Whitelaw, Northern Ireland Secretary.
21 July 1972:	Bloody Friday, eleven killed in Belfast IRA bomb blitz.
30 October 1972:	Document on Northern Ireland's future recognising its 'Irish dimension' and constitutional rights was published by the British Government. Heaney resigned his post at Queen's and moved to Glanmore, in County Wicklow, the Republic of Ireland, to work as a full-time freelance writer, in August *Wintering Out* published by Faber and Faber. In November engaged on translation of Middle Irish romance 'Builé Shuibhne'. Met Robert Lowell, the American Poet.
1973:	Received Dennis Devlin Award and Writer in Residence Award from the American-Irish Foundation. Fulfilled promise made in 'The Tollund Man' and visited Aarhus, Denmark, to see the Bog people. Daughter Catherine Ann, born in April.

21 November 1973:	Consensus on the establishment of a Power Sharing Executive.
9 December 1973:	Sunningdale Conference proposed a Council of Ireland.
1973 – 75:	Heaney read widely in Osip Mandelstam, Yeats, and Dante.
28 May 1974:	Strike by Loyalist Ulster Council brought down the Power Sharing Executive.
20 December 1974:	Ten day ceasefire announced by the Provisional IRA.
8 May 1975:	The Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention held its inaugural meeting.
1973 – 77:	Heaney hosted 'Imprint' on Radio Eireann bi-weekly, later weekly.
1975:	*North*, published by Faber and Faber. Received WH Smith Award and Duff Cooper Memorial Prize. Began teaching at Carysfort, Teachers Training College, Dublin.
1976:	Moved to Sandymount, Dublin. Named Department Head in English at Carysfort.
12 August 1976:	Women's Peace Movement established. This later became the 'Peace People'.
18 January 1978:	British interrogation methods used on internees in nineteen-seventy-one were judged to be 'inhuman and degrading' by the European Court of Human Rights.
1979:	*Field Work* published by Faber and Faber. Spent a term at Harvard University as one of a series of temporary successors to Robert Lowell.
3 May 1979:	Margaret Thatcher led the Conservatives to win the British General Election.

25 October 1979:	Ulster Unionists rejected Northern Ireland Secretary Humphrey Atkins' invitation to four main Northern political parties to talks on political solution to Northern Ireland.
28 November 1979:	John Hume took over as leader of the Socialist Democratic Party.
1980:	*Selected Poems*, published. *Preoccupations*, Heaney's first collection of essays, published by Faber and Faber.
8 December 1980:	Charles Haughey, the Irish Premier and Margaret Thatcher agreed to joint Anglo-Irish studies.
1980 – 81:	Nationalist Prisoners in the H-Blocks at Long Kesh (The Maze prison) in Northern Ireland staged a series of hunger strikes, seeking the reintroduction of political status as opposed to criminal status. In the battle of wills that ensured, ten Republican prisoners perished, but support for their cause on the island soared to its highest pitch since Bloody Sunday.
1981:	Heaney resigned post at Carysfort; accepted post as Visiting Professor at Harvard.
6 November 1981:	The Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council was set up by Garret FitzGerald (Irish Premier) and Margaret Thatcher.
January 1982:	Heaney started a five year contract at Harvard to teach one semester a year. Edited *The Rattle Bay* with Ted Hughes, a poetry anthology for older children. Received honorary D. Litt., Queen's University, Belfast.
20 October 1982:	Sinn Féin won 10.1% of the vote in election for the new Northern Ireland Assembly.
11 November 1982:	The Northern Ireland Assembly was opened at Stormont and was boycotted by the SDLP and Sinn Féin.

1983:	Published *Sweeney Astray*, translation of Builé Shuibhne. Co-founded Field Day Publishing with Brian Friel, Tom Paulin, and others. *An Open Letter*, published as a pamphlet by Field Day in Ireland. The verse letter objected to Heaney's work being included in an anthology of British poetry.
9 June 1983:	Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Féin won West Belfast House of Commons seat.
1984:	*Station Island*, published by Faber and Faber. *Sweeney Astray*, published in Britain. Open University awarded Heaney honorary degree. Elected Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, Harvard. Mother, Margaret Heaney died.
1984 – 87:	Divided time between Harvard, teaching one semester per year, and Sandymount.
2 May 1984:	Three options suggested by the New Ireland Forum Report. As possible solutions were a Unitary State, a Federal Ireland and Joint Authority.
18 June 1984:	Ian Paisley won European Election with 230,000 votes topping the Northern Ireland poll.
12 October 1984:	The IRA attempted to kill Margaret Thatcher and Cabinet Ministers by planting a bomb at the Conservative Conference in Brighton.
19 November 1984:	Margaret Thatcher denounced the options forwarded by the New Ireland Forum Report as 'Out, out, out'.
15 November 1985:	The Hillsborough Agreement was signed by Garret FitzGerald and Margaret Thatcher
1986:	Heaney's father, Patrick Heaney died.
3 March 1986:	Unionists strike against the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

1983:	Published *Sweeney Astray*, translation of Builé Shuibhne. Co-founded Field Day Publishing with Brian Friel, Tom Paulin, and others. *An Open Letter*, published as a pamphlet by Field Day in Ireland. The verse letter objected to Heaney's work being included in an anthology of British poetry.
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2 November 1986:	Following a vote at Sin Féin Ard Fheis permitting successful candidates in future Dàil elections to take their seats Ruairi O'Bradaigh staged a walk-out and established Republican Sinn Féin.
1987:	*The Haw Lantern*, published in May by Faber and Faber.
8 November 1987:	IRA bomb killed eleven people at the Enniskillen Remembrance Day Ceremony.
1988:	*Government Of The Tongue*, his second collection of essays, published by Faber and Faber.
21 September 1988:	British Labour Party paper suggested co-ordinated policies on matters of security and economy as steps towards a United Ireland by consent.
1989:	*The Place of Writing* (Richard Ellmann Lectures), published by Faber and Faber.
1989 – 94:	Heaney was Professor of Poetry at Oxford University.
24 July 1989:	Peter Brooke was appointed Northern Ireland Secretary.
3 November 1989:	Peter Brooke said that if violence were ended he would see his way to talk with Sinn Féin. He also stated that the IRA could not be defeated militarily.
9 November 1990:	Peter Brooke stated that Britain had no selfish economic or strategic interest in Northern Ireland and would accept unification by consent of the majority.
23 December 1990:	IRA publicly declared Christmas ceasefire, first such declaration in fifteen years.
1990:	*The Cure at Troy*, Heaney's version of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, performed in Derry and published in London by Faber and Faber. *New Selected Poems* published by Faber and Faber.

1991:	*Seeing Things*, published by Faber and Faber.
17 April 1991:	Inter-party talks commenced at Stormont and continued until 3 July. Ulster Unionist Party, Democratic Unionist Party, SDLP, and the Alliance Party were involved.
22 April 1991:	Loyalist paramilitaries declared a ceasefire for the duration of the inter-party talks.
10 April 1992:	Conservatives win the British General Election. Joe Hendron of the SDLP defeated Gerry Adams in West Belfast.
11 April 1992:	Sir Patrick Mayhew replaced Peter Brooke as Northern Ireland Secretary.
29 April 1992	Inter-party discussions recommenced at Stormont.
10 November 1992:	Inter-party talks collapsed following the withdrawal of the Unionists from negotiations.
16 December 1992:	Sir Patrick Mayhew said that if Sinn Féin renounced violence 'for real', they could be included in political dialogue and that the British Government would not put obstacles in the way of a United Ireland if the Unionists were agreeable.
24 April 1993:	John Hume and Gerry Adams issued a joint statement asserting the right of all Irish people to 'national self-determination'. The statement rejected an internal settlement in the North.
23 July 1993:	John Major denied that the British Government made a deal with the Ulster Unionist Party in return for support in the Commons vote on the Maastricht Treaty.
15 December 1993:	Taoiseach Albert Reynolds and Prime Minister John Major published the Downing Street Declaration.

3 January 1994:	Sir Patrick Mayhew said that troop levels in Northern Ireland would be reviewed if there was a cessation of violence and that the British Government would not become 'persuaders' for a United Ireland.
31 August 1994:	The IRA announced 'a complete cessation of military operations', effective from midnight.
13 October 1994:	The combined Loyalist Military Command (UDA, UVF and the Red Hand Commandos) declared a ceasefire, the permanence of which would depend on 'the continued cessation of all Nationalist / Republican violence'.
22 February 1995:	Framework Document published by Dublin and London Governments.
14 March 1995:	Britain announced 400 soldiers would be withdrawn from the streets of Northern Ireland.
12 April 1995:	450 UK troops withdrawn from Northern Ireland.
1995:	*The Redress of Poetry*, Heaney's third collection of essays published by Faber and Faber. Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in October.
12 July 1995:	Drumcree One stand-off by Orangemen. Three day stand-off by Orangemen followed by Orange march down Garvaghy Road.
1996:	*The Spirit Level*, published by Faber and Faber.
February 1996:	Breakdown of IRA ceasefire with bomb in London's Docklands.
15 June 1996:	IRA bomb at Manchester's Arndale Shopping Centre.

12 July 1996:	Drumcree Two stand-off. UK Government U-turn, allowed Orangemen to march down the Catholic Garvaghy Road, against the wishes of its Catholic residents; after a stand-off by Orangemen of some days at Portadown.
1997:	*The Spirit Level* named Whitbread 'Book of the Year'.
July 1997:	Renewed IRA ceasefire in Northern Ireland after Labour victory in Britain in May 1997.
1998:	*Opened Ground: Poems. 1966 – 1996*, published by Faber and Faber.
10 April 1998:	Good Friday Agreement signed by all parties in Belfast.
25 June 1998:	New 108 member Assembly in Belfast elected to form the basis of the new Government of Northern Ireland.
May 1999:	Ongoing negotiations and disagreements regarding IRA decommissioning.

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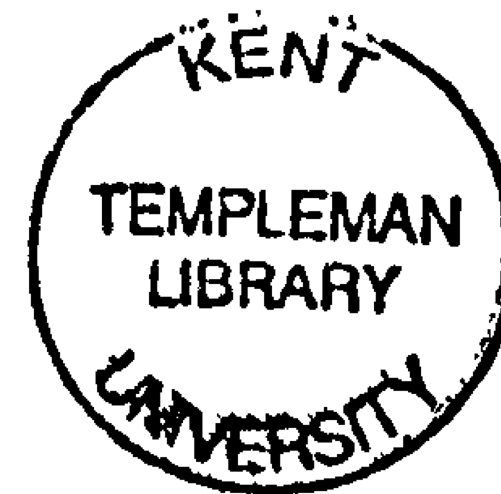

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