

The Development of the Poetry of Seamus Heaney  
From Death of a Naturalist to North

by

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## Abstract

Seamus Heaney's poetic development is examined through a series of close readings of selected poems from his first four volumes. The main focus of the dissertation is on the stages through which he passes in his attempt to develop a poetic mode which is simultaneously responsive to the preoccupations of the private self and to the wider political and cultural backdrop of Northern Ireland.

Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark are examined in terms of the relation between poetic technique and historical situation. Correlatives of limitation characterise nearly all aspects of Heaney's poetic technique in the first volume. These are enumerated and examined. Enclosures at a conceptual rather than technical level are found to characterise Door into the Dark. The mode used threatens to become a form of self-enclosure, hermetically sealed off from the conditions of its production.

At the root of the various forms of closure is Heaney's need to exclude certain material from consideration. History and the politics of contemporary Northern Ireland are the most notable phenomena excluded. The poet's inability to control certain intractable potentialities latent in his subject matter is examined in poems which deal with violence, history, the unknown and landscape. These poems, generally considered failures by critics, are shown to facilitate Heaney's poetic development.

In an investigation of two sets of landscape poems in Door into the Dark, those which treat landscape as a surface phenomenon, and those which see it masking depths which Heaney

has constituted as realms of significance, I examine the means whereby he begins to move toward "the matter of Ireland" through his contemplation of landscape as the memory-bank of Ireland's history.

In Wintering Out Heaney develops an elaborate set of conceits in which he collapses the distinctions between various parts of his poetic terrain (landscape, language, the body, sexuality, violence, etc.). He blurs the distinctions between the self and an external environment which absorbs and preserves its history. The aim of these strategies is to enable him to generate a speech which is simultaneously both personal and socially symbolic. The complexity and ingenuity of the strategy is investigated and the reasons for its failure outlined.

Heaney's estrangement, and his relations to his varied linguistic, literary and political traditions are also surveyed.

The dialectical tension between the poet's contradictory needs to engage with politics and to remain detached from them is then examined. Among the topics in North which are considered are the bipartite structure of the volume, Heaney's use and eventual rejection of myth, the narrativization of part I, and the problems facing a poetry which takes violence as its subject. The poet's self-consciousness and his reflexive concern with his own poetry are found to be features which contribute to the success of the volume.

The dissertation concludes with a consideration of how Heaney manages paradoxically to turn a failure--his failure to produce a politically efficacious speech--into a form of poetic success by making that failure his subject.

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## Introduction.

This dissertation deals with the poetic development of Seamus Heaney during the decade which saw the publication of four volumes: Death of a Naturalist (1966), Door into the Dark (1969), Wintering Out (1972), and North (1975). I do not pay detailed attention to the remainder of Heaney's poetic output: neither to the early Stations (1975), nor to the later Field Work (1979) and Station Island (1984). Although the later volumes contain substantial and important poetry Heaney's early work warrants critical attention for a number of reasons.

In the first place the four collections with which I deal form a unit. "I'm certain that up to North, that that's one book; in a way it grows together and goes together," says Heaney ("Meeting Seamus Heaney" 15-16). In 1980 he had his Selected Poems published. A year earlier he had said:

I was to do a Selected Poems last year, and I hesitated and didn't do it for two reasons: one, that I think the publication of a Selected Poems isn't just a publishing convenience, and I still have this notion that it's a declaration of a certain stage of artistic command; in a sense, you crown yourself when you're ready and I didn't think I was ready to crown myself ("Meeting Seamus Heaney" 15).

Significantly, when he was ready he crowned himself and declared his artistic command with work from only the first four volumes.

The first volumes form part of a single enterprise. They enact what Heaney calls his "finding a voice" (Preoccu-

[T]he shift from North to Field Work is a shift in trust: a learning to trust melody, to trust art as reality, to trust artfulness as an affirmation and not to go into the self-punishment so much.

("Artists on Art" 412)

These statements tell us something about the differences between the early poetry and the later. The confidence and trust in his own poetic powers that characterise the poetry after North are not features of the first volumes. More noticeable, in fact, are his mistrust of the efficacy of his poetry in the peculiar conditions of its production, and his reservations and hesitations concerning his very ability to produce poems "that give me any right to speak: poetry as divination, poetry as revelation of the self to the self, as restoration of the culture to itself; poems as elements of continuity . . ."  
(Preoccupations 41).

I will contend that Heaney's early poetry develops along a path that can be outlined in the following way. He begins by writing poems that derive their material from memory, childhood and the farm on which he grew up. The insularity in which this results is one manifestation of a general need to write a poetry that is contained--that excludes forces threatening to break in upon it. Primary amongst these are the forces of history and politics, which Heaney comes to see as permanent presences in the land. A shift occurs when he moves towards an acknowledgement of these presences by allowing them into his poetry. He does this by dismantling the closural elements of his early verse, by deconstituting the stable self at the centre of poems, and by radically exten-

ding his range of subject-matter, techniques and attitudes. Eventually, by an act of "surrender" he allows the self to become a vehicle for the expression of meanings held to be latent in the landscape: in his terminology, he surrenders his "imagination to something as embracing as myth or landscape." The primary tension in the poetry--which generates the development--is a tension between his implicit acknowledgment that he has to take into account developments in the public realm (the Ulster situation making this a particularly pressing concern) and a desire to escape any such obligation.

By the end of North Heaney has performed an entire cycle. He acknowledges that his attempt to speak the reality of the historical landscape of Ireland and of its community through myth is only partly successful. The needs and desires he expresses in the statements I have quoted are perhaps consequences of this development. Field Work is in many respects the result of a need to change direction. In the voice of the "first person singular [that] means me and my lifetime" he produces many of his finest poems, several of which deal with the public realm towards which he moves increasingly in the earlier volumes. The approach is, however, a different one; it is part of the story of Heaney's poetic maturity. My subject is the development of the poetry prior to that break.

I base my analysis of Heaney's early poetry on a sequence of close readings of individual poems. Such a procedure gives Heaney's technical competence the attention it deserves. In his introduction to his monograph on the poet, Blake Morrison observes that "[Heaney] has a safe reputation but also a reputation for safety" and defends him against Al Alvarez's claims that his poetry "'works comfortably in a recognizable tra-

dition,' 'challenges no presuppositions,' 'does not advance into unknown territory'" (Seamus Heaney 12; see Alvarez 16-17). Heaney's use of traditional forms reveals far more than a simple adherence to the Yeatsian notion that "ancient salt is best packing." My analysis rests on the assumption that a relation exists between the poet's historical situation and the forms he chooses to use. A close reading of the poems allows one to follow the subtle formal and technical modifications that attend Heaney's shifting responses to a volatile historical situation.

Each of Heaney's volumes is, in important respects, an advance over the volumes which precede it. Thus, although my approach to the volumes is chronological, my decision to treat certain issues in the first collections rather than others is sometimes dictated by the larger arc of the poet's whole development. Consequently, the themes with which I will be concerned are those which sustain interest across the whole range of Heaney's early poetry. My analysis will continually return to a particular constellation of concerns. The elements of which it is constituted include the poet's concern with his own poetry and with the poetic function, with the history, politics and culture of Ireland, with its landscape, with violence, and with his need to find a voice that is responsive to issues of pressing importance in the public realm yet which can sustain a fidelity to the ordinary and extraordinary experiences of the self.

## Chapter 1. Death of a Naturalist

### I. Introduction.

In the positive critical reception of Heaney's first volume, the features most commonly singled out for praise were the poet's technical virtuosity, his ability to concretely realize the environmental particular, and his promise as a poet.<sup>1</sup> The acclaim was tempered with reservations when the focus of attention shifted from the way Heaney said things to what he said. The nature of this critical response raises an issue of some importance. The contemporary critic is inclined to ask whether, once Heaney's obvious technical competence in DN is acknowledged, there remains matter substantial enough to warrant detailed critical attention. The problem is whether, in the final analysis, there is very much to say about the contents of the volume.

Many of the features of the poems that I take to be significant in terms of Heaney's poetic development appear unremarkable in the context of DN. One would be disinclined to notice them if the longer perspective afforded by an acquaintance with Heaney's subsequent work was unavailable. They can easily be catalogued: a farm--not Co. Derry, Northern Ireland or Ireland, and not a "landscape"--provides the locale for most of the poems; certain poems take the hidden depths of that locale as their subject; violence has a latent presence in many poems; personal rather than communal experience is the poet's main interest; he expresses contradictory notions about art; the range of his subject matter is limited; he seldom uses abstractions; his poems use a manifestly concrete imagery and end resolutely. Unremarkable though they seem, these are

amongst the most important features in DN if one's area of interest is the poet's development.

The reason I give them this status is that they do one of two things. Some--such as the poet's circumscribed subject-matter and certain of his techniques (strong formal closure, for example)--represent the dangers of a mode that constantly threatens to close in on itself and lead the poet into some or other poetic impasse. Others--the presence of depths, or of violence--provide seminal, and often latent, expressions of concerns with which Heaney becomes progressively obsessed in the first decade of his career. They also point to possible ways of passing beyond particular impasses.

My catalogue of features contains numerous correlatives of limitation. A defining characteristic of DN in fact is the poet's confidence in the limitations of his materials. Biographical information is useful in this regard. What one notices in Heaney's statements about the origins of his own poetry is precisely the lack of any such confidence. "When you begin to write," he says, "you're just desperately hoping that you can write . . ." ("Raindrop on a Thorn" 25). "We [the Belfast "Group"] stood or hung or sleepwalked between notions of writing that we gleaned from English courses and the living reality of writers from our own place whom we did not know, in person or in print" (Preoccupations 28). He appended the name "Incertus" to his first printed poems (Preoccupations 45) and said, "I had absolutely no confidence as a writer qua writer" ("Artists on Art" 407).

The chief factor that changed this state of affairs, in conjunction with the role played by Philip Hobsbaum and the "Group" (see Preoccupations 28-30), was the example provided

by specific poets. Heaney has registered his alienation from what he calls "the Eliot voice, the Auden voice," the "bringing in [of] irony and urban subject-matter and intelligence" ("Meeting Seamus Heaney" 27). He found a release in his reading of the work of Ted Hughes, of Patrick Kavanagh, of Hopkins, and to a lesser extent, of poets like R.S. Thomas, John Montague, Richard Murphy, Norman MacCaig and the Movement poets (see Ploughshares interview 14-15; "Meeting Seamus Heaney" 27; "Raindrop" 25-26). This poetry was crucial in its enabling function. From the Movement poets he got "the metrical thing" (Ploughshares interview 15), from Hughes and the other contemporary poets "a confidence in the elements of my own experience," because "all of their subject-matters, the elements of the poetry, were the natural world: were somehow eccentric experiences, not urban, not metropolitan" ("Raindrop" 25), and from Kavanagh a "confidence in the deprivations of our condition" ("Unhappy and at Home" 66).

The results of this confidence in the limitations and "deprivations" of his own experience are there to be seen in DN. It allowed the inclusion of slight poems, even of mere poetic exercises, along with the more substantial pieces. The willingness of the critics to take him up rewarded that confidence. Heaney's early strengths are indisputably tied to his self-imposed limitations. The benefits are, however, attended by disadvantages, and the constraints of the mode begin to make themselves felt even before the end of the poet's first volume. Lines from "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces" in North--"a cage / or trellis to conjure in"-- which describe the line on a piece of bone but also a line of poetry, might have been written to capture a quality of DN. The limitations

which the poet uses as a vine does the trellis along which it grows, occasionally transform themselves into a "cage." The purpose of this chapter will be to follow the dynamics of those transformations.

## II. From Farm to Landscape.

If we concede that landscape plays a crucial role in Heaney's poetry we should notice that, in almost all of the poems in the first half of the volume, it is the childhood farm rather than a "landscape" that provides the locale and, sometimes, the subject. In several poems the farm--nature ordered, parcelled and possessed--is seen as a mere (inadequate) container for the forces of raw nature. In the second half of the volume the farm gives way to landscape as locale and subject.

Let us note that the word landscape, which we use today to designate both a particular stretch of terrain and the general character of a given terrain, enters English in the sixteenth century as a technical term from the art of painting: a landscape is a pictorial representation of a stretch of countryside. (Coetzee, "SA Landscape" 1-2)

It is thus significant that in the later poems, when landscape becomes a subject, explicit references to art enter the poems. This is not to say that art is not an issue in the first poems--"Digging" and "Churning Day" make the point immediately--but rather that a different conception of art, one based on the

visual arts and set in opposition to the conception of art embodied in the farm poems, finds expression in the later poems.

The move from a child's perception to that of an adult which accompanies the move from farm to landscape is also a move from farm-child to adult poet. If we note that in an agrarian society an individual's relationship to the land will tend to express itself as a relationship to a farm, while in less agrarian societies the relationship is more likely to be one of contemplation, of viewing nature or landscape, we might begin to realize the significance of Heaney's move in DN and also throughout his progress from DN to North. The move is away from the farm, from childhood, and from those labourers (his family included) whose relationship to the land is less conscious and extremely intimate.

In many of the poems in DN the temporal distinction between child and adult generates the poetry. Heaney's need to define his relationship to the people and places of his personal past is thus the predominant concern of the first half of the volume, the poems from "Digging" to "The Diviner."

### III. The Farm Poems 1.

Poems in the first half of DN in which the focus of the child-protagonist is on human agents can be separated from those in which he is alone and his focus is on the non-human. "Digging," "Follower," "Ancestral Photograph," "Churning Day," "The Early Purges," "Dawn Shoot" and "The Diviner" fall into the first group; "Death of a Naturalist," "The Barn," "An Advancement of Learning" and "Blackberry-Picking" into the second.

I want to begin by considering the first group, and

especially those poems from it which take the poet's male forebears as their subject. "Digging," "Follower" and "Ancestral Photograph" deal with Heaney's father, grandfather and great uncle. The poet characterizes them as connected to the land, he presents agricultural labour as a form of artistry, and he expresses simultaneously the need to establish links of continuity between them and himself and the need to break loose of the bonds that tie him to them.

In "Digging" the relationship between the worker, his activity of work, and the land is presented as one of productive interdependence:

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft  
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.  
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep  
To scatter new potatoes. . . .

The lines combine an audial and physical harshness associated with manual labour ("coarse boot," "lug," "levered firmly," "bright edge") with the vulnerability and delicacy of the worker's body ("nestled," "inside knee"), and "new potatoes" are the almost magical result of the interaction. The nautical image with which "Follower" opens similarly establishes farmer, plough and land as connected parts of a single interanimating whole. Even at the level of physical appearance, these farmers resemble the land they work: "Jaws puff round and solid as a turnip" ("Ancestral Photograph").

Heaney consistently perceives resemblances between agricultural work and artistic activity. Leaving aside for the moment the problematic image of the gun, we see how the first lines of "Digging"--"Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests; snug as a gun"--anticipate the description of the poet's

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father's handling of his spade. Here too the instrument of labour, a hard physical object, is cradled against sensitive human flesh. The movement of these lines carries proleptic force. The conjunction of a series of stressed syllables, the word "rests" and a semi-colon in the second line bring the reader to a moment of respite before the poet's artistic "digging" continues. His grandfather's later momentary rest from physical digging and his return to it have something of the same rhythm.

The links being established between the sedentary activity of writing and the actual physical world outside are concretised at one point by an exploitation of the most notable of the physical properties a poem possesses--its appearance on the printed page:

My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds . . . .  
Here the physical action of looking down from a window finds a corollary in the gap of white paper which separates the two portions of the enjambed sentence. One's eye follows the semantic thrust of the words and "looks down" to the continuation of meaning in the same way that the speaker's eye travels down to the location of physical action outside. The correspondence between conception and observed physical activity is carried further in Heaney's description of the act of digging.

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods  
Over his shoulder, going down and down  
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap

Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge

Through living roots awaken in my head.

Here the distinction between the rhythms of physical activity and those of poetic representation begin to blur. These chopped lines use caesuras to distinguish between the various moments of spadework; the lengthening of the hard "c" in "Nicking" into the sibilance of "slicing" accords with an essential difference in the nature of the two activities, as does the outlet of breath that is necessary both for the pronunciation of the word "heaving" and in the actual exertion involved in that physical act. "Squelch and slap" and "curt cuts of an edge" similarly represent aurally the distinction between the sogginess of the earth and the sharpness of both the spade and the manner in which it is used. The virtuosity of the verbal act again accords with the skillfulness of the physical act.

The resemblance between poetry and agricultural labour is also present, if less explicitly, in "Follower":

He would set the wing

And fit the bright steel-pointed sock.

The sod rolled over without breaking.

At the headrig, with a single pluck

Of reins, the sweating team turned round

And back into the land. His eye

Narrowed and angled at the ground,

Mapping the furrow exactly.

In "Thatcher," a later poem from Door into the Dark (DD) which deals explicitly with the artistic nature of agricultural labour and its resemblances to poetry, the speaker reflects on the thatcher's method: "It seemed he spent all morning warming

up." The first lines from "Follower" quoted above also draw attention to that preparation. The competent result of this preparation comes in the next line: "The sod rolled over without breaking." Later Heaney talks of "the polished sod," and we feel that this quality of the soil is not merely present, but produced, presumably by the act of "[m]apping the furrow exactly."

What adds substantial interest to this passage, moreover, is that it resembles an observation made by Heaney in his description of Wordsworth's compositional techniques:

The continuity of the thing was what was important, the onward inward pouring out, up and down the gravel path, the crunch and scuffle of the gravel working like a metre or a metronome under the rhythms of the ongoing chaunt, those 'tracings of thought and mountings of the mind' somehow aided by the automatic, monotonous turns and returns of the walk, the length of the path acting like the length of the line. And I imagine that the swing of the poet's body contributed as well to the sway of the voice. . . . The poet as ploughman, if you like, and the suggestive etymology of the word 'verse' itself. . . . 'Verse' comes from the Latin versus which could mean a line of poetry but could also mean the turn that a ploughman made at the head of the field as he finished one furrow and faced back into another (Preoccupations 65).

But today

It is my father who keeps stumbling  
Behind me, and will not go away.

("Follower")

Blake Morrison's perceptive comments on the ending of "Follower" have a wider application:

The reversal at the end carries a possible double meaning: we can take it literally, that the father is now old and clinging; or, metaphorically, that the son, as a writer, is shackled with his father as poetic subject-matter. Whichever the reading, though, we are again struck more by distance than by intimacy: not only do father and son have different skills, but they are at the height of their powers at different times. The common ground is divided ground. (Seamus Heaney 26)

The distance Morrison mentions is established as something pre-given:

Behind Heaney's recreation of the rural world lies the notion of a discontinuity, caused not so much by modernization, technology and so on as by the poet's own sensibility which incapacitates him for his inheritance. His vulnerability to experience disables him as a farmer but enables him to be a poet (Mary P. Brown 289).

Justification for this view is found in the child's response to the crudeness of the cattlemen in "Ancestral Photograph,"



in his clumsiness ("Follower"), and in his sensuous response to the rhythms of the workers, to their efficiency, to the potatoes ("that we picked / Loving their cool hardness in our hands") in "Digging" and the sod in "Follower."

But the most significant difference between the labourers and himself (and here we may include the labourers from other poems--the diviner, the potato diggers) has to do with language. For the most part they are speechless. It is almost as if they are bonded to the land by their inarticulacy. The ascent into language represents a break with the land. The poet's early talkativeness in "Follower"--"tripping, falling, / Yapping always"--is one more factor creating distances between father and son, and child and land. In Heaney's early poetry the ascent into language is also an ascent into consciousness. Those who are silent are unconscious of their relationship to the land; the speaker is highly conscious of it. Heaney's exile from his potential community--a theme present throughout his oeuvre--is first established on these terms.

It is interesting to note the paradox generated by the situation of a voluble poet attempting to represent with fidelity members of his non-verbal childhood community. In the first and most famous poems of DN Heaney reveals a need to fully elaborate the setting of the poem, capture the experience whole and fill in all the details. This signifies a lack of security felt in the community of experience of the writer and his audience. The community that would presumably understand the setting and experience are non-verbal; the community which so eagerly took up DN was a highly literate, and predominantly English, audience. Heaney's need to fill in all the details, as it were, suggests an attempt to become part of another,

more literate community. As an adult, at the end of each of the three poems with which I deal here, he comments on his need to break loose. He needs to break loose from a subject matter as much as from an emotional relationship, and his vocation provides the potential means. This is prospective; it is not yet achieved.

Undoubtedly, one reason for the popularity and success of DN is that the rural folk it frequently takes as its subject are not romanticized, not "folk." The laboriousness of agrarian activity is stressed, and one of Heaney's early strengths is his ability to preserve this sense whilst simultaneously opening other ground. "Churning Day" and "The Diviner" provide the examples. The tension of the father-son relationship is absent here, so that the submerged poetic parallels do not have the quality of resistance, of the poet needing to define and justify his vocation in the face of an alternative possible vocation. There is a confidence and note of quiet celebration in the ingenuity of the links made.

"Churning Day" is on the one hand simply an excellent descriptive piece. Heaney's "original power," says Richard Murphy, "is that he can give you the feeling as you read the poems that you are actually doing what they describe"(38). On the other hand, the poet discovers in the activity of churning an alchemical equivalent for the creative process. Natural process continually threatens to fill the poem to the point of satiety but the human activities of sterilizing, boiling and beating hold it within check and manage eventually to produce the alchemical product itself: gold, in the form of butter. The movement appears to be one from process to stasis: even the "gold" itself moves through stages toward

stasis, from "gold flecks / began to dance" to "a yellow curd," "coagulated sunlight," "gilded gravel" and, eventually, "soft printed slabs."

The process is not, however, complete, and the poet's most telling touch comes in the final lines:

And in the house we moved with gravid ease,  
our brains turned crystals full of clean deal churns,  
the splash and gurgle of the sour-breathed milk,  
the pat and slap of small spades on wet lumps.

The final product of the churning is not gold or butter, but crystals in the brain. Process has solidified into stasis, but the crystalline stasis can in turn become artistic process--as it does in the poem itself--because the crystals in the brain are conceived as containers. They hold not only light but sound and smell in suspension. Heaney fills his poem as full of the sights and smells of churning as are the crystals formed by the experience itself. The content simply, and implicitly, swops structures; it moves from a crystalline to a poetic structure. In this way Heaney's poetry is not only continuous with the activity of his forebears but also fulfils preservative and reproductive functions.

In "The Diviner" the poet's gaze follows the movements of the water-diviner "Circling the terrain, hunting the pluck / Of water." When he finds it, we see "Spring water suddenly broadcasting / Through a green aerial its secret stations." The speaker stresses the medium of this "broadcasting." The sentence itself has to pass "through" the words "through a green aerial" to link its subject and verb to its object. Attention is drawn to the indispensable role played by the individual mediating something of value to its potential users.

The poetic analogies are obvious: the diviner-poet is the gifted human being, linked by an inexplicable bond to a submerged reality inaccessible to others, who acts as a conduit in the production of value. Like the farmer who "produces" potatoes, the diviner is a medium rather than the source of production.

Before I move on I want to register, and emphasise, aspects of these poems to which I will return. Several of the poems are, amongst other things, about the writing of poetry. The unconscious activity of labour is seen to be artistic, and a simple verbal transcription of such labour which aims at capturing the textures of ordinary activities as accurately as possible becomes a description of the poetic process. It does this without having to resort to distracting imaginative transformations and reconceptions of the matter at hand.

There is in this regard, however, a difference between the poems "Digging" and "Follower" on the one hand, and "Churning Day" and "The Diviner" on the other. Surface activities are described in the first two. (Even though "Digging" ends with "I'll dig with it," the digging is, one might say, only potato-deep). In "The Diviner" depths are plumbed to reveal something of value. These are external depths, depths in the landscape "out there." In "Churning Day" an external activity results in the creation of interior products, the crystals buried in the depths of the self, in the brain. I will later return to the opposition of surfaces and depths, and to Heaney's different conceptions of hidden and meaningful depths.

The poems "Death of a Naturalist," "Blackberry-Picking," "The Barn" and "An Advancement of Learning" resemble one another. The movement in each of these poems is from a description of a scene--which superficially appears tranquil, pleasurable and unthreatening--to a transformation of that scene, or, more accurately, to a revelation from within that scene of something threatening or frightening. "An Advancement of Learning," which differs from the others in its greater concentration on the adult experience, follows a similar pattern, though its conclusion goes beyond the point reached in the other three.

In "Death of a Naturalist" the densely textured phenomenal (and verbal) surface of the initial scene virtually implodes. It reveals the frogs' previously unrecognized capacity for "vengeance." This shocks the child protagonist, and not just because it invalidates his earlier anthropomorphic and domesticized conception of nature: "The daddy frog was called a bullfrog / . . . the mammy frog / Laid hundreds of little eggs and this was / Frogspawn. You could tell the weather by frogs too. . . ." The scene at the end of the poem has elements reminiscent of the Freudian primal scene. A child's perception of an act of violence by the father-figure; the suggestions provided by noises and animal sexuality; the idea that anal coitus occurs; the resultant anxiety: all these elements have their parallels in the final lines (see Laplanche and Pontalis 335-36). Most of them are explicit, while others are implicit in the expressions "rank / With cowdung," "cocked / On sods," "obscene threats" and "their blunt heads farting." If read in this way, and I only want to suggest this as a possibility, the maleness of the frogs, the archetypal "great

slime kings," together with the male rats of "An Advancement of Learning," might illuminate Heaney's ambivalent feelings towards his father evident in the poems already discussed. The archetypal suggestions are, however, kept in check: the important point to be made about this poem in the context of Heaney's development is that this revelation from the dark depths of the landscape is conceived in the terms of a personal, childhood experience.

The initial descriptions of the environment in "Death of a Naturalist," "An Advancement of Learning" and "The Barn" all in some way pre-empt the later revelations. Lines 5-10 of "Death of a Naturalist" celebrate the "clotted" and densely textured reality of the flax-dam, but this is qualified by the connotation of putrefaction carried over from the preceding lines. "[F]estered in the heart," "rotted," "gauze" and "smell" combine to create a subliminal impression of infection and decay in the human body. The sharp and menacing objects that make up the "armoury / Of farmyard implements" in "The Barn" foreshadow the experience to follow. And the images used in the description of the river in the first quatrain of "An Advancement of Learning" ("The river nosed past, / Pliable, oil-skinned") anticipate the later appearance of the rat.

Perhaps most interestingly of all, the "rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache" that horrifies the poet in "Blackberry-Picking" is not without a parallel in the poem. Earlier, talking about the berries he ate, the speaker says, "summer's blood was in it / Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for / Picking." The importance of the examples from this poem and from "Death of a Naturalist" is that a correspondence between the human being and nature is established: buried

in the depths of both lies a frightening potential.

What specifically is it that frightens the poet so much in the poems I have considered? The "vengeance" of frogs; a "rat-grey fungus"; the dark interior of a barn; a real rat: these are puzzling stimuli considering their effects. What characterizes each poem is a disproportionality between cause and effect. Rather than trying to find out why the poet "actually" reacts so strongly (we could, for instance, follow the trail of the "primal scene" reading), I want to consider an effect of his failure to adequately specify the stimuli.

In his book The Romantic Sublime Thomas Weiskel says, "[W]hat happens to you standing at the edge of infinite spaces can be made, theoretically, to 'mean' just about anything" (28; see Coetzee, "SA Landscape" 16). Heaney is not writing poetry in the mode of the Romantic Sublime, nor are his sensations, which resemble the "delightful horror" of the sublime experience, occasioned by spectacular scenery (mountains, depths, abysses, "infinite spaces") as in that mode. He writes about his farm. This does not render Weiskel's remark inapplicable, however. We might recall the example of Ted Hughes. Heaney could owe to Hughes, in addition to much of the subject-matter of DN and some of its effects, an example of how the Romantic sublime can be transposed into a naturalistic key. In admitting this, we should not forget an important difference between the work of the two poets. In Heaney there is no abstract idea behind what he describes, no universal supra-human potentiality, while in Hughes these are central.

In DN Heaney does not, to use Weiskel's terms, make his "standing at the edge. . . 'mean' just about anything"; he does not yet ascribe anything concrete to the unrevealed depths.

What he does do, however, is constitute the unseen depths of landscape (and of the self--we recall the parallels established between human and natural depths) as loci of profoundly important feelings. One might at this stage anticipate Heaney's development by looking to his later volumes DD, Wintering Out (WO) and North. The title of the first is enough to indicate the significance that becomes attached to the notion of the dark: the dark as a source of creativity, as the locus of religious meaning, sexuality and, later, history. In WO darkness and the depths of landscape accrue historical meaning. Finally in North the poet derives his greatest sense of the meaning of Ireland's history from what the depths of the landscape disclose.

What distinguishes the present poems from these later developments is the poet's reaction. In later poems he seeks entrance into the depths: he desires to obtain intimations of their potency; he plumbs them as a source of meaning. In DN, in contrast, the revelations generate an immediate and overwhelming desire to escape:

I sickened, turned, and ran.

fast

[I]scuttled<sub>^</sub> into the sunlit yard. . . .

I lay face-down to shun the fear above.

I turned down the path in cold sweat. . . .

The experiences are frightening because what is revealed represents the unseen, the other, the horrifying mystery of the unknown. And yet, in each poem that Other finds a container: imagistically or literally, animals become the vehicles. We find real frogs and a real rat, imagined bats and birds,

"two-lugged sacks . . . like great blind rats" and a "rat-grey fungus." One needs to look at other poems in DN to appreciate the significance of this. Here, as elsewhere, the revelation, although frightening, is not enough to burst the bounds of the tight poetic form or the ability of language and the imagination to contain the experience.

Each poem ends resolutely, "An Advancement of Learning" most obviously (and unsatisfactorily) so. The qualified closure of "Death of a Naturalist" provides one reason why this poem carries greater force than the others. Admittedly the others contain weaknesses: "The Barn" relies too heavily on the simple tropic transformation of an exterior into an interior; "An Advancement of Learning" contains several thudding lines ("I turned to stare / With deliberate, thrilled care / At my hitherto snubbed rodent"); and "Blackberry-Picking" closes with a touch of sentimentality. Nonetheless, the degree of formal closure in these three poems--their straining after resolution--allows "Death of a Naturalist" to appear more powerful.

My discussion conflates Heaney's use of animals as imagistic containers for certain disruptive potentialities in the landscape with a reference to the way he ends poems. Both are forms of closure. They represent two constituent parts of the complex of closural devices which pervades the poems in DN. I believe a consideration of this complex is crucial to an understanding of the volume--an understanding of what makes it both successful and limited.

Forms of closure are found at numerous levels in DN: at conceptual levels and at the levels of technique and form, of imagery, of subject-matter and of stance.

Heaney's indebtedness to a wide variety of traditional forms is everywhere evident in the volume. When he uses original forms these are either based on or approximate traditional models. He is impressive as a prosodist because of his proficiency, not his daring. One would add to such features the pervasiveness and intensity of his desire to end poems resolutely. He uses the formal devices of poetic closure effectively, and often. Neat concluding statements become a hallmark of the poems: for just a sample, we can look to "An Advancement of Learning," "The Early Purges," "Digging" and "Ancestral Photograph." None of these observations provide substance for a negative criticism of the poems; often, in fact, the effects of these techniques are entirely felicitous. In "Mid-Term Break," for example, the result of Heaney's use of a terza rima model and a strong concluding line is superb. It is the existence rather than any particular effect of these techniques that I wish to establish here.

Less noticeable, if even more pervasive, is Heaney's use of imagistic fixity. A striking feature of DN is that a majority of its poems admit little or no abstraction. The "unsentimental clarity" of Heaney's vision "[i]mpinges with a sense of the physical" (Ricks, "Growing Up"). This effect is largely the result of an imagery which defines phenomena in concrete terms. That which is usually perceived as insubstantial takes on a palpable physical presence:

bluebottles

Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell.

("Death of a Naturalist")

Clouds ran their wet mortar, plastered the daybreak  
 Grey. . . .

The plaster thinned at the skyline, the whitewash  
 Was bleaching on houses and stables,

("Dawn Shoot")

Dusk hung like a backcloth  
 That shook where a swan swam,

("Twice Shy")

Space is a salvo,  
 We are bombarded by the empty air.

("Storm on the Island")

Not only the insubstantial, but also the fluid, solidifies:

The river nosed past  
 Pliable, oil-skinned, wearing

A transfer of gables and sky.

("An Advancement of Learning")

(Buttermilk is) "A thick crust, coarse-grained as limestone  
 rough-cast,"

("Churning Day")

From depths smooth-skinned as plums

("Trout")

The burn drowns steadily in its own downpour,

A helter-skelter of muslin and glass

That skids to a halt ("Waterfall").

That which is abstract is concretised in similar fashion. Marriage is no abstract noun, but a "golden ring" in "Poem"; love is not something intangible between two people, but the physical relationship between sea and land ("Lovers on Aran"). When fear is aroused in these poems it seeks an imagistic container in the phenomenal animal realm.

An element of control can be exercised over any phenomenon that resists specific definition once it is reduced to the terms of the concretely perceptible. Flux, dynamism, process, insubstantiality and abstraction lose a measure of their intractability when conceived of as static, concrete or definable.

Such imagistic fixity is a form of closure, as is the mnemonic fixity that characterizes several poems, especially those in the first half of the volume. These poems deal with a complete, past experience. The speaker's temporal distance from the experience allows him to capture it whole. A coherent and stable self is at the centre of each experience: the deconstitution of the "I"--which allows for the embracing of communal and historical perspectives--that occurs in WO is not yet anticipated. The contradictions and tensions of the experience are reconciled (or at least allowed to cohabit) in the stable poetic frame.

Finally, both the farm locale and the temporal locale of childhood--to which I have already alluded--are correlatives of closure.

Different methods of delimiting the potential range of Heaney's subject thus pervade DN. The poems which, as a group, carry the closural impulse to their extreme are the love poems.

It is interesting that the poems which deal with the subject one might expect would touch most intimately on the poet's affective life are the poems in this volume which most persistently evidence a high degree of formal finish. One even suspects the poet of distancing himself from his subject through reliance on form. The poems insistently present themselves as poems (thus making "Poem" the subject as much as the title of that particular piece).

One might speculate that as the temporal distinction between child and poet is broken down, and as some of his most intense feelings are approached, an important change occurs. The poet lacks the safe distance provided by a lengthy period of time and by subjects that are relatively unthreatening to him in the present. This is to say that when mnemonic fixity and the observed environmental subject (the object out there that can be rendered as a concrete particular) no longer provide options, it is progressively in poetic technique and its closure abilities that the poet finds his device for poetically controlling his subject-matter.

If we allow for certain exceptions provided by "Honeymoon Flight," a number of general comments can be made about the love poems as a group. The formality of the poems often borders on rigidity; their concluding statements attempt to tie things up even more resolutely than do the poems I have already discussed; they exhibit imagistic fixity but, in addition, evidence a fixation on actions of encompassment, reciprocity, circularity and homecoming. Like "Gravities," which takes such actions as its subject, these poems are trapped in their own closing off. The relationship between the "thrush" and the "hawk" in "Twice Shy," the motion of the "ship" in "Valediction,"

the perfect reciprocity in "Lovers on Aran," the easy transformation of destruction into construction in "Scaffolding": in all these precious pieces tropes, conceits, ingenious parallels and analogues provide a means of appearing to reconcile all conflict within the ambit of the verbal artifact.

"Poem" is the most fully achieved example of this tendency. It begins,

Love, I shall perfect for you the child  
Who diligently potters in my brain  
Digging with heavy spade till sods were piled  
Or puddling through muck in a deep drain.

The gradual move in the verb forms from subjunctive to present and then, using the intermediate participle "Digging" as a bridge, into past, follows a move from interiority to exteriority. The poet establishes a temporal juncture between adulthood and childhood, but preserves a sense of the present reality of past experience. Thereafter, the third and fourth lines each receive a stanza-length dissemination and elaboration of its theme: the child builds walls of sod that "yearly" fall by admitting the sow and hen whom they were built to exclude; the dams built to clog up the flowing drain "Would burst before the rising autumn rain."

Four factors contribute to the closural effects of the last stanza: its anaphoric first line, the fact that the thematic "unpacking" of lines 3-4 of the poem is complete and calls for a conclusive statement, the promise to put an end to the constant destruction of "imperfect limits" by the creation of a stronger "wall," and the imagistic correspondences set up between the last lines and the previous stanzas:

Love, you shall perfect for me this child

Whose small imperfect limits would keep breaking:  
 Within new limits now, arrange the world  
 Within our walls, within our golden ring.

In these lines the palpable reality of a physical environment is fused with the purely imaginative space of the speaker's interiority and the limited locale of childhood is extended to "the world" that is to be "arranged." Finally, the ring, as a symbol of perfection, permanence, and unflawed circularity, retrospectively draws all the potentially disruptive elements of the poem's enclosed universe into a cohesion which is supposedly both healing and meaningful.

Marriage is, in the poem, an anticipated state of reconciled perfection, and one is tempted by the closural techniques used to lose sight of the fact that that state of perfection is deferred. The poet's representation of such a state is due less to his conception of marriage than to the manner in which past and present, childhood and adulthood, process and stasis, destruction and reconstruction, exteriority and interiority, and the divided halves of the self are reconciled within the ambit of the poem itself. Once all is said and done, however, there persists an uneasy feeling that the order and "arrange[ment] of the world" which the poem would display is a little too neat, a little too easily achieved. Our awareness keeps moving to a generating consciousness behind the poem which orders its elements along a predetermined course. The traditional form of the poem, straining in its sequential quatrains toward closure and comprehensibility, seems to be a strategic device deployed to combat any possible disruptive potential.

"Honeymoon Flight" is a more successful poem than the

other love poems, and one reason for this is its ending. Nature is presented as beneficent in the poem: the landscape is humanized and familiar and the four elements appear to be in equilibrium. A panoptic steadiness frames the present instability and tenuous "trust" that are the primary foci of the speaker's attention. The ending of the poem is impressive in that the several shocks of the final lines make the panoptic steadiness wobble without destabilizing it completely. The lightness of touch and sensitivity evident here are absent from the more "solid," controlled love poems.

As I have said, "Honeymoon Flight" is something of an exception, and I want to return attention to the discussion of closure that preceded my analysis of it. Now it is obvious that all poems have to end, and that a vast majority of poems strive for some sort of resolute closure, or avoid it for intelligible reasons. So too are mnemonic fixity and concrete imagery commonplace in poetry. My point is not that DN is unique in its use of any of these features, but rather that the specific forms they take here are particularly intense and particularly revealing. One reason for the important role closure plays in Heaney's poems can obviously be found in his stated desire to prove that he simply could write: a concretely realized scene, a self-enclosed, eminently complete poem being very powerful and attractive aims the successful realization of which could be taken to signify competence. But I think it goes further than this.

#### VI. Threats to Closure.

In a lecture on three of his contemporaries--Derek Mahon,

Michael Longley, and Paul Muldoon--Heaney gives an opinion on the reasons for the concern with formal finish in poetry produced in Northern Ireland in the 60s:

[T]he writers did not feel the need to address themselves to the specific questions of politics because they assumed that the subtleties and tolerances of their art was precisely what they had to contribute to the coarseness and intolerances of the public life . . . . Nothing needed to be exposed: rather it seemed that conditions had to be outstripped, and it is probably true to say that the idea of poetry was itself that higher ideal to which the poets unconsciously had turned in order to survive in the demeaning conditions. . . .

The only reliable release for the poet was the appeasement of the achieved poem. In that liberating moment, when the lyric discovers its buoyant completion, when the timeless formal pleasure comes to its fullness and exhaustion, in those moments of self-justification and self-obliteration, the poet makes contact with the plane of consciousness where he is at once intensified in his being and detached from his predicaments. It is this deeper psychological compulsion which lies behind the typical concern of Northern Irish

poets with style, with formal finish,  
with linguistic relish and play. . . .

I want to emphasise the profound relation here between poetic technique and historical situation. It is a superficial response to the work of Northern Irish poets to conceive of their lyric stances as evasions of the actual conditions ("Place and Displacement" 49-50).

What is significant here is Heaney's ascription of what appears to be absent from the poem as crucial to the poem. Although it is dangerous to talk about poems in terms of what they do not express--of attempting to point to that which is present because of its absence--I think we may legitimately, if tentatively, follow this line a little way, using Heaney's remarks as a starting point. At the basis of his remarks is the notion that poetry is chosen as an alternative realm to politics, as an active way of precluding the necessity of having to deal with the political matter most obviously at hand. It is for this reason that the poems need to close themselves off so tightly, because of what they would allow in if they were not "pulled tight with little drawstrings in the last line or two . . . clicking shut like little boxes" (Ploughshares interview 18). This line of argument would be dangerous if there was not evidence to support it from the poems themselves in DN, and if--this is my contention--the tension between closure and certain elements in the poems which threaten it did not form one of the most significant features of the volume.

What then threatens to prevent closure in the poems?

In the longer perspective of Heaney's work from DN to North four "threats" appear important enough to contemplate here: the threat of the unknown, the threat of violence, that of history and that of alternative perceptions of landscape. Heaney deals with them in different ways: sometimes he manages to contain them--however precariously--by using the closural tendencies so evident in the volume; at other times he is forced into adopting different poetic strategies to deal with them, and he meets with varying degrees of success.

i. The Unknown.

I have indicated how the unknown is transformed into the known and thus contained in poems which deal with depths or with anything abstract that is potentially threatening. The best examples are found in those poems in which the poet's fear finds a container, and the poem is allowed to end resolutely.

ii. History.

In "At a Potato Digging" Heaney for the first time gives expression to a concern with historical questions that in later volumes takes on almost obsessive proportions. With "For the Commander of the 'Eliza,'" this is the only poem in DN that deals with a specific historical event. The poem has many features that could allow Heaney to open up new terrain for inquiry. The sequence form offers him the opportunity to go outside the limitations imposed by having at the centre of each lyric an authoritative, perceiving self. By establi-

shing connections between a sequence of passages which deal with different worlds--particularly with a past world that extends beyond personal experience--Heaney could break the enclosures created by the isolated perceiving self, and open up the imaginative space of the poem to larger social and historical forces. The subject-matter could lead to the politics of Ireland. His use of an empirical lyric form and of concrete realization (as in section II) could feed into a larger historical inquiry without necessitating an absolute break with his first, familiar terrain. Speculation about such potentialities is not idle; Heaney's subsequent poetry exploits precisely what is only latent in "At a Potato Digging." As a result, it is this latency which gives the sequence what importance it has in terms of Heaney's development.

Its importance would have been greater had Heaney not strained to contain within bounds the very material that threatens those bounds. Using repetition and complex metaphoric patterns, he establishes two things above all else: the link between the labourers and the land, and the cyclical continuity of historical time. In the line "Like crows attacking crow-black fields" the workers, the land and the crows--another presence on the land--are linked. The land and all the different things that live in or on it are elsewhere defined in terms of one another: the potatoes are "Native/to the black hutch of clay"; "A people hungering from birth, / grubbing, like plants, in the bitch earth, / were grafted with a great sorrow." "Millions rotted along with it" could refer either to millions of potatoes or millions of people; potatoes, described as "live skulls, blind-eyed," resemble the workers during the Great Famine: "Live skulls, blind-eyed, balanced

on / wild higgledy skeletons." "Higgledy" creates another connection, that between the activity of the present ("they stretch / A higgledy line from hedge to headland") and the appearance of the workers of the past. The crow metaphor similarly links the present workers to the past, since during the famine "Mouths tightened in, eyes died hard,/faces chilled to a plucked bird. / In a million wicker huts / beaks of famine snipped at guts." The different historical periods resemble each other further because what is produced in both remains constant: "They lie scattered / like inflated pebbles" and "The new potato, sound as stone."

There may be an unconscious political motivation in all of this since Heaney's descriptions naturalize the relationship between workers and land, suggesting that the Irish peasantry is the land, part of it inextricably. (The notion is subliminally present again in lines from "'Eliza'": "Six grown men with gaping mouths and eyes / Bursting the sockets like spring onions in drills." Interestingly, it is the poet rather than the naval persona who speaks here). The fact that the peasants are embedded in the land renders any other relationship to the land--such as control by a colonist--artificial.

None of this is, however, explicit. More important here is the fact that Heaney renders historical process as stasis. The superaddition of the earth-goddess theme facilitates his seeing time as essentially static. This is in some ways the greatest closure of them all. Thus, whilst the poem is important in terms of its difference from the material in the rest of DN, the potential it offers is not realized. The subject of history does not finally threaten the closural tendencies of the volume. The author continues to exercise

authority.

The other two "threats" to closure are more interesting, despite the fact that they find expression in poems which the critics have generally seen as the flawed, less accomplished, or even failed poems of DN. When one thinks of DN, one thinks of poems like "Digging," "Death of a Naturalist," "Churning Day"--essentially of poems in the first third of the volume--as the poems which characterise its particular nature and define its achievement. Accurate though this view might be, the lesser poems that appear toward the end of the volume are those which I take to be most indicative of Heaney's need to develop. They show the as yet unresolved tensions inherent in working within a particular restrictive mode, and it is this fact, rather than the "quality" of the poems, that makes them noteworthy.

### iii. Violence.

Violence is found in one form or another in a great variety of places in DN. It appears in different forms. The most ordinary, and explicit, form is found in poems like "The Early Purges" and "Dawn Shoot." It appears in forms of latency in images of and references to guns, bombs, grenades and the like. These provide a certain frisson, and are most effectively used in the poems "Death of a Naturalist" and "Churning Day," where the force of the reference lies precisely in its enhancement of the sense of precariousness that hangs about the closure obtained. Violence appears more incongruously and apparently inexplicably in poems which seem in some way flawed: "Water-

fall," "Cow in Calf," "Turkeys Observed," "Twice Shy," "Lovers on Aran" and "Trout."

Of these poems, "Trout" is the most interesting, since in it Heaney tries (unsuccessfully) to deal with released violence rather than latent or contained violence. What makes the poem both interesting and such a failure are its metaphoric excesses. Heaney has to resort to a frenzied application of poetic metaphor in an attempt to capture the movements of a trout conceived in violent terms. The weird metaphoric transformations simply do not work; their significance derives from the fact that they reveal the anxiety of the poet when he is trying to deal with movement. (The attempt to freeze in imagery the movement of the water in "Waterfall" reveals a different, almost opposite approach to kinesis: Heaney's method of rendering process as stasis is marked by excess here too). The rhetorical excess of "Trout" marks Heaney's need to use--and the difficulty he experiences in using--poetry to achieve what he calls a "buoyancy of completion" when he is confronted with intractable matter (here the trout, but actually violence). In this instance, his closural devices fail to contain released violence.

#### iv. Landscape.

In the poems that appear after "The Diviner" there is a movement away from the farm and away from childhood. Landscape begins to emerge as a subject. Alternative perceptions of landscape are a "threat" to closure in DN, the final such threat with which I will deal.

Two of the three Aran poems in the volume challenge the

way in which the land is viewed in the first half of the volume. Earlier poems deal with a farm, with a rich, clotted nature and with the laboriousness of the activities performed on the land by agricultural labourers. The land of the first lines of "Death of Naturalist" and of "Blackberry-Picking" is fecund and pullulating; the poetic representation of this land is catered to by those qualities Heaney so expertly manages so early in his career: concrete imagery, a dense texture of verbal articulation, onomatop<sup>o</sup>ēia and synaesthesia. The Aran Islands--bare, inhospitable, sparsely populated--present a challenge to the poet in the sense that the aridity of the landscape demands that he find a form of poetic representation that is responsive to an "empty" landscape.

"Storm on the Island" is fascinating in this regard.

We may presume that it deals with Aran because of its title, subject, and collocation with "Synge on Aran." Heaney does not meet the challenge I have described because the landscape in this poem is described not in terms of what it is but in terms of what it is not: "This wizened earth has never troubled us / With hay"; "there are no stacks / Or stooks that can be lost. Nor are there trees. . ."; "there are no trees, no natural shelter"; "You might think that the sea is company, / . . . But no. . . ." The speaker paradoxically describes not the island but the absence of the mainland. The dominant impression the poem creates is that the island and its weather are not susceptible to the categories of the mainlander. Interestingly, the absent landscape is seen as a source of comfort.

In the final lines the speaker attempts again to make a presence of an absence. This time, the "nothing" the speaker fears is delimited and given a quantity by the addition of

the adjective "huge." "Space" and "empty air" are also perceived in concrete terms: "Space is a salvo, / We are bombarded by the empty air." In "Storm on the Island," therefore, Heaney does not adequately represent the empty landscape he takes as his subject; he is too constantly responsive to fullnesses which are not there. The closures of the poem paradoxically close out the landscape they would enclose.

"Synge on Aran," the companion-piece to "Storm on the Island," carries questions of poetic responsiveness to landscape still further. It is instructive to discuss this poem with "In Small Townlands."

Before continuing, I would like to recall two points I made earlier: the first concerned the etymology of the word "landscape" and the second the distinction between poems that deal with art as a means of verbally representing surface activities and those which see art as a means of plumbing "depths." In view of the first point it is perhaps not surprising that the poem in DN that deals most obviously with landscape is about a painter's relationship to the land. The second point raises more important issues.

If art is a subject of "Digging," "Follower" and "Churning Day," it is an art of verbally reproducing the activity of labourers, and of showing up the natural, unselfconscious artistry of that activity. The movement and rhythms of the lines mirror the movements and rhythms of labour. The activity of the artist--its laboriousness, its materiality, its status as work, as a vocation--is the focus of attention. The notion of art in "Synge on Aran" and "In Small Townlands" is altogether different: art is here a means of discovering, or producing, meaning. The poet's concentration is not on the super-

ficiencies seen, but on what is hidden. The purpose of his art is no longer to represent activities but to make the landscape yield up its meaning.

Significantly the sparse Aran Islands (and not his lush farm) provide the locale for Heaney's notion that the land should be stripped to reveal what it is "really" like. Imagery of the cutting away of surfaces appears in the first lines of "Synge on Aran": "Salt off the sea whets / the blades of four winds. / They peel acres / of locked rock, pare down / a rind of shrivelled ground." Imagery from sculpture then takes over: "bull-noses are chiselled / on cliffs. // Islanders too / are for sculpting." The shift suggests Heaney's possible use of the notion attributed to Michaelangelo--that a form pre-exists in rock, waiting to be bared by the sculptor and brought to its expressive fulfilment.

Following these references the speaker talks of the islanders' "polished head / full of drownings" and of "a hard pen / scraping in his [Synge's] head." Penetration to those cores of interiority is implicitly the purpose of art; of an art that, like the "four winds" of Aran, has a creative, incisive, cutting edge. Synge, who more than anyone brought the Aran Islands into the artistic consciousness, is shown to have inscribed "in his head" the "message" of the landscape. That his pen--peculiarly detached from him--writes with the elements themselves ("the nib filed on a salt wind / and dipped in the keening sea") is indication enough of Heaney's belief that the landscape can be written in an unmediated way. Here he sees it writing itself in the head of the artist who in turn will externalize that writing. The reality which in the case of the islanders remains hidden (their "head / full

of drownings") will, in the case of Synge, and through art, be expressed.

For my purposes "In Small Townlands" is a more important poem than "Synge on Aran" because it carries further certain notions about the relationship of art to landscape. In "Synge on Aran" the landscape and its people are fairly susceptible to being shaped, sculpted, polished and formed by the winds and, implicitly, by the artist. The landscape in "In Small Townlands," on the contrary, presents a surface that resists intrusion. In this poem the artistic act is presented as one of violent penetration and takeover. The chief organ of this act is the eye. In poems elsewhere in the volume sight is only one of the senses involved: the sense of hearing has a place in "Digging," "Death of a Naturalist," "Storm on the Island," and, later, "Personal Helicon." "Churning Day" and "Blackberry-Picking" appeal to our senses of smell and taste, while, most impressively, the poet appeals to the sense of touch in "Digging," "At a Potato Digging," "Blackberry-Picking," "The Diviner," "Synge on Aran" and "Personal Helicon."

The violence presented in the poem is strangely productive: "A new world cools out of his head." The artist is involved in a paradoxically creative desecration of landscape: the interrelation of violence and creativity that finds expression in the first part of North is prefigured here. Instead of adopting a relationship to the landscape that maintains the distance of the spectator, of the empirical observer, the artist, through the medium of his strangely voracious eye, wishes to penetrate, strip, explode, and release the pent-up forces within the landscape that are artificially contained by the surface. Through the intensity of attention it invites

the landscape ingests the perceiver; his eye ingests the landscape: the relationship is one of reciprocal voraciousness. The landscape of WO and North is, in significant ways, pre-figured here.

The conception of the artistic act which emerges from the poem is different to those found earlier in the volume. In this conception art is a form of mastery over the object of contemplation, a form of conquest, violent takeover and dominance, "a landscape art . . . founded on the imperial gaze" (Coetzee, "SA Landscape" 25). In contrast, a poem like "The Diviner" suggests the harmonious interrelationship of land and artist. The artist acts as a medium for the message of the land, as an almost passive conduit of meaning. It also contrasts with a poem like "St. Francis and the Birds," in which there is a perfect overlap of poetic language and its object: the birds are like a "flock of words // Released . . . from his <sup>holy</sup> lips"; they are like images; their flight constitutes his "best poem."

One reason for the stability of the poems in the first part of the volume (even of poems like "Death of a Naturalist" and "The Barn") is that they are reliant on a conception of landscape that is in no danger of fragmenting into atomism. What holds the landscape together is memory. In "In Small Townlands," a poem which relies neither on mnemonic fixity nor on the farm locale, a notable feature of the landscape is its potential to fragment. Interestingly, it is the figure of the artist who, through an imaginative act of control, not only holds it together but transforms it and improves on it: "A new world cools out of his head."

The frenzied application of metaphor that we saw in "Trout"

is repeated here. In that poem the poet's excessive use of metaphoric language evidences a need to contain the violence and movement of his subject, while in this poem the purpose of the application of metaphor is to make the unresponsive landscape yield up its meaning.

Two different, and contradictory, conceptions of art thus emerge from DN. Art is, in the first conception, a means of simply transcribing ordinary activities. It owes its fidelity to the tactile reality of the activity itself; it is an attempt to obtain the simpler satisfaction of charting a personal experience, of capturing it and closing it off with a Movement-like poetic tact, of giving it to us whole, uncomplicated and complete--a "surface" presentation, superbly rendered. In the second conception art is destructive of surfaces; the artist seeks to penetrate into the landscape, beyond surfaces which are conceived as veils of illusion hiding substrata of "meaning." At this stage of Heaney's development the two possibilities face each other as antagonistic and mutually exclusive alternatives, with the latter means threatening the stability of the former, but without providing any real possibility of reconciliation.

This final challenge to the desire for closure seems to me the most important. It is at the point where landscape (the artistic conception as much as the terrain) is perceived as a realm that could yield up its (hidden) meaning, that attempts at closure break down. Nowhere is that meaning in fact spelt out: what is the painter's "new world"? what does Synge's pen write? The deferral of meaning necessitates a further search. It is one which will have to break out of the rigidity of the forms and conceptions that prove so

delimiting in DN.

VII. "Personal Helicon."

"Personal Helicon," the final poem in the volume, is crucially placed in that it shows a way forward, indicates a method that could lead beyond the impasse sketched above, and prevents DN as a volume from closing in upon itself. More than any other poem in DN, it looks out beyond the closures of DN, and towards DD.

Heaney revisits the locale of childhood at the end of the volume. He does not attempt here to hold the landscape in the grip of his eye and force it to give up its meaning; rather, he enters into it. Quite literally, the poem charts a movement into the earth, into the wet channels of wells that, recalling "Death of a Naturalist," could easily represent the "womb" of the landscape. His purpose is neither to capture verbally the landscape of his youth, nor to force it to yield up its meaning. By utilizing all his senses, he aims to perceive as fully as possible the life of the landscape itself-- in order to gain intimations about his own life.

There is a progression in the poem that begins with the line "So deep you saw no reflection in it." This suggests that the "reflection" is there somewhere, and that the speaker is looking for it. Further, it suggests that the depths of the landscape are not, as previously, simply constituted as a realm of significance but as a place to find oneself. The progression I mention concretises his reflection: the movement is from "no reflection" to a ghostly "white face" revealed hovering "over the bottom" of a well, then to "echoes" and

a more substantial reflection (across which a rat--the poet-child's familiar foe--slaps). The progression ends with the poet's Narcissus-stance, his tranquil, loving, looking on himself: "I rhyme / To see myself, to set the darkness echoing." His final statement conflates the depths of landscape with the depths of the self, his childhood explorations into the landscape with his poetry, and the Narcissus-Echo complex with his poetic activity. The importance of the statement becomes clearer if we recall his earlier treatment of depths. What Heaney manages to do in "Personal Helicon" is populate the depths that earlier represented the "scareosome" Other with himself. The fascinations of introspection associated with the Narcissus-stance palliate the fear that earlier incapacitated the poet in his approach to mysteriously significant dark depths. His poetry provides a means of looking into those depths, and the volume that follows, significantly entitled Door into the Dark, takes up the challenge and furthers the progression.

## Chapter 2. Door into the Dark

### I. Introduction.

DD is essentially a volume of transition, a volume in which the young poet tries out adaptations to a securely created terrain and plays with alternatives before eventually finding a subject. At the root of the volume seems to be an impulse to progress beyond the inherent limitations of continuing to work in the mode developed in the first part of DN. Certain of the dynamics of Heaney's first volume are carried over into DD. The tension between closure and the challenges made to it appears again. The surface-depths dichotomy, alternative responses to landscape, and different methods of dealing artistically with landscape are all again issues.

I want to consider how DD takes over some of the problems of DN in altered form. The opening poems register the poet's need to develop. This he does in a way that ties in with the title Door into the Dark. He changes his approach to "darkness," reconstituting it as a field of multiple meanings and thus opens up new areas for investigation. And yet, despite the fact that several of the poems promise release, they end in different forms of closure.

The issue of landscape is once again crucial. The poet's different approaches to landscape illustrate best the primary tensions in the volume, and also provide an avenue for development in the final poems. Throughout the volume he tentatively investigates alternative artistic approaches to landscape: in some poems he continues using the "farm-mode" familiar from DN; in others he views a wider surface-area of the

landscape by driving; in the final poems he begins to conceive of landscape in social and historical terms--as a retentive entity. Penetration into this landscape is to discover what it hides and not, as in "Personal Helicon," to see what is hidden in the self.

I want to look at Heaney's use of the notion of "darkness" in the volume before considering the issues of closure and landscape.

## II. Opening Poems.

The position of prominence afforded poems that appear at the head of a volume makes the three poems with which DD opens somewhat puzzling. "Night-Piece," "Gone" and "Dream" invite commentary because of their position of prominence rather than because of any inherent value they might be thought to possess.

"Night-Piece" is compact and oblique, a surprising poem to appear at the beginning of the volume following DN. Its title is a nice play on words, suggesting that Heaney is giving us both a piece of the night and a poem about night. After DN, where most poems had a complete and lushly described action as their subject, this poem gestures towards both a new style and a new method of approaching personal experience. Its position is intended, perhaps, to set the tone for a volume in which we are to acknowledge that Heaney is capable of development and of a new type of poetry. With wearied resignation and reluctance clinging to its opening words, the poem begins as a return to some frightening and undefined recurrent experience. It is an evocation and an unwilling submission

to the dark mystery of an aspect of animal life apprehended at a point somewhere between dream and reality. The disturbing sounds of the short lines of the first stanza give way suddenly to the line "A sponge lip drawn off each separate tooth." This long line, with its multiple stresses, is a painfully prolonged look, in tranced close-up, at the manifestation of something repulsive yet fascinating in nature. The imagistic power of this central line, and of "Opalescent haunch, / Muscle and hoof" which follows it, is doubtlessly due in part to the coexistence in each line of the contrasting tactile qualities of "sponge lip" and "tooth," "Opalescent" and "haunch," and "Muscle" and "hoof."

The word "Bundled" makes the last line the most puzzling and oblique of the poem. The impression of inertness conjured up by the word contradicts the implied movement of "Dull pounding," and breaks down the distinctions established between what is heard and seen, between hardness and softness, darkness and light, revulsion and fascination. The horse in the poem could be giving birth, suffering physical agony, dying, or even copulating. The obscurity of the imagistic piece as a whole is perhaps intentional, the aim being not to reveal meaning but to create a sense of mingled revulsion, horror and fascination which draws attention to the inexplicability of the darkness and mystery addressed. The unsettling impact of the poem complicates our response to the poems which follow and suggests the simultaneous need and fear experienced by the various speakers of DD when going into the psychological depths of the self or the darkness of external nature.

In "Gone" the speaker feels not revulsion but nostalgia for the "hot reek" of animal life. The sterile lifelessness

evoked by his contemplation of equipment remaining in a stable after a horse has bolted combines with his poignant sense of loss to suggest this.

"Dream" is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, the darkness with which it deals is unambiguously the darkness of the personal subconscious. Heaney is seldom so explicit. Secondly, the violent implication of much of the imagery of DN is seen here to be internalized in the person of the speaker where earlier it was more likely to be located in the external world.

A feature that makes the poems, and especially "Night-Piece," significant is that they attempt to embody the experience with which they deal rather than be about that experience. The distinction is, I think, important. The possibilities of a new approach to Heaney's poetic subject is latent here. As the title of the volume suggests, one of his concerns is to penetrate the "dark" that for much of DN remains an unspecified, threatening domain. The first three poems are attempts at embodying that darkness in a manner that the poems which follow do not. "The Outlaw," "The Forge" and "In Gallarus Oratory" deal with literal spaces of enclosed darkness: they are "about" these spaces of darkness in a way that the first poems are not. It is perhaps not surprising then that these poems resemble the poetry of DN so much.

### III. Enclosed Darknesses.

What is the "dark" into which Heaney seeks admittance? The dark depths of DN are obviously carried over into the second volume while the first poems suggest the darknesses

of disturbing natural process ("Night-Piece") and of the personal subconscious ("Dream"). The slippage that allows "darkness" to signify both these phenomena is notable. The notion of darkness, like that of depth, admits of a metaphoric treatment that allows various meanings to be read out of its lack of specificity. It allows the poet an inordinate degree of imaginative freedom in his constitution of the object of inquiry. Throughout DD Heaney capitalizes on this potential.

"The Outlaw," "The Forge" and "In Gallarus Oratory"--which in some respects can hardly be distinguished from similar poems in DN--are lent an additional degree of significance by the fact that in them darkness is rendered, respectively, as the locale of animal sexual potency, of the first stirrings of the impulses of artistic creativity, and of communal religious worship.

There is a discrepancy in "The Outlaw" between expectations raised concerning the bull's potency and the presentation of the animal itself. The expectations are aroused by Kelly's words, "Go by // Get up on that gate," by the door whacking back against the wall, by the description of the bull as an "illegal sire," and, earlier and more subtly, by the rhythms of the predominantly trochaic lines "Once I dragged a nervous Friesian on a tether // Down a lane of alder, shaggy with catkin, / Down to the shed the bull was kept in." The difficulty experienced in dragging the cow is reflected in the opening rhythms. The closed couplet, with the metrical alteration in the last line, increases our expectation on arrival at the bull's shed. When the child and the cow later depart, rhythm and description combine in an iambic pentameter line ("I walked ahead of her, the rope now slack") to indicate

that the earlier tension of expectation has been released.

In the interim the expectations raised are partially disappointed by the fumbling animal, who exhibits impassivity and awkwardness rather than power. His "knobbed forelegs," the speed with which the sex act is completed, and the fact that it may not have been successful ("She'll do, . . . 'If not, bring her back"), combined with the speaker's use of mechanistic imagery to describe the animal ("old steam engine," "tank," "tipped-up load of sand"), cast doubts on the bull's potency. He is reduced to the level of an able tradesman working on the object of his labour: "No hectic panting, // Just the unfussy ease of a good tradesman."

After this the line describing the child's departure would seem to convey disappointment. Yet the final couplet of the poem effects a strange transformation:

I walked ahead of her, the rope now slack

While Kelly whooped and prodded his outlaw

Who, in his own time, resumed the dark, the straw.

With these lines an element of the irrational and the mysterious re-enter the poem. Kelly's whooping, the bull's becoming again an "outlaw" and entering his byre "in his own time," the use of the word "resumed" which suggests that a dark activity that was interrupted will continue: all these hint at something atavistic, still hidden, alien and beyond law. The "dark" and the "straw" are the only terms applied to the place resumed. Of course, if we recall the obvious contrast to the poem--Hughes's "The Bull Moses"--we see how mild Heaney's "dark" is. This does not, however, negate Heaney's attribution of a hidden sexual potency to the darkness of the byre, a

potency that contradicts what is seen in the light of day.

The discrepancy between what is seen and what imagined, between what takes place in the dark and in the light is addressed in "The Forge" as well. The primary discrepancy in the poem is between an outside (what is seen and known) and an inside (unseen, unknown, imagined). The things that are outside--"old axles and iron hoops rusting"--are familiar, visible, tangible objects; parts of the ordinary process of ageing and decay. Their concrete presences are entirely unlike the concretized visual and audial emanations from the forge. Those sounds have an onomatopoeic solidity: "the hammered anvil's short-pitched ring," the "hiss when a new shoe toughens in water." Insubstantial sound is concretized into something new and of practical use. What light there is in the forge takes the form of an "unpredictable fantail of sparks," something beautifully patterned and ordered. This heightens the hidden brilliance of the dark.

The anvil is the one substantial reality known "inside"; it appears at first as something concrete and visible, but is immediately mystified. Its existence is known, but its precise location is not ("somewhere"); its importance is conceded ("in the centre") but its nature is not fully understood ("Horned as a unicorn"). The unicorn image makes the anvil and the work associated with it magical, and yet it remains material ("at one end square") and substantially present--the initial spondee of the shorter line "Set there immov<sup>e</sup>able: an altar" fixes it in place. The transformation of anvil into unicorn and then into altar is attended by the transformation of the mystery and magic surrounding that concrete object into ritual and religious dedication, and these

changes raise the status of the labour performed on it (smithy work, poetry) whilst stressing that that labour is a service.

The blacksmith's art, like that of Heaney's other craftsmen-makers in DN and DD, is not verbal. He "grunts," but his actions speak in music: even his turning his back on the modern world is conveyed audially, in "slam and flick." The word "real" in the last line--"To beat real iron out, to work the bellows"--throws a disparaging light on everything observed outside the forge. It seems intended to make the outside world appear slightly out of touch with reality. The blacksmith's reality has to be beaten out and physically shaped. The process is difficult, in the Yeatsian sense. The main import of the last line is its suggestion of hard labour; as an artistic metaphor, the poem seems to claim that both magic and labour are part of the creative process. As a poem "that uses the dark, active centre of the blacksmith's shed as an emblem for the instinctive, blurred stirring and shaping of some kinds of art" (Heaney, Poetry Book Society Bulletin 61) it turns a tension between a physical "outside" and "inside" into a tension between the interiority of the secret life of the poet's feelings and the exteriority of all that exists outside him. I will later turn to consider whether a more interesting tension--that between what the poet knows and does not know--does not play a still more important role in the poem.

The speaker of "In Gallarus Oratory" is separated from the intensity of life he imagines--here and elsewhere--to be located in "darkness." The separation is not spatial, as in "The Outlaw" and "The Forge," but temporal. The speaker is aware of the residuum of a past intensity: "You can still

feel the community pack / This place"; "A core of old dark walled up with stone." Penetration to the dark interior of the oratory itself does not, however, constitute penetration to that intensity. That unfathomable entity for which the darkness acts as a metaphor is again deferred.

The religious mystery described in the poem is made subterranean and material rather than celestial or transcendental: "You might have dropped, a reduced creature / To the heart of the globe. No worshipper / Would leap up to his God off this floor." This reduction and union with both the oppressive darkness and the earth is not as debilitating as the inability to "leap up" would suggest. Structurally, the last line of the first stanza is the only one thus far that does not form part of a couplet. The form thus generates a need to continue.

In similar circumstances--"Under the black weight of their own breathing"--the lost community experienced the creative potential of the earth, being "Founded there." Immersion in the dark is a kind of incubation; it issues in a mystical vision of material reality: "And how he smiled on them as out they came, / The sea a censer, and the grass a flame." The pyrrhic substitution in this heroic couplet enhances the sense of lightness and release in the lines.

It need hardly be said that there are similarities between "The Outlaw," "The Forge" and "In Gallarus Oratory." It is perhaps more important to register that of these poems, "In Gallarus Oratory" represents certain departures. The poem is important in the long perspective of Heaney's work because it intimates that the "darkness" with which he is concerned possesses a historical component. It is also important because Heaney uses his concept of darkness strategically. In "The

"Outlaw" and "The Forge" the poet draws distinctions between outside and inside, between the seen and the unseen; these suggest that the dark is mysterious and unknown and the light mundane and ordinary. There is a fairly clear case of projection at work in the poems. The blacksmith's work is so obviously also poetic work that the notion of an unknown interior must be severely qualified. The oratory, on the other hand, does not enclose a space in which the poet can see what he wants to see; rather its significance derives from its ability to renew and purify perception. It is, paradoxically, darkness that facilitates a cleansed vision: the invisible provides the key to a cleansed perception of the visible. The thing renewed is the ordinary landscape (sea, grass) and the renewal is achieved through retreat and immersion in darkness.

Analogous instances of renewal are found in "The Peninsula," "Night Drive," and "The Plantation." One also recalls the well that "gave back your own call / With a clean new music in it" in "Personal Helicon." In all of these the renewed perception is either of landscape or achieved in the landscape. One is inevitably led in a consideration of how Heaney uses the notion of "darkness" in DD to his treatment of landscape. Before I consider this area of the volume I think it is instructive to explore the other area carried over from DN: the need to and the results of seeking to progress beyond the closural limitations of the mode outlined in the first part of DN.

To sum up the issues presently under discussion then: although I have so far only dealt with the poems at the beginning of the volume, one sees a pattern emerging that is true of the volume as a whole. "Darkness" is as much a strategic

metaphor to introduce into Heaney's work a number of relatively unrelated concerns (sexuality, the unconscious, history, artistic creativity, religious worship) as it is referential. The dark depths that terrify the child in the opening poems of DN are reconstituted as an area of multiple meanings. In all cases darkness and depths are locales of significance. The poet can approach these without the nervous frisson of DN because he has effectively populated the terrain with the very things that he seeks.

#### IV. Closure.

I want to recall two points from my discussion of DN. Firstly, correlatives of limitation and closure abound in Heaney's first volume. I would recall those aspects of form, technique and imagery I mentioned; Heaney's valuing of stasis over process, his use of a stable self at the centre of each narrated experience and the limited locales of these experiences will be remembered too. The second point concerns those elements which challenge closure. I specified the challenges of violence, history, the unknown, and alternative perceptions of landscape.

The poems in DD appear to challenge rigorously the correlatives of limitation I note above. Concretion of imagery gives way to images of fluidity and release; tight poetic forms and luxuriant language are replaced by sparer, more open forms and diction; the position of the speaker is more and more at the periphery of the experience described rather than at the centre of it; both temporal and spatial locales are significantly widened, and the poet moves way beyond both childhood

and the farm.

One cannot draw from such a point-by-point comparison the conclusion that DD represents a striking poetic departure. It would be more realistic to say that, with the exception of the last poems, DD is an extension rather than an adaption of the terrain and modes of DN. The reason for this lies in the note of hesitation that attends each point of progress, and in the fact that a different set of constraints comes into operation in the later poems.

We might begin by taking a poem out of its context and looking at it against the backdrop of the features I have taken as characteristic of Heaney's closural tendencies in DN. The poem is "Rite of Spring."

The poem charts the movement from fixity and stasis towards fluidity and release. It begins with the word "So," indicating that the poem is not self-enclosed, but comes out of a pre-existing context. The poem is concerned with the consequences of a particular process, with only one stage of a cycle. The first two stanzas employ that concrete realization of the environmental particular which characterised DN: the personification of winter and of the pump, the fixity of every image used, and the onomatopoeic import of "stuck," "pump," "plunger," "froze" and "lump," all of which are encased in an abb rhyme scheme, give the impression of an indissoluble cohesion of physical presence. The stanzas appear as "iced up" as the plunger. Thereafter the bodily implications of lost mobility in "handle / Paralysed at an angle" gives way to the physical embrace of ropes lapped "tight / Round stem and snout." The opening out of vowel sounds in the third stanza leads us to the final embodiment of release.

The last stanza reads,

That sent the pump up in flame.  
 It cooled, we lifted her latch,  
 Her entrance was wet, and she came.

The multiple commas in these lines and the galloping cadence of their almost anapaestic rhythm enforce a reading which makes each phrase a stage in the rapid and fluid progression towards the release of water. They also, to an extent, follow the rhythms of the sex act that speed up before the moment of orgasm, which is implied in the last line. The fulfilment conveyed by the achievement for the first time of an envelope rhyme is the fulfilment not only of the release of that which was blocked and pent-up, but the fulfilment of a sexual encounter.

The title of the poem makes the entire process sacramental; the cycle of the seasons, sexuality, and the combination and interaction of different elements (ice, iron, water, fire) are perceived as cleansing, regenerative and liberating. The description of released energy here is nowhere evident in DN, and it suggests parallels with the act of poetic creation: a freeing and discovery through language of pent-up internal resources. This suggestion is enhanced if we notice how well the image of "The plunger froze up a lump // In its throat" accords with a comment Robert Frost made about poetry, which Heaney quotes in his essay "Feeling into Words": "'a poem begins as a lump in the throat, a homesickness, a lovesickness. It finds a thought and the thought finds the words'" (qtd. in Preoccupations 49).

Heaney has certainly departed from the predominant mode of DN. By beginning with the word "So" this poem is not self-

enclosed: its speaking subject stands at the periphery rather than the centre of the poem. Heaney uses a short, spare line to replace the heavy pentameter line he earlier favoured. The promise of release is also a promise of speech, whereas DN abounded in correlatives of silence. The movement is from the concrete to the fluid rather than the reverse. Finally, the enclosures of the love poems in DN are absent from this, a different sort of love poem.

Nonetheless, features from DN linger. For a poem about release, it is remarkably contained. Consummation as much as liberation form its subject. The title ensures that the release achieved slots into a larger cyclical order, and the formal closure of the final rhyme underscores that dynamic. What we have then is the poet sensitively and tentatively extending his range. He does not leave his first ground but looks beyond it. What appears as promise at one point ends up being held fairly tightly in check at another. This pattern captures the dominant quality of DD.

"Rite of Spring" is one of a group of poems that deals with the subjects of sexuality, marriage and birth. The poems in DN that deal with related dimensions of the poet's affective life were amongst the most severely delimited in that volume. The sense of an opening out to which I have drawn attention in "Rite of Spring" is thus enabling, and we see some of the fruits of the development in the other poems in the group, which comprises "Undine," "The Wife's Tale," "Mother," "Cana Revisited," "Elegy," "Victorian Guitar," and perhaps "Night Drive" and "At Ardboe Point."

One result of Heaney's utilization of a freer mode is that these poems are opened to the tensions as well as the

consummation of the marital relationship. While the development is welcome, it should be noticed that each of the poems does not really open a vein that could be profitably explored. "Undine" closes itself off too neatly in what Calvin Bedient has called "myth-primer stuff" ("Music of What Happens" 16); "The Wife's Tale" cannot fight free of its Frostian model (though it provides an example of Heaney's need to widen his formal range); "Mother" has a disastrous conclusion, in which Heaney clumsily attempts to combine elements from the rest of the poem to facilitate closure; "Elegy" traps itself in the ingenuity of its conceits. "Cana Revisited" is a successful, if minor, achievement, and "Victorian Guitar" is chiefly interesting for its method--the revelation of a putative past through contemplation of an object in the present. The appearance of this method in this poem and in "Relic of Memory" is significant, since it inaugurates a procedure Heaney will use continuously thereafter. The procedure will culminate in the poet's contemplation of those bog bodies that, rising out of the bog and out of the past, rejoin the present.

I do not believe there is very much in this group of consecutive poems that need detain us. The promise one might read into "Rite of Spring" is not fulfilled in the poems that immediately follow it.

The two coupled poems that follow this group, and form the centre-piece of the volume, are "Relic of Memory" and "A Lough Neagh Sequence." Like "Rite of Spring," they promise developments away from the self-enclosing procedures found in DN. However, they eventually turn back upon themselves in new forms of enclosure. Heaney's use of a sequence form, and his provision of an introductory poem to the sequence

allow him to cast his net further and wider than he has before. He links the fishermen--the aquatic equivalents of his earlier labourers--not only with their environment, as before, but also with the natural rhythms and processes of non-human life. The familiar childhood experience with which the sequence closes finds a context that was noticeably lacking in the earlier work.

The potential of a poetic exercise of this sort is similar to that provided by "At a Potato Digging": a historical dimension is opened up; the enclosures of the childhood farm and of past personal experiences are transcended in the direction of a communal and national perspective; the interrelationship of population and natural environment becomes a subject, and a context against which to set personal experiences is set up. And, again like "At a Potato Digging," the entire enterprise succeeds in providing an entirely competent, if strangely disappointing result. The poet is caught in a presentation of the same unconscious, vaguely mystical union of labourer and land. The overarching order of the natural cycle becomes the ultimate enclosing factor. The child's fear is astonishingly similar to that of "Death of a Naturalist" and "Blackberry-Picking."

"Relic of Memory" illustrates the problem. It begins, in contrast to "Victoria<sup>n</sup> Guitar," with the poet's contemplation and only gives us the object contemplated at the end. The focus, therefore, is on the processes of the lough rather than on the "relic." Despite this fact, what is noteworthy about the poem is that it still tends towards stasis. The magical and inexplicable geological processes described tend towards closure of another sort, with the processes finished,

with the product--solid, static, exhibited, remembered--supplanting them as the object of contemplation.

i. Imagery of Closure.

The distinctive form of closure that characterises DD is more the result of Heaney's imagery than of any other feature of the poems. The imagery is patently unlike that of DN: fixity, stasis and concretion are not its defining features. Nevertheless, alongside imagery that suggests release and the flow of liquids--water, semen, birth waters--are images that, like the geological processes of "Relic," lead to other forms of closure. These are images of circularity, of reflexivity and of homecoming. Images of this type are found in DN, but they are used there with less insistence, and are found mainly in the love poems.

It is interesting that once movement comes to replace stasis as the predominant feature of the poems, so too are images of circularity and return insistently used, as if to nullify the potentially destabilizing influence of the movement. Several types of image fall under the rubric of a motif of circularity. I shall deal with these one at a time.

The first set of images I want to explore are spatial. In many poems, Heaney postulates an explicit or implicit centre around which, or to and from which, something moves. In "The Forge" the anvil is "somewhere in the centre . . . Set there immovable." The salmon in "The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon" and the eels in "A Lough Neagh Sequence" move away from their points of origin only to return recurrently. In the former poem the speaker places himself "in the centre," making contact

with the salmon inevitable. At the point at which he becomes most salmon-like--at the point of the kill and thereafter--he, like the salmon, returns home. The "outlaw" bull "resumed" the straw of his dark byre. The movement around the peninsula in "The Peninsula" ends with a "drive back home."

Astronomical imagery is used in a number of poems. Movement around a central point is seen as predetermined and necessary. The "core of old dark" in "In Gallarus Oratory" resembles "the heart of the globe." "Elegy" has astronomical rhythms broken to portend death. The most obvious example is found in "Beyond Sargasso"; the eel "drifted / into motion . . . / sure as the satellite's / insinuating pull / in the ocean, as true / to his orbit." Heaney occasionally goes beyond simply invoking motions of circularity and recurrence, and begins to intimate that there is something mystical, magical or religious about them. This happens in "The Forge," "A Lough Neagh Sequence" and "The Plantation."

The second set of images are temporal. With these the linear time of history is negated by a larger cyclical temporality. This is the effect of Heaney's treatment of the interrelation of birth and death in "Elegy" and of the life-cycles of the eels in "A Lough Neagh Sequence." He presents fishing as an emblem of the continuity of an almost archetypal human activity, which is unconscious (as in "At a Potato Digging"), religio-mystical, and unaffected by changes in technology and consciousness. Recurrence is also the recurrence of experiences. Sometimes these are personal ("Must you know it again?"; "you're in the dark again"; "Years / Later in the same fields. . . . Time / Confirmed the horrid cable"); sometimes they are impersonal ("the years / Shuttle through space invisibly";

"when did this begin? / This morning, last year, when the lough first spawned?"; "Take any minute. . . . Is it the Danes, / . . . Or the chinking Normans?").<sup>2</sup>

Heaney exploits repetition--usually of an entire phrase or sentence--as a poetic parallel for temporal recurrence. He thereby creates a sense of unchanging temporal patterns, or of a re-emergence into the present of what was always there: in "Requiem for the Croppies" he only repeats the word "barley" but the understood relation suggests recurrence--a dying back into the earth from which growth first came. In "Up the Shore" and "Bait" the sentences "The lough will claim a victim every year" and "Lamps dawdle in the field at midnight" illustrate my point.

Another poetic device is visual equivalence or similarity. Innumerable simple images of circles are scattered throughout the volume.<sup>3</sup> There is the more complex visual equivalence in "Lifting" between the "knot of black and pewter belly" that "knits itself, four-ply, / With the furling, slippy / Haul" and "stays continuously one," and the boats' wakes, that are "enwound as the catch / On the morning water." The "world's live girdle" in "Vision" deserves comment, as do the "charmed rings," "circle you travelled" and "whispering treadmill" of "The Plantation."

Amongst the resources Heaney uses is the pun, used twice in the line "she's at sea in grass / and damned if she'll turn" from "The Return." The first pun points to the contradictory nature of the land ("grass") as both alien--since "she's at sea"--and also as home--since her natural home is the sea. In terms of the second pun, the eel is "damned" if she turns because not turning is her destiny, but she is also "damned"--

literally restricted--if she turns and so must continue.

Lastly, perhaps most interestingly, there is the reflexive image. Heaney uses several of these in DD:

The leggy birds stilted on their own legs,  
Islands riding themselves out into the  
fog . . .

things founded clean on their own shapes,  
("The Peninsula")

The breakers pour//Themselves into themselves,  
("Girls Bathing")

a wick that is  
its own taper and light  
through the weltering dark.  
("The Return")

You had to come back  
To learn how to lose yourself,  
To be pilot and stray--witch,  
Hansel and Gretel in one.  
("The Plantation")

The example most pertinent to my purpose here is the one from "Girls Bathing." The reflexive image suits Heaney's aim exactly here: the image turns back on itself, and keeps doing so. The breakers which "pour//Themselves into themselves" will continue to do so eternally, being both the container and that which is poured into it. A temporal infinitude is created in an image that also conjures up visual circularity.

The extent to which Heaney uses all the above forms of

imagery might make one conclude that the self-imposed limitations of DN have merely been replaced at a more complex plane by different forms of closure. At one level, such a conclusion is justified. There can be little doubt that the desired movement away from the time, place and people of DN is not fully achieved; these remain at the centre around, to, and from which the poet imaginatively moves. There is also a falling off in the emotional power produced in a poem like "Death of a Naturalist" by confrontation with the disruptive unknown. Not only has Heaney populated the darkness and thereby tamed it to a certain extent, but in DD he has also tied its threatening potential to larger, ultimately comforting rhythms.

Thus, the child's fear in "A Lough Neagh Sequence" cannot but be seen against natural processes that have been penetrated, understood, and rendered accessible to poetic representation. The dark processes of animal sexuality, reproduction and instinct are seen against a humanized backdrop that is naturalized, made cyclical and predictable, and also mystified. The threatening potential of the sequence is palliated by these comforting associations. "The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon" suffers similar weaknesses. The natural cycle, the inevitability of the conflict, the connectedness and eventual transubstantiation of fisher and fish combine to give the poem a mild and unthreatening pallor.

The effects of the devices I have been discussing are not all negative, of course. In a consideration of the development of a poet it is important to locate those features of the poetry that open up areas for exploration even if they themselves are ordinary or unsuccessful. The closures associated with the motif of circularity are, in this light, revealing.

The life-processes of the eels in "A Lough Neagh Sequence" provide the basis for a perception of history as recurrence. In Heaney's later work he blurs the distinctions between natural process and historical time, and begins to see history as essentially static, its unalterable patterns having been laid down in prehistory. The roots of Heaney's historical consciousness, such as it is, are laid down in "At a Potato Digging" and developed in "A Lough Neagh Sequence."

Heaney attributes sacramental qualities to activities and occurrences that repeat themselves throughout history. The ordinary activities of eel-fishing, bathing, smithy-work, pumping water, and even giving birth, are familiar and mundane but the immemorial cycles of which they form part render them magical in the poet's eyes. By extension, he is able to begin to see the miraculous and the magical in the ordinary--the ordinariness of his wife ("Night Drive"), of the landscape ("The Peninsula"), of a group of bathing girls ("Girls Bathing"), of mosquitoes ("At Ardboe Point"), and so on. There is in that extension a very important shift: by detaching the sense of the sacramental or magical from immemorial human labour and seeing it also manifest in the ordinary occurrences of daily life, he takes a step in the direction of his later work. He begins to see potential meanings behind the most familiar objects and occurrences. It is not long before seemingly insignificant objects and landmarks begin to supplant the extraordinary experience and the archetypal labourer as the subject of poems. When whinbushes, clay and bogholes supplant the human actor at the centre of poems, as they do at the end of DD, an important shift is taking place. The temporal circularity seen in DD is in this sense

enabling.

The closures of DD are "larger" than those in DN. They are closures of aeons, of geological processes, of archetypes, not the closures of the concrete particular or of the specific anecdote. They are communal and national rather than individual or familial. They are also the closures of (circular) movement and not of stasis. In particular poems they are the closures of the shifting gaze that returns to the same place ("The Peninsula," "Night Drive") rather than the fixed, close-up stare into some dark depth ("Death of a Naturalist," "Personal Helicon"). The movement and the shifting gaze take place in landscape: the whole of Ireland and of the continent form the widened locale of these poems. The poet moves away from the farm and into the landscape beyond. The most important evidence of poetic development in DD is found in two sets of poems that deal with landscape in two different ways. It is to these that I now want to turn.

#### V. Landscape.

In DN Heaney treats landscape in one of two ways: either as a set of external objects the verbal transcription of which gives his poems their peculiar texture, or as a realm of hidden meaning, needing to be penetrated, dominated and forced to yield up that meaning. I have drawn on the dichotomy of surfaces and depths, and the tension between the two terms, in explaining the nature of his treatment of landscape in that volume. The tension between these contrasting perceptions continues into DD. Two interesting things happen in DD: darkness is constituted as a locale of multifarious meanings--

an indefinite realm capable of sustaining just about any meaning ascribed to it, and the range of topography under scrutiny is dramatically widened to encompass all of Ireland and, in "Night Drive," the continent beyond.

The poems that deal with landscape can be divided fairly neatly into two groups: poems in which the poet or speaker moves along a horizontal axis, through the landscape--usually in a car, and poems in which he looks down, into the landscape. It is my intention to deal with the differences between these methods of representing landscape. I also want to suggest that the one group of poems offers Heaney a mode of perceiving landscape that he toys with in DD but more or less abandons thereafter, whilst the other opens up the vein that in time gives him his most important subject and a poetic procedure to deal with it.

It should be noted that the poems I assign to these two groups are not the only poems which deal with landscape. Indeed, one of the significant features of DD, as of Heaney's work generally, is that the majority of his poems deal in one way or another with landscape. When set alongside one another in groups, the specific poems I have selected illuminate a peculiar tension in Heaney's poetry.

#### i. The Driving Poems

"The Peninsula," "Night Drive," "At Ardboe Point," "Elegy for a Still-Born Child" and, to a lesser extent, "Shoreline" share a number of features. All concern, in whole or in part, a speaker we can identify as the poet driving through the landscape. In all of them, the landscape is viewed: the

principle organ of perception is the eye, and the stance of the poet is meditative. "Shoreline," which acts as an intermediary poem between the groups, differs somewhat. In it the landscape is wider, it is identifiably Irish, and the poet not only looks at it but also listens to it. The poem is also only a "driving poem" by implication: "Turning a corner, taking a hill. . . ." Unlike the others, it does not make the poet's driving position explicit. The first four poems are again similar in that the landscape--the exterior--inverts itself to become a metaphor for the interiority of the poet himself. He uses landscape as his means of penetrating into and revealing facets of his affective life. A final similarity between the poems may derive from his decision to write poems about driving through a landscape: a phenomenological distance between subject and object is created. The car encloses the poet, it moves, and it provides a literal barrier between poet and landscape. These obvious observations are not as trivial as they initially appear.

For my purposes, "The Peninsula" is the most important poem of this group, and I shall base my discussion on it. It is the one poem of Heaney's that deals with the landscape as quintessentially a surface phenomenon. He starts the poem with the statement, "When you have nothing<sup>more</sup> to say. . . ." From this one reads into the instruction "just drive" the implication that something worth saying should turn up. Significantly, the first topographical feature mentioned by the speaker does not belong to the land; it is the sky: "The sky is tall as over a runway." The sky, empty and overarching, is not alien (as it was in "Honeymoon Flight") but inviting: the reference to the runway suggests the possibility of leaving

the earth. Movement in the poem is in fact peculiarly detached from the land itself. Nothing is touched, no contact is made; the potential is always present but always deferred: "The land without marks so you will not arrive // But pass through, though always skirting landfall."

The poet travels along an edge, and when the voracious dark threatens ("At dusk, horizons drink down sea and hill, / The ploughed field swallows the whitewashed gable") he is again found along a border--this time the border between the naturalistic dark of night and a different darkness. He is "in the dark again," but this dark is not that of night; it is another of those curiously creative locales that dot DD under this name: it is an imaginative "dark." From within it he can reconstitute things, not in the light of day, but in a preternatural clarity:

Now recall

The glazed foreshore and silhouetted log,  
That rock where breakers shredded into rags,  
The leggy birds stilted on their own legs,  
Islands riding themselves out into the fog . . . .

This gives us a clue to the nature of the movement in the poem. It is a flickering movement that captures the particular as a momentary frozen image before moving on. The poet does not stop; his movement is perpetual, and it is circular: "And drive back home. . . ." The larger movement is again a circular one away from a centre ("home") and back to it. Perhaps surprisingly, there is "still . . . nothing to say" except "that now you will uncode all landscapes / By this: things founded clean on their own shapes, / Water and ground

in their extremity."

The poem has at its root the desire for an aesthetic freedom of perception. The poet does not feel bound by any duty of representation to an objective landscape; his presented landscape is "recalled" in the "dark" and is registered at a pre-verbal level ("still with nothing to say"). The poet does not represent the particular landscape of the peninsula but discovers a key with which to "decode all landscapes." His subject is the quiddity of landscape itself, not this or that landscape. And when we look to see what constitutes this key, it is simply "Water and ground in their extremity"; it is the foreshore, bog, birds, and islands of the poet's reflexive images. The use of these images is significant. A reflexive image creates a closed circuit. The birds or islands are quintessentially themselves and yet not quite themselves. The birds are "stilted"; they are objects acted upon by an agent or force separate from themselves and yet there can be no-one but themselves to do so; the islands both ride and are ridden. The "meaning" of the objects is that they are themselves--absolutely. Objects in this landscape are "things founded on their own shapes." They hide nothing, "mean" nothing, represent nothing but themselves. There is therefore nothing to say about them: their existence is their only possible statement. And this is the key the poet receives with which to "decode all landscapes."

The obvious paradox--that he needed to write a poem saying that nothing needs to be said--points to the crucial problems of representing this mode of perceiving landscape: ultimately, a verbal transcription of the recalled scene that captures it in all its preternatural clarity is the ideal (yet impossible

and therefore futile) aim of a poetic form responsive to a landscape of surfaces. Nothing need--indeed nothing can--be said about a landscape that simply is; the ascent into language makes for misrepresentation, not representation. The poet is left "still with nothing to say"; unless, of course, he talks about his feeling this.

This extreme form is never seen again in Heaney's poetry. In "Night Drive," on the contrary, there is a perfect overlap of language--in its purest referential function, the name--and place: "Signposts whitened relentlessly. / Montreuil, Abbéville, Beauvais / Were promised, promised, came and went, / Each place granting its name's fulfilment." Objects flicker by in this poem too. The absolute material presence of Heaney's earlier landscape is here eroded by the speaker's act of driving, which necessitates a perception of the landscape as a collection of disparate phenomena that are momentarily present before disappearing. The concrete outlines of a palpable reality dissolve into the less substantial "smells of ordinariness" or "Rain and hay and woods on the air."

It is impossible when moving at speed for the fixed gaze to constitute itself. As a result, nothing can fracture and reveal dark depths. This, I think, gives us one reason why Heaney chooses to move through landscape in these poems. In later "driving poems" (the dedicatory poem to WO, which is also part IV of "Whatever You Say Say Nothing"; "The Tollund Man") the protective hermeticism of the vehicle is a buffer between the poet and a landscape of atavisms and threatening historical forces which threaten to erupt into the present of the landscape and of the poet's consciousness. At this point in DD, no such threat is yet imaginable. But the movement

of the car prevents its very possibility--even if stanza 3 of "Night Drive" contains disqu<sup>e</sup>itening notes. The note of pain and mortality in the stanza is almost as insubstantial as the "smells of ordinariness." It becomes part of an emotional geography as well as a material one, and coalesces with the poem's other elements to form a geographical whole which is imaginatively and emotionally rather than empirically conceived. In this emotional geography the elements partake of the speaking self's own longings:

I thought of you continuously  
 A thousand miles south where Italy  
 Laid its loin to France on the darkened sphere.

Again, the ordinary is rendered magical and renewed from within a meaningful "dark."

The conception of landscape as an emotional geography rather than a concrete material presence represents an important advance for the poet. The final lines of "Elegy"--the lines that use the driving motif--fit into the new pattern in an interesting way. The poet's "lonely journeys" are through a landscape described in the following way:

I drive by remote control on this bare road  
 Under a drizzling sky, a circling rook,

Past mountain fields, full to the brim with cloud,  
 White waves riding home on a wintry lough.

These lines, by far the most powerful in the poem, show Heaney handling landscape with acute sensitivity. One is simultaneously made aware of the topographical phenomena mentioned as unadorned existential entities--simply present, meaning nothing--and of the force of the poet's affective situation

impelling them towards meaning. The lines capture almost exactly the border between a landscape that is simply there and a landscape conceived in terms of pathetic fallacy. The bare road almost reflects the poet's emptiness; the active sky and rock, the full mountain fields, and the waves hover on the point of contrasting with the poet's desolation--telling him of larger cycles that are timeless, pre-given and "natural." But they do not. The impulse to read meaning into landscape could almost be the subject of these lines. I do not know of a place in Heaney's poetry where the delicacy of this perception is repeated.

ii. The Final Poems.

This brings us to "Shoreline," a poem which acts as a bridge between the group of driving poems and the group made up of the last poems in the volume, the poems from "The Given Note" to "Bogland." I have noted features of this poem which distinguish it from the other "driving poems": the landscape is specified as Ireland, it draws on more than a simply visual perception of landscape, and the act of driving is implicit rather than explicit.

Like "The Peninsula" this poem deals with a shoreline--the border between land and sea. The differences between the poems are, however, striking. In "The Peninsula" the poet moves in an unimpeded, almost gliding manner along the edge of the land. The landscape provides no points of resistance: "the land without marks." The shoreline of the later poem is filled with topographical features which are meticulously observed, which invite attention, and which continually suggest that more than topography is at issue. The movement

of the poem takes its speaker around the whole of Ireland, and he speaks of it as embattled on all sides, thereby adding to distinctions made in previous poems between surfaces and depths the sense of a silent and insidious confrontation.

The sea's invasion of the land is partly insidious: "there's the sea / Sidling and settling to / The back of a hedge"; "A tide/Is rummaging in / At the foot of all fields, / All cliffs and shingles." In the lines "Haphazard tidal craters march / The corn and the grazing" the verb used implies the anticipation of military conflict, which is to be taken up later with "Basalt stands to" and "Strangford, Arklow, Carrickfergus, / Belmullet and Ventry / Stay, forgotten like sentries." But "march" also signifies how close the ocean, and all that it represents, is to the everyday activities of growing corn and grazing.

The conflict between land and sea is not only prepared for ("stands to"; "sentries") but actually taking place: "Both ocean and channel // Froth at the black locks / On Ireland. And strands/Take hissing submissions / Off Wicklow and Mayo." The process is eternal and ongoing--"Take any minute"--and recalls previous invasions of another sort: "Is it the Danes, / A black hawk bent on the sail? / Or the chinking Normans?" These lines contain the most explicit reference to the social history of Ireland since those early poems which were set during moments of historical crisis. Where "The Peninsula" was happy to pass over the particulars of landscape, in "Shoreline" these are insistently drawn upon in place-names, the etymologies of which point to a language also made up of historical layers and filled with historical resonances. Where landscape was a means of penetrating to a personal situa-

tion in the driving poems, in order to evoke aspects of the poet's affective life, here it is Ireland's history and not the poet's past or his feelings which forms the focus of attention. This is not the history of geological, animal, or vegetable life processes, as in "A Lough Neagh Sequence," "Relic of Memory" and "Whinlands," but a specifically social history. The other important feature of the poem is the shift from eye to ear, from looking at the landscape to listening to it. In the driving poems the eye is an organ of mastery that controls, composes and selects features of the landscape for representation. By becoming passive and receptive--by listening--the poet gives the landscape a chance to speak. The desire to have the landscape speak implies that the poet's function is no longer to represent the landscape but to hear and interpret it. What it speaks is its own history. In this moment, the political and cultural landscape of WO and North emerges. It will be important that the poet can hear the landscape, since only natives of the land will be shown to bear the intimacy with landscape that allows this. From this viewpoint one can look back at the naturalization of the relationship between labourers and land in "Digging," "At a Potato Digging," and "A Lough Neagh Sequence" and see in it the seeds of a political purpose that is not yet fully visible. The first stirrings of such a purpose fill the final poems of DD. "Shoreline" in particular is filled with historical and political reverberations.

In the final poems, Heaney begins to uncover the path to the central subject of his later work in WO and North: the "matter of Ireland," as it is found in the landscape of that place. "Shoreline" treats of a landscape that is no

longer a surface, that no longer lends itself to the imaginative transformations of the poet's personal life. The landscape is rather instinct with signs that need to be deciphered, and it is the landscape itself that starts being placed at the centre of the poems. In the final poems Heaney does not present himself as a source of meaning--what he was in effect doing in his treatment of landscape in the driving poems. Instead, the landscape itself is presented as having something to give up. I have traced the procedure by which Heaney populates the darkness of the first poems in the volume; the appearance of an historical aspect in the dark depths of landscape must be seen analogously as a consequence of the poet's need to see this.

Heaney moves towards a new conception of landscape gradually. It does not spring fully formed out of his past writings. The process passes through a number of gradations, and I see the final poems reflecting these. I shall deal with the poems without the presumption that in them some consecutive progression is at work. They are not sequentially narrativised in any way, though later poems will indicate how the discoveries contained in each of them can be brought into meaningful interaction.

It is interesting, nonetheless, to look at two of the poems in conjunction. The poems are "Whinlands" and "The Given Note." "Whinlands," perhaps more than any other single poem in DD, shows the determination with which the poet worries at the surface phenomena of landscape in an attempt to make the landscape yield up what lies hidden beneath its cluttered surface. As in "Trout" and "In Small Townlands" we have metaphoric exuberance, an attempt through an astonishing variety

of uses of figurative language to penetrate the landscape's surface. We have a voracious eye of a different sort here: the poet's gaze shifts from one part of the whin bush and of the hills on which it grows to another as his imagination shifts from association to association, the direction being provided by the associations of language itself. The life of each item is taken over, noted and discarded in the almost anxious shifting of poetic attention. The contemplation (and the poem) only ends--and then ends immediately--when the imaginative exercise yields up something from the past and from human history--the "battlefield" of the last line.

This is a different conception of landscape to that contained in "The Given Note," which immediately precedes "Whinlands." In the latter poem the poet penetrates the landscape with the use of his eye; in "The Given Note" the landscape has its own naturally expressive language which must be heard, not as "Strange noises" or "bits of a tune" but as "the whole thing." The artist-figure in the poem goes "alone into the island" and brings back "the whole thing." The correct responsiveness--"hearing"--is needed, as are discipline and control ("He blamed their fingers and ear / As unpractised, their fiddling easy"). Although it is less "easy" here, the artist's role--as in "The Diviner"--is that of a mediator or conduit for the landscape's latent language of music: "It comes off the bow gravely, / Rephrases itself into the air." The "meaning" of the landscape is all around the perceiver here, and has to be controlled and interpreted. In "Whinlands," on the other hand, it is displaced and hidden, something to which the poet has to penetrate.

The example of "The Plantation" makes it clear that the

final poems in DD cannot be seen as a coherent group but should be perceived as a collection of possibilities. The poem itself is in fact just such a collection. It stands between the possibilities offered by the driving poems and those of the last poems or, more correctly, stands at some distance from both along the axis that divides them. It is one of Heaney's most interesting early landscape poems.

In it we see the extent to which the concrete environment and the definable limits of the central perceiving self in DN have been broken down. The relationship between exteriority and interiority in Heaney's first volume was a relationship between separable realms which were seen to reflect one another in a specific and limited number of ways. In "The Barn," for example, the dimension of exteriority simply became a dimension of interiority, the bats and rats of the external world becoming metaphoric containers for the speaker's internal emotion of fear. It is more difficult to point to the distinctions between interiority and exteriority in "The Plantation," the distinctions between them being not so much collapsed as never fully visible in the first place. The poem is also distanced from the driving poems of DD by the poet's symbolic act of leaving the car to penetrate into the woods. Abandoning both pure description and detached meditation, Heaney here imagines landscape as an experience and not as a collection of empirically derived objects. This makes it impossible to distinguish between what is physically "out there" and what is being projected onto that external dimension.

The poem does not belong to that group of poems which take as their subject a hidden meaning in the landscape, a meaning which exists beyond the speaker and to which he needs

to penetrate. He does not hold the landscape in the grip of sight, turn it into a platform from which to consider other facets of his emotional life, or perceptually batter it into yielding up its meaning. The poem is rather, to a degree, about the capriciousness of the imagination. Speaking from within the environment, the poet tells of the woods playing tricks with sight and with imagination, creating potential meanings everywhere: "Any point in ~~that~~ wood / Was a centre, birch trunks / Ghosting your bearings, / Improvising charmed rings // Wherever you stopped." This has an interesting bearing on those numerous points in DD which are concerned with centres and circularity. In the wood, everywhere can become a centre since no centre is fixed but is extemporaneously constituted by the imagination. The centre is simultaneously nowhere and everywhere, and all movement rotates around constantly shifting centres: "Though you walked a straight line / It might be a circle you travelled / With toadstools and stumps // Always repeating themselves. / Or did you re-pass them?" Heaney's ideal centre, towards which so much of the movement of DD and his later work is directed, is simultaneously absent and present everywhere.

The speaker goes on to talk casually about what elsewhere in Heaney's poetry takes on the force of historical veracity: "Someone had always been there / Though always you were alone." The experience is exemplary: it suggests that the elusive meaning Heaney so often seeks in the landscape is not a stable constant awaiting discovery ("Its limits defined, / So they thought, from outside") but simply the product ascribed to the unknown by the imagination. It is only one among many possible such "meanings." Here the experience is totally

beneficent and unthreatening:

You had to come back  
 To learn how to lose yourself,  
 To be pilot and stray--witch,  
 Hansel and Gretel in one.

The poet does not take pleasure in finding the self but in losing it, in suspending the self in the indeterminacy of the self-reflexive or self-infolding image of being simultaneously astray and directed, doing the directing and being free of it, beckoning, drawing on, inviting (like the witch of the fairy tale) and exploring, being beckoned and drawn in, leaving the known (like Hansel and Gretel). This is a poem about the pleasures of suspending the search for meaning, a savouring of the drifting yet directed aimlessness of the imagination. It also might be thought to question the central drive of Heaney's poetry: the attempt to read meanings out of the landscape as if they were concretely embedded there.

To provide the contrast, and show the real way forward, Heaney has written "Bann Clay." With "Bogland," the poem opens directly onto the terrain of WO and North. Heaney adds a geological dimension to the "soundings" of geography and vegetation he makes in "Shoreline" and "Whinlands," and states most unambiguously and explicitly the motivation that underlies most of the final poems: "Under the humus and roots / This smooth weight. I labour / Towards it still."

Like "Whinlands" and "Bogland," the title "Bann Clay" forms an integral part of the poem. The poet aims to comprehend what is implied by those first ostensibly simple words. The poem begins with an evocation of a memory of the labourers who worked with the clay. Their activity is recalled, as

are the physical qualities of the clay itself. The subterranean clay of the first two stanzas is rich; it is laden with the linguistic ore that is reminiscent of, yet a progression beyond, the lush realisation of objects and processes in earlier poems like "Death of a Naturalist" and "Churning Day."

After the relatively impersonal observation of the first stanzas, the self of the poet and his attitudes begin to be insinuated into the description, implicitly at first in the use of "Relieved," "hoarded," and "ripen," but more so with the shift from past to present tense in the fourth stanza and thereafter:

It underruns the valley,  
The first slow residue  
Of a river finding its way.  
Above it, the webbed marsh is new,

Even the clutch of Mesolithic  
Flints.

Geological fact and imaginative perception are fused; the poet communicates values and attitudes by his selection of details rather than by any explicit commentary. The darkness that the clay implies is the darkness of the unfathomable past, but, unlike the piece of stone in "Relic of Memory," it is not so much the product of the past and of natural processes as part of those processes--processes which are yet uncompleted: "The first slow residue"; "the webbed marsh is new, // Even the clutch of Mesolithic / Flints."

The clay is emblematic of the darkness of the past, but it is also a "door into the dark." The speaker remembers having once unclogged a drain and, with the freedom and release achie-

ved by its water, having perceived the presence of the "old floor" of the clay. The memory leads into the poem's final lines:

Under the humus and roots  
 This smooth weight. I labour  
 Towards it still. It holds and gluts.

This acknowledgement of immanent meaning in the material realm ("Under the humus and roots / This smooth weight") is not new in Heaney's poetry, but his attitude towards it is. A willed determination to enter into the darkness of the landscape and the self is more evident here than in earlier poems: "I labour / Towards it." This changes one's perception of the personal anecdote recorded immediately prior to the last stanza. Heaney is not so much concerned with the immediacy of a particular remembered experience, but with a state of mind. He is determined to relive those moments of perception when the landscape and its history--conceived as a timelessly present geological formation--were opened, allowing some aspect of their packed depths to be momentarily exposed to the poet's vision. Thus digging for clay that "holds and gluts" ("holds" because it remains securely part of the unyielding earth, but also because it captivates the speaker; "gluts" because of the surfeit of meaningful information it holds back) becomes the archetypal activity of the young poet, whose entry into darkness remains, at the late stage of this penultimate poem, unaccomplished.

In the last poems of DD, thus, a different procedure begins to emerge. Landscape is public in the poems. The clay sought in "Bann Clay" is avowedly public property (not personally owned property but geological property); the picnic

spot of "The Plantation" is public, and the bogs of "Bogland" form part of "our" rather than "my" land. The detritus that emerges in "Whinlands" and the sounds of Danes and Normans are, respectively, to become the "part-objects" of WO and the Vikings of North. A drift "inwards" is ventured again, but this time it is supposedly the landscape's own properties that are revealed, not the childhood fantasies or primal scenes of Heaney's earlier work.

The metaphor of the bog used in "Bogland" gives Heaney a route to his true subject and his later poetry. The poem begins:

We have no prairies  
 To slice a big sun at evening--  
 Everywhere the eye concedes to  
 Encroaching horizon,

Is wooed into the cyclops' eye  
 Of a tarn. Our unfenced country  
 Is bog that keeps crusting  
 Between the sights of the sun.

In "Shor<sup>e</sup>line" Heaney speaks of Ireland as an island looking out to sea; here the island turns in upon its inexhaustible self. Heaney is intent on rendering the cultural landscape which emerges here as distinctively Irish. He draws distinctions between an American landscape and the Irish one immediately, the physical distinctions being supplemented by the linguistic discrepancy between the Americanism "prairies" and "tarn." He reinforces this emphasis when describing "the Great Irish Elk" in the following stanza. In Preoccupations, he says, "I . . . had been reading about the frontier and

the west as an important myth in the American consciousness, so I set up--or rather, laid down--the bog as an answering Irish myth" (55). His answering myth is implicitly formulated as one of the Irish consciousness: his use of the plural "We" to open the poem indicates that the plunge into self and landscape gives him access to a communal voice.

If we compare the concluding poems of DN and DD, we find a similarity of stance but a difference in subject. In "Personal Helicon" Heaney looks into a well, in "Bogland" into a bog. In poetry, bodies of clear, still water lend themselves to metaphors of reflection, transparency and contemplation (see Coetzee, "SA Landscape" 7). Heaney's aim, in "Personal Helicon," is to "see myself. . . ." The bog, in contrast, has murkiness as its defining feature. One cannot "see" oneself by looking into the bog; what it has to give up is its own materials. We could once again adapt Weiskel's observation to assert that the position of the speaker in this poem renders the bog capable of meaning anything. Projection is an obvious possibility. It seems to me that, in this poem, Heaney reads into these depths an historical aspect: it is Ireland that will be revealed in the form of its preserved artifacts. The "American" option--a perception of expanses, of boundlessness--is not taken; "our" experience is an introspective one.

The precise, usual line of demarcation between prairie and sun in the poem's second line is not available to the Irish consciousness. Landscape here ("Everywhere" being Ireland--another indication of the poet's obsession with his own national landscape) is something that cannot be so precisely defined. It is consuming and seductive, almost claustrophobic: "the eye concedes to / Encroaching horizon, // Is wooed into

the cyclops' eye / Of a tarn." The movement of these reluctant yet conceding lines is "Inwards and downwards," towards a subaqueous centre of mythic significance that draws everything, including the speaker's consciousness and the horizon, towards it. The phenomenological distance between speaker and landscape set up by the car in the driving poems is broken down completely; the poet is here almost ingested by the land. The resultant almost claustrophobic intimacy communicates a sense that the landscape will not yield up its secret to anyone but the native--he whose link with the land goes further back, and deeper, than any new, colonizing, perspective. By opposing "American" and "Irish" perceptions of landscape, Heaney may be pointing to the inappropriateness of an American aesthetic to an Irish subject. He may also be revealing that "defensive love of . . . territory" which he ascribes to a colonial consciousness (Preoccupations 150-51). Edna Longley has remarked that "'Bogland' registers the advantages as well as the disadvantages of a retentive racial memory" ("Searching the Darkness" 124). In the lines which follow, one notices a cloying, claustrophobic sense of an inescapable historical presence as well as the celebration.

The country of the community whose voice is here adopted is "unfenced"--unrestricted and unenclosed, but also unrestricted and unenclosable. It is "bog that keeps crusting / Between the sights of the sun." The very sound of the word "bog" suggests suction, making the country unfenceable. Ireland is embattled, not by the sea as in "Shoreline," but by the sun itself. It "keeps crusting," its glutinous substructure continually hardening into static surfaces, which retain, however, merely a surface solidity. Underneath the layered

strata created by the process of continual crusting remains the semi-fluid depths of bog.

The suggestive possibilities of bogland appear inexhaustible, yet Heaney delays mention of this inexhaustibility until the end of the poem. As a way of approaching it, he limits himself first to literal representations of facts that have the status of personal memories (see Preoccupations 54-55). These find congruences with the "memory" of the landscape:

They've taken the skeleton  
Of the Great Irish Elk  
Out of the peat, set it up  
An astounding crate full of air.

Butter sunk under  
More than a hundred years  
Was recovered salty and white.  
The ground itself is kind, black butter

Melting and opening underfoot,  
Missing its last definition  
By millions of years.

In these lines the bog begins to reveal some of the secrets of its mysterious historical hoard. Objects and processes which illustrate its magicality are revealed: the bog which absorbs, preserves and yields up "the skeleton / Of the Great Irish Elk" and "salty and white" butter. These are examples of what Heaney calls "[t]he objects, the material culture by which the nation identifies itself, [which] were mostly found in the bogs" ("North: Silent Awarenesses" 167). This quote hides the fact that the objects raised from the bog

are also raised by the poetic imagination. There are unmistakable correspondences between the action of the poem and Heaney's conception of poems as things which rise "like bodies . . . out of a bog, almost complete, seeming to have been laid down a long time ago, surfacing with a touch of mystery" (Preoccupations 34).

As an object in itself, the Elk appears to contain very little: "crate full of air." Yet surrounding that very insubstantiality is some preserved outline or internal structure ("the skeleton") of a heroic past. The poet finds it "astounding." Heaney is at this stage of the poem registering the "advantages" of the retentive racial memory.

If we compare "Bogland" to "Churning Day" we notice a difference between the poet's conception of poetic subject matter contained in the line "our brains turned crystals full of clean deal churns," and that contained in the lines,

They'll never dig coal here,

Only the waterlogged trunks

Of great firs, soft as pulp.

This deceptively casual recognition of what is contained by the bog (and by implication, by the depths of the poetic imagination) does not seek to bring to light a fixed and finished concrete brilliance ("crystals"), but to evoke something less definable, more mysterious, "softer" ("the waterlogged trunks / Of great firs"). Landscape, memory and the poetic imagination do not imply a linear history which results in the creation of an end product ("coal"), but a history of continuity, of processes always at work, which links the present with the past by carrying into the present the trace-elements of its

entire past.

In my discussion of "The Plantation" I drew attention to the freedom afforded the poet by his new conception of landscape. Rather than seeing it as a collection of empirically verifiable objects, he imagines landscape as an experience. In "Bogland" something similar occurs with Heaney's conception of history. In "At a Potato Digging," "For the Commander of the 'Eliza,'" and "Requiem for the Croppies," Heaney distances himself, by the use of a spectator position and the adoption of personae, from significant occurrences in the chain of events which make up Irish history. In "Bogland" he abandons this concern with the specificity of the historical moment and reduces the distance between self and history by dramatizing his own imaginative experience of history:

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.

The movement "Inwards and downwards" is the archetypal Heaney movement, and is not only a movement into the unfathomable darkness of the historical past and of the self but, like the movement of the salmon in "The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon" and of the eels in "A Lough Neagh Sequence," a movement back to origins and home. Every stage of the movement is a revelation of the persistence of Ireland's communal and natural past, yet the ultimate source of these remains elusive and unfathomable: "The wet centre is bottomless."

Heaney says, "Every layer they strip / Seems camped on before. / The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage." Interestingly, the only time a substantive verb is used in the stanza it appears in conjunction with the adjective "bottomless." Again, a hidden or imperceptible entity becomes the central (absent) presence in the poem. The final line hints at the religious and sexual dimensions of landscape to be explored in WO and North, but it also pre-empts the search which those later volumes undertake into the depths of the poet's psyche, into Ireland's historical depths, and into the elusive sources of poetic inspiration. Heaney has acknowledged that "Bogland" opens up the terrain of the later volumes:

[T]he first poem I ever wrote that seemed to me to have elements of the symbolic about it was "Bogland." It was the first one that opened out for me, that seemed to keep going once the words stopped, not really like the other poems that were usually pulled tight at the end with little drawstrings in the last line or two . . . . this poem came drifting past me and instead of putting it behind me, I followed it, and it led me to P.V. Glob's archae<sup>o</sup>logical study of peat-bog burials in Iron Age Jutland (Ploughshares interview 18).

[I]t wasn't trapped in its own anecdote, or its own closing off: it seemed to have some kind of wind blowing through it that would carry on ("Raindrop" 30).

"Bogland" is a watershed poem in Heaney's oeuvre, bringing to culmination the adaptations made in DD to the predominant mode of DN, and looking forward to the poetry of the later volumes. It brings to an end what may be called Heaney's early poetry, and gestures towards the poetry of his maturity.

## Chapter 3. Wintering Out.

### I. Introduction.

Perhaps the most important single observation to be made about WO is that the poems it contains were written by and large after the outbreak of the current phase of violent sectarian hostilities in Northern Ireland, which occurred shortly after the publication of DD, in the summer of 1969. We can, in the light of this, put two statements Heaney has made about the impact of 1969 side by side:

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 (Preoccupations 56).

[Y]ou deal with a public crisis not by accepting the terms of the public's crisis, but by making your own imagery and your own terrain take the colour of it, take the impressions of it (Ploughshares interview 13).

A number of issues emerge here. Most importantly, the politics of Irish history emerge as a real presence, causing the most noticeable break in the line of the development of Heaney's poetry to this date. It is no accident that the most significant historical event of the decade in which DN and North appeared should coincide with the most significant shift in Heaney's poetry. Poetry is thereby made an inherently

problematic activity. To absorb the impact of these events, Heaney was forced to confront in his poetry questions concerning his varied political, literary and linguistic traditions; he had to reassess the nature of his dominant subject matter; he had to face the difficulties of political alignment, and reconsider his conception of the function of poetry. The "problems of poetry" are foregrounded as never before. It was in fact impossible for him to return to a conception of poetry as a form of simple craft, to be understood on the analogue of smithy work, digging, divining, or thatching.

One of the characteristics of the volume is an exploratory quality unprecedented in the poetry before the last poems of DD. The "search" to which Heaney refers takes the path he outlines in the second quote, though it is important to notice that the "first ground" he mentions does not remain stable. It is not merely altered, but transformed by the "colour" and "impressions" of the crisis. The imagery he uses--"terrain," "first ground"--is significant, for in the "search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament," landscape plays a vital role. This conception of landscape, like his perception of himself in relation to it, undergoes a radical transformation. A conceptual, cultural landscape replaces his earlier landscape: the farm becomes "Ireland." The existence of a large, violent public landscape is conceded at the same moment that the personal element is broadened to include the historical and the communal. This brings me to the final word I take to be important in the first quote: Heaney's concentration on "our" predicament comes to replace the earlier emphasis on the individual perceiving self. His own terrain becomes the locale of "our" predicament. A line

I want to explore is the correlation between the breakdown of a concrete landscape and the breakdown of a stable, definable self; more specifically, the means whereby these disparate phenomena are merged, and the points at which it is difficult to distinguish between them.

The poems in WO are, in a sense, political, and yet they cannot be said to evidence any political commitment. If there is a commitment in the volume it is a commitment to speak. Although the act of speech--its necessity, complexity, and implications--recurs throughout the volume, and there is a simultaneous savouring of, yet wariness concerning, language and the uses to which it can be put, these poems are not statements of positions adopted but probings of the potential bases from which he might engage with the problems of politics and violence. This makes WO Heaney's most searching and troubled volume, and makes the passage from WO to North part of a single enterprise.

Many of the poems suggest that Heaney is faced with a fragmented culture. The fragmentation is seen as the result of a history, and the purpose of the poetry is less to represent that fragmentation than to attempt to make it part of a coherence. Two facts--this fragmentation and the need to continue writing--issue in a poetry that seeks to make of the constituent elements of the poet's reality a coherent articulable whole. This need to perceive a coherent whole is linked to the poet's need to speak. To facilitate the constitution of an articulable whole, Heaney draws on an elaborate network of conceits that link various elements of his reality: his self--both as a sentient being and as a body; the landscape of which he is part; the language he speaks and that which is spoken in this

landscape; the history of his land and his people; aspects of that history like its violence and its religion; his own sexuality. All of these are linked in a pattern of innumerable correspondences.

Just about everything is fused in the narrativized space of part I of the volume--the part in which his poetic development is most clearly evident. Thus, talking about a single aspect of his reality becomes a means of talking about other, related aspects. The strategy is a means towards his making meaningful cultural statements by talking about himself. One of the impressive features of WO is Heaney's courageous willingness to perceive his own experience as representative of the historical, cultural and communal experience of his place. His aim to talk of "Ireland" by talking about himself is a means of showing the inevitability of cultural determinants in all speech. The degree of success achieved in the enterprise will determine one's estimation of the success of the volume.

I see in the attempt to perceive his experience as representative the reason why Heaney tries to do a seemingly strange thing in WO: he seeks to fuse himself with the landscape; he seeks to deconstitute the stable "I" of his previous work, making the distinctions between landscape and subject so imperceptible that the land itself might at moments be thought to speak. Poetry potentially constitutes that space in which the fragments of his culture can be gathered up and made whole. The aim is an ambitious one, and one which is, to an extent, doomed to failure. What is ultimately impressive about the most notable poems in WO is that this failure becomes a hallmark of the success of the poetry.

So far this discussion has perhaps been vague to the

point of obscurity. I believe it can be substantiated and clarified by reference to the poems themselves.

## II. The Dedicatory Poems.

Standing outside both sections of WO is the dedicatory poem. The point of the poem being placed in this position of prominence, and the reason for the exclusion of its companion pieces from "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," is that the collection is to be read with the present horrors of the Irish situation as one of its loci, albeit often a subliminal one. As yet another driving poem, it provides an opportunity to explore the relationship between poet and landscape.

Unlike Heaney's earlier, strictly formal poems, and unlike the 1950s Movement-type "well-made poem" to which Heaney, with the other poets of the "Ulster Renaissance," might owe something, this poem illustrates the extent to which the Northern Irish context has charged the "well-made poem" with an astringency somewhat foreign to that rational, empirical form in its English manifestation. These measured pentameter quatrains escape the charge of evasion through consciousness of its very possibility. For while the poet dramatises himself as hermetically sealed off from a landscape bearing the scars of violence in the protective enclosures of vehicle and poem, his persistent concern is with the distance between the rationality implicit in the poem's restrained articulation from a position of detachment, and the powers and terrors suffusing the landscape outside.

To a greater extent than in the earlier driving poems, the poet is enclosed and cut off from the landscape outside.

His gaze appears also to be almost transfixed; the implied movement of the vehicle in the earlier poems is absent. It is as if the poet cannot move on: the landscape presents itself as an ineradicable solidity of which he has to take account.

On the one hand, a poem of this sort allows the poet to inspect the landscape without involvement. It allows him to go beyond the realm of the purely personal to admit more disturbing perspectives without becoming enmeshed in them. But it also hints at the dissatisfactions experienced in maintaining this stance of non-involvement. The first two quatrains of the poem itself pull in different directions, towards a perception of the scene in *its* bracing physical freshness ("This morning from a dewy motorway," "fresh clay," "white mist <sup>you get</sup> on a low ground"), where the suggestions of haziness and distance lead into the dimension of a personally recalled past ("déjà-vu, some film made," "a bad dream with no sound"), and in the opposite direction, toward an acknowledgement of what has come to dominate this landscape by its presence ("new camp for the internees," "a bomb," "machine-gun posts defined a real stockade"). We might notice the subtlety with which individual words act as mild self-conscious reproaches to the poet's predilection for a sensual appreciation of physical beauty alone: the freshness of the morning--its dew, mist and fresh clay--would seem to suggest newness, but the word "new," when used, describes the camp for the internees and not the morning; the poet's acknowledgement of the "real" stockade throws qualifications on the status and significance of the rest of the phenomena perceived. This tension between the desire to use poetry for a sensual evocation of natural beauty and the compulsion to recognise the existence of camps,

bombs, and machine-guns in the landscape described, is not here resolved finally; both the desire and the compulsion remain in an uneasy relationship of coexistence. The strictness of the quatrains acts as a restraining form on an experience that is potentially terrifying. Rhyme and rhythm contain emotion and regulate its expression; it is as if the form of a dream was outlined without exploring its horrifying content of sound, as if the tableau quality of the scene is intentionally and insecurely retained: it is significant that we have not the bomb itself but the static "crater of fresh clay" it leaves behind. It appears that the poet is here aware of the risk involved in such a situation--that language might act as an anaesthetic, turning reality into imagination.

Against these perceptions, however, must be set the curious double-effect of these quatrains. The external environment acts as an objective correlative to the solitude of the poet, being without living presences itself, containing only some traces of absent inhabitants and past events. But the emptiness of the scene acts against that solitude, since each thing described implies an absent ghostly populace, and this prepares us for the appearance in the third quatrain of a gradually emerging communal perspective. The double-effect centres on the fact that the poet--through estrangement and solitude--paradoxically begins to hesitantly speak for his dispossessed community. At the same time we see his feeling of being estranged from this landscape and its history coincide with an obvious appreciation of a landscape which he both knows and loves. One subject of the poems that follow is, as here, the distance between the poet and what is closest to him. The need to bridge that distance gives the poems in WO some of their explo-

ratory quality, and some of their tensile strength.

The last stanza opens with an inversion that makes it deliberately difficult to distinguish between cliché and serious question; the difficulty continues in the rest of the lines, which could be either proposed solution or straightforward description. The sense of detachment noted in the first two quatrains diminishes in the last with the move from a rural to an urban locale, and with the decreasing distinctiveness of the speaker's voice. The admission into the verse of graffiti and colloquialism, which exist also as serious question and literal description, whilst aligning the poet with the broader base of people whose "little destiny" he is attempting to articulate, also calls into question the value of what he is doing. For while the last three lines attempt to encompass the Ulster dilemma in the shared language of the community, they do not evidence much more than the numb despair and futility of the graffiti. The poem moves toward a recognition of the failure of language as a medium for handling such experiences, and the potential failures of the poet as the handler of that language (dual dangers--the ability to anaesthetise through language, the potential for degeneration into cliché). Heaney's subject of failure is, however, given successful expression in the poetry.

### III. Estrangement.

The dedicatory poem is different to most of the rest of WO but it points to one of the most notable features of the volume. Heaney concentrates on stances of anxious detachment, on isolated, embattled figures in a hostile environment.

WO is not populated with the arch<sup>e</sup>types of the human being in nature but with the dispossessed of history. Instead of the arch<sup>e</sup>typal rural labourers who enjoy a relationship of connectedness to the land, we find the lonesome, deprived figures of the mummer, the servant boy and the starving "geniuses" of Ireland's colonial past. These figures provide vehicles for the expression of a deep sense of estrangement in Heaney's poetry. Though evident previously, this is intensified in WO: the distance between the poet and his family, the workers on the land, or his own past in the earlier poetry is mild compared to this dominant emotion in WO, accompanied as it is by a sensation of desolate emptiness, of a shrinking from life.

In several poems Heaney associates himself with outsiders, outcasts and victims of various sorts. He dramatizes himself as estranged in a disturbingly wide variety of forms: he is estranged from his own past in "Fodder," from the people actually doing the killing and those suffering directly from it in "A Northern Hoard," from the celebratory ritual of marriage ("Wedding Day"), from the community, its holy rites and his homeland in "Westering," from his mother in "Mother of the Groom" and from the primal spirit of Ireland in "Midnight." Certain details in the poetry signal this estrangement. He remembers people, and is distanced from them, by the marks they leave behind: heelmakes, wound scars, "a straggle of fodder / stiffened on snow." The residues of past practices, beliefs and languages dot the volume, and the physical remnants of history are given in the innumerable lists in the poems. Heaney appears unable to connect all these cultural scraps meaningfully when dealing with them as fragments. He needs

to internalise them and relate them to the self by opening out what he has called a "field of force" which draws into focus other areas of his experience. At a later stage I shall address the nature of this "field of force."

The lines "What do I say if they wheel out their dead? / I'm cauterized, a black stump of home" in "Stump" convey that mingled sense of pain, anguish and vulnerability that is one result of this estrangement, and which is never far below the surface of the poems. In addition to the treatment of estrangement as an experience, though, there is the less noticeable use of it as a tactic or strategy. The ultimate purpose of this strategy is to provide a means towards poetry.

"Wintering Out," the phrase Heaney lifted out of "Servant Boy" to act as the volume's title, may be fruitfully discussed in this regard. Apart from the important connotations of adversity, discomfort and suffering that are suggested, all of which find adequate expression in the poems, there is the suggestion that something is being "wintered out" from. The isolation is in response to a stimulus that forms the background against which the drama of the poetry unfolds. That something is perhaps the "clangour and objectivity of historical events, the remorselessness of action, the unstoppable flow of time" (Preoccupations 78) to which Heaney has gradually been more willing to concede. Solitude from this restless realm of public turmoil is an expression of the poet's belief in the importance of maintaining an independence of the mind against the current of history, even when the necessity of taking that turmoil into account is conceded. And we may divine the purpose of this "wintering out" from its placement in the cycle of the seasonal round: there is a future-based

perspective, an implied looking forward to a time when re-entry into the more hospitable seasons will have been made possible by this period of hardship and exclusion, a re-entry that will be the return of a sensibility that has been chastened and tempered by these experiences. Heaney has said of the title:

It is a phrase associated with cattle,  
and with hired boys also. In some ways,  
it links up with a very resonant line  
of English verse that every schoolboy  
knows: "Now is the winter of our dis-  
content." It is meant to gesture towards  
the distresses that we are all undergoing  
in this country at the minute. It is  
meant to be, I suppose, comfortless enough,  
but with a notion of survival in it. . . .  
If people have wintered out through the  
last four or five years in Northern Ireland,  
they can summer anywhere ("Mother Ireland").

Poems at the beginning of part I, especially "Fodder," "Servant Boy," "The Last Mummer," and to some extent "Bog Oak," may be seen in the light of the title. "Fodder" establishes a tone which resonates through the volume. In it, the poet is shown finding in dialect and pronunciation some intimation of a comfort that was lost and is again sought as a means of alleviating his present state of frustrated desolation. It is a poem of nostalgic yearning, and its note of estrangement is untouched by the political implications of the poems which follow.

Likewise, the dialect and pronunciation as well as the

rustle of the language itself concerns a specifically personal past, which can be contrasted with the language of later poems, seen there carrying the freight of political allegiance and tribal resonances in more noticeable form.

"Servant Boy" and "The Last Mummer" fit more clearly into my hypothesis concerning Heaney's utilization of estrangement as a strategy towards poetic utterance. In both poems he uses an outsider figure to image the potentially regenerative function the estranged poet can play.

The protean mummer moves elusively on the outskirts of a community that no longer either understands or accepts the purpose of his ritual being. At least partly the bearer of ancient nutritive traditions, the mummer goes through transformations--from the violent and impotently angry representative of atrophied traditions to a mysterious, strangely unanchored form, close to nature and yet the repository of the varied languages of diverse communities.

It is fairly obvious that the mummer acts as a figure of the artist. Contrasts with the earlier poetry are instructive. While the blacksmith of "The Forge" can retreat into his region of creative darkness to escape an exterior the only negative feature of which seems to be its modernity, and where the thatcher, like the diviner, seems to inhabit a world of relative simplicity, the mummer is embattled on all sides by "the taboos of the country," by the "long toils of blood//and feuding." The environment in which--or, in the case of "In Small Townlands," against which--the artist forged his artifact has become a place bearing the scars of history and violence.

The imagery of the opening of the second section invites

commentary: the "taboos," "blood and feuding" and "civil tongues" of these lines are imagined as part of the landscape. Although distanced from his contemporary community, the mummer is placed literally among the realities of a history of political and linguistic conflict. In contrast to the earlier, silent craftsmen, his "whoring//among the civil tongues" gives him access to a multiplicity of possible voices, and the structure of the first two sentences of the section allow language to take the impression of sectarian conflict and division. This is a vein Heaney is to work relentlessly in WO. As someone deeply in touch with the past, with nature, and with the community from which he stands apart but whose secret he nonetheless holds, the mummer is a figure Heaney is in danger of glamourising as the type of the poet as outsider. This is especially the case at the end of the poem, when, with imagery suggesting the interconnection of death and regeneration (a deliberate extension of the symbolic sacrificial element in the traditional mummer plays), and the possibility of reconciling the pagan and the Christian, the mummer is imaged as the provider of indispensable services to the community of which he is not part but which he puts in touch with the restorative secrets of nature. The tendency to folksy, rural nostalgia and the glamourising of the figure of the poet are checked by the technical competence of the expression, the crispness and accuracy of the final lines and the more disturbing perspectives carried over from the second section, but they do remain to weaken the poem's ultimate effect.

The artistic analogues that accrue to the mummer are stripped from the figure of the servant boy in the poem of that name, leaving him his more unaccommodated estrangement.

Suggestions of the possibility of some form of resurgence are, however, retained.

Heaney works through suggestion to a greater extent in WO than previously. The image of the servant boy "swinging a hurricane-lamp / through some outhouse" conveys an impression of restless energy. This combines with a sense of his elusiveness and capacity for survival to suggest the concealed resistance that lies beneath the docile exterior of the boy's behaviour. The success of the poem depends on the effectiveness of the contrast between the cold, isolated position of the boy and his function as the bearer of the "warm eggs." As a deprived figure capable of keeping his mind untrammelled by his condition of slavery, and maintaining a fierce independence whilst continuing to concentrate his energies on the possibility of regeneration, he might resemble the poet, but he remains more clearly the resilient victim of a situation of social dispossession and oppression.

In both poems Heaney sees in estrangement a possibility of regeneration which, translated into poetic terms, comes to represent the possibilities of poetic speech. The possibilities are, however, limited, as the poem "Bog Oak" makes clear. I want to discuss the poem more fully in another context, drawing there on the importance in it of Heaney's anguished investigation into the quality of his relationship to his political and literary traditions. The importance of the poem in the present context resides in the fact that his estrangement in this instance is an estrangement from an accepted mode of poetic speech. He realizes that his fidelity to the dispossessed natives of Ireland's history brings him into conflict with the literary language and tradition in

which he writes. Rather than being enabling, his estrangement is here disabling. Speech itself becomes problematic. He is thus forced to attempt to find positions besides that of an estranged detachment and isolation from which to speak. He is thrown into what is perhaps the most interesting poetic enterprise in WO: the need to create, or at least define, a position from which to speak if the resultant speech is to be anything more than an isolated voice in the wilderness, detached and indifferent to a pressing historical situation. Estrangement might be enabling in certain situations, but the more pressing need is to find a language in which he can talk from a position within a culture. The route taken is an enormously complicated, puzzling and only partially successful one. I want to address it in the next few pages.

#### IV. The "Field of Force."

In several of the poems in part I of WO the coherent subject--beginning to slip at the end of DD--is even less concretely present. Small, seemingly precious poems on scant subjects present themselves: "Fodder," "Anahorish," "Land," "Broagh," "Oracle," "The Backward Look," "The Wool Trade," the middle sections of "A Northern Hoard," "Midnight," "Nerthus," "Veteran's Dream," and "Augury." All of these seem strangely incomplete; they lack almost entirely that quality of closure in the earlier poetry which Heaney reflected on when comparing that poetry to "Bogland." He says of "Bogland" that "it wasn't trapped in its own anecdote, or its own closing off: it seemed to have some kind of wind blowing through it that would carry on" (Raindrop 30). This captures one's

sense of these poems. Bits rather than wholes are the focus of attention. The concentration on fragments of all sorts is inordinate: bits of language, individual lost words, momentary experiences, the isolated, remembered visual image, traces left by past inhabitants, scraps of history in the numerous lists that dot the volume, images of parts of the body. All these, and others, present themselves in fragmentation.

It is my contention that the most interesting aspect of the volume is the poet's implicit search for a set of relationships that link these fragments. We can isolate some of the fragments: childhood memories, an archaic past, a distinctively colonial history (some of its seemingly irrelevant aspects, not its events), an absorbent landscape, a lost language, the poetic function, a strangely rendered dissolution of the central subject or the self of the poet. None of these remains isolated; all are cumulatively linked in the progression of poems. The most pervasive instrument of this linkage is the poet's imagery. Towards the end of DD there were indications of Heaney's awareness of the possibilities of metaphoric richness that a blending or intermingling of the various elements of his imaginative terrain might afford. In WO the effect is much more significant than the simple achievement of metaphoric density; part I sees the emergence of a complex interplay of landscape, language, history, and the body that now becomes the poet's encompassing obsession. To catalogue the extent of the interrelation and overlapping of the different, though almost indistinguishable imagistic, thematic and metaphoric patterns discernible in the poems is a lengthy and tiresome process. Nonetheless, some illustration is necessary to indicate its existence, its pervasiveness, and its

importance in the volume as a whole.

I want to work against the grain of the volume for a while: where Heaney is concerned to weave, fuse or render indistinguishable the patterns of relationship between elements of his imaginative terrain, I seek to unweave and re-distinguish what has become fused. I will not try to be either comprehensive or exhaustive: the aim is simply to give a sense of the density of the image-clusters that give WO much of its characteristic texture.

Heaney links landscape and language. In "Anahorish" he says "Anahorish, soft gradient / of consonant, vowel meadow"; in "Gifts of Rain" "The tawny guttural water/spells itself. . . breathing its mists / through vowels and history"; in "Broagh" "the shower / gathering in your heel<sub>mark</sub> / was the black O//in Broagh"; in "The Wool Trade" "Hills and flocks and streams conspired // To a language of waterwheels, / A lost syntax of looms and spindles." Correspondences of this sort play a crucial role in at least seven poems, with numerous less important cases elsewhere. If one includes pronunciation, etymology and place-names under "language," the list is still more extensive.

Imagery connects parts of the human body to landscape. Some obvious examples are: "his peat-brown head, / The mild pods of his eye-lids"; "her breasts an open-work / of new straw and harvest bows"; "stepping stones like black molars / Sunk in the ford"; "the drill grafting his wrists / to the shale . . . the welted, stretch<sub>mark</sub> / curve of the world"; "the soft fontanel / Of Ireland."<sup>4</sup> I have counted approximately 40 such instances in the volume. Sexuality is frequently implicated in talk of landscape: "a mating call of sound /

rises to pleasure me"; "Eridegroom to the goddess, // She tight-  
ned her torc on him / And opened her fen, / Those dark juices  
working / Him to a saint's kept body"; "an ash-fork staked  
in peat, / Its long grains gathering to the gouged split."<sup>5</sup>  
There are over 20 such cases.

References to ritual and religion also form part of the  
terminology of landscape (over 15 important examples): "The  
moon's host elevated // in a monstrance of holly trees" ("The  
Last Mummer"); "And Derrygarve, I thought, was just, / Vanished  
music, twilit water, / A smooth libation of the past / Poured  
by this chance vestal daughter" ("A New Song").

Poetry and the other arts are seen to bear an inherent  
relationship to landscape (16 examples): "This [the poem]  
is in place of what I would leave / plaited and branchy /  
on a long slope of stubble" ("Land"); "Moyola / is its own  
score and consort, // bedding the locale in the utterance, /  
reed music, an old chanter" ("Gifts of Rain").

Talk of landscape also provides the vehicle for treatment  
of the theme of violence (more than 20 cases): "Out there  
in Jutland / In the old man-killing parishes" ("The Tollund  
Man"); "And they do their white magic // Where he lies / On  
cankered ground, / A scatter of maggots, busy / In the trench  
of his wound" ("Veteran's Dream"); "A man wading lost fields /  
breaks the pane of flood: // a flower of mud- / water blooms up  
to his reflection // like a cut swaying / its red spoors through  
a basin" ("Gifts of Rain").

So far, I have dealt only with landscape and the imagistic  
and metaphoric links that Heaney establishes between it and  
other important thematic elements. One could do the same  
with almost any of the other terms I have linked with landscape.

There are imagistic links between sexuality and religion (at least ten, one of which is "as you bend in the shower / water lives down the tilting stoups of your breasts" ("Summer Home")), between language and the body, poetry and ritual, as well as the more obvious links between such elements as the body and sexuality, the body and violence, and sexuality and violence. Violence, in fact, pervades most of the areas with which the poet is concerned: religious rituals are violent (in "The Tollund Man" and elsewhere), language and art provide potential instruments for the infliction of violence, especially when they are used by a particular group for political ends:

"Our guttural muse / was bulled long ago / by the alliterative tradition"; "But now our river tongues must rise / From licking deep in native haunts / To flood, with vowelling embrace, / Demesnes staked out in consonants"; "that tongue of chosen people."<sup>6</sup>

As I said at starting, constraints on space prevent exhaustive illustration. I take it that I have made the point about the pervasiveness and density of these image-clusters. The implications of their use go well beyond the notion that Heaney simply uses a certain bed of imagery from which he consistently draws. The device--and I leave aside the question of the extent to which it is conscious, since it seems to me largely irrelevant--has altogether more profound reverberations. An essay of Heaney's gives some indication as to the possible significance of what I have been exploring. Writing on Wordsworth's "The Thorn," he says:

. . . Wordsworth's own apprehension of the tree, he instinctively recognized, was basically superstitious: it was a

standing over, a survival in his own sensibility of a magical way of responding to the natural world, of reading phenomena as signs, occurrences requiring divination. And in order to dramatize this, to transpose the awakened appetites in his consciousness into the satisfactions of a finished thing, he needed his 'objective correlative.' To make the thorn 'permanently an impressive object,' images and ideas from different parts of his conscious and unconscious mind were attracted by almost magnetic power. The thorn in its new, wind-tossed aspect had become a field of force (Preoccupations 50-51).

Later on in the same essay, when talking of the change that occurred in his own poetry after the conflict in Northern Ireland had become violent in 1969, he wrote:

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. . . . I felt it imperative to discover a field of force in which, without abandoning fidelity to the processes and experience of poetry [which he outlines in the essay] 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  
(56-57).

The suggestiveness of Heaney's term "a field of force" would, I think, allow us to include under its rubric the set of relationships I have outlined. The qualities he ascribes to it--its ability to "encompass," its working mechanism (the cathexis of "images and ideas from different parts of his conscious and unconscious mind")--are essentially those which pertain to the image-clusters of WO. Set in conjunction with a number of statements he has made in interviews, an interesting pattern emerges.

I grew up in an atmosphere full of silent awarenesses of division. You were conscious of that: not politically aware of it. Still, the texture of one's life and the posture of one's consciousness, if there is such a thing, was determined by what was there. You belonged to one caste, or tribe, and you breathed in the attitudes.

I'm not really political, and I can't think politically, but in a sense I can feel the meaning of the politics in these things ("The North" 161; 168).

But apart from the politics of the thing, I was incapable, artistically, of breaking with my first ground and my first images. So WO tries to insinuate itself into the roots of the political myths by feeling

along the lines of language itself. It draws inspiration from etymology, vocabulary, even intonations--and these are all active signals of loyalties, Irish or British, Catholic or Protestant, in Northern Ireland, and they are the things I had an instinctive feel for, as a writer and native of the place. So you have those language and place-name poems in WO. . . . And I think those poems politicize the terrain and the imagery of the first two books (Ploughshares Interview 17).

What emerges fairly clearly from all of these statements is the poet's apparent conviction that seemingly divergent concerns, like politics, history, landscape and language, are not in fact separable. On the contrary, it would seem that his experience suggests the existence of a web of relationships between these concerns that allows each one to influence, modify and complicate the others. And this to the degree that if attention is paid to any one, or if it is spoken of, each of the others comes, to a certain extent, into focus and is implicated in the resulting statement. Thus talk of one dimension of the poet's experience becomes talk of others, and this finds its most consistent expression in an imagery that is at once topographical, historical, sexual, religious, and linguistic. It is for this reason that Heaney can talk of "feeling the meaning of the politics in these things" when talking of landscape or language, and it is with this as background that we can make sense of his term "field of force."

Looking back over the entire range of the imagistic resourcefulness of WO with these statements in mind, one is struck by the facility with which individual references to any given particularity of landscape, language, sexuality, and so on, begin to shade into the remaining constituent elements of the "field of force": it is as if given elements cohere to create a form of poetic unity in which each element interacts with, contains or implies any number of the others. It is as if the aim of the poetry is to deny, transform or remedy the disordered fragmented multiplicity by giving expression to an underlying connectedness between things. The "hundred centuries' // loam, flints, musket-balls, / fragmented ware, / torcs and fish-bones" that lie scattered in the culture are to be gathered up and synthesised--healed--in the poetry.

One needs to find reasons for this. If we look again at the last statement I quoted, we see one reason why WO signifies a significant break with Heaney's previous work. He says there that he cannot "think politically" and in the face of this explores "the things I had an instinctive feel for," things which he nonetheless at this stage identifies in their political aspect: "etymology, vocabulary, even intonations [are] all active signals of loyalties, Irish or British, Catholic or Protestant, in Northern Ireland." He needs to come to terms with a political reality--on whatever grounds he can. His imagery here--his use of "first ground"--is revealing, since it is indeed "ground" that he uses. He meets the political pressures he experiences through a revised conception of his relationship to the terrain of his homeland.

Let us for a moment look back at some earlier poems that could be termed "political." These are "At a Potato Digging,"

"'Eiiza'" and "Croppies." His stance in all three is one of detachment: he either views the dispossessed natives or renders himself invisible. In all of them the natives are linked indissolubly with the land: the labourers in "At a Potato Digging" are the land in many senses; the image of "Six grown men with gaping mouths and eyes / Bursting the sockets like spring onions in drills" suggests connectedness; the croppies die back into the land, becoming part of its natural rhythms. The attitude Heaney adopts in all three cases is clear; but he is not one of them. He remains detached, as a recorder and commentator. The events after 1969 seem to have made it more imperative that he adopt a new stance. His comments in the interviews bear this out, and poems like "Bogland" and the dedicatory poem indicate the direction he takes. He moves from a detached individual perception to an expression of a communal viewpoint. This is undoubtedly in response to a political reality, and his sense that "You belonged to one caste, or tribe, and you breathed in the attitudes" forces its way into the poetry. The posture he adopts is an interesting example of continuity in Heaney's work: on the basis of his representation of Ireland's earlier inhabitants, he chooses too to become part of the land.

One of the image-clusters I have dealt with briefly is crucial in this regard. I refer to the links established between the human body and landscape. The various instances are by and large of a single kind. The exceptions deal with the poet's own body ("under the dislodged // slab of the tongue / I push into a souterrain"; "small mouth and ear / in a woody cleft, / lobe and larynx / of the mossy places"). Much more pervasive is the seemingly impersonal attribution of an anatomy

to the landscape. The flood water in "Gifts of Rain" has "a nimble snout"; the poet notes a "low tattoo" in "Broagh"; stepping stones resemble "black molars" in "A New Song"; the wind "streamed bloodshot tears" in "First Calf" and the moon has "enlarged pores" and a "bony shine" in "Westering." The importance of this distinction falls away, however, if we give credence to the view expressed by Ronald Paulson in his reading of the "sexual-psychological landscape of desire" (9) in his book Literary Landscape: Turner and Constable:

In psychological terminology, parts of the landscape are either directly connected to one's own body (part-objects) or separated from it (whole-objects), and thus carry either the calm balance of mature relationships (the beautiful), the threat of a male force that is keeping one from his object of desire (sublime), or the object of desire itself embodied above all in points of intersection that recall the genital area of the female body.

As Melanie Klein explains the phenomenon, first there is something like identification: "at an early stage of its development the child tries to rediscover its bodily organs and their activities [their functioning] in every object which it encounters." Then "when repression begins to operate," the child moves from identification to symbolism, displacing the libido onto other objects. . . . Closer to the

sense of emotional involvement one feels in landscape exploration is another Kleinian formulation: the strong "sense of orientation" is "determined by the desire to penetrate the mother's body and to investigate its inside, with the passages leading in and out and the processes of impregnation and birth." But always nearby is the counter-object, the threatening hazard symbol . . . of the father. . . . (173-4).

Whether or not this holds true for artistic treatments of landscape generally, Heaney's poetry provides an interesting test case. A poem like "Death of a Naturalist," with its spawn-filled bodies of water, its threatening male frogs, and its domesticated "sublime," or "Personal Helicon," with its slimy wells and its "scareful" rat, or the desired penetration of the dark in DD are interesting examples of the second stage of the model Paulson outlines here. It is interesting, if the process is supposed to be sequential, that Heaney to some extent reverses the postulated progression, since in WO the examples are relentlessly of the kind that would fall under Klein's term "part-object" identification and the initial procedure of the child "rediscovering its bodily organs and their activities in every object which it encounters." The progression into North is then more orthodox, with the exploration into the bog holes of an explicitly maternal landscape yielding up "whole-objects" in the form of the bodies of P.V. Glob's bog bodies.

To return to WO, though, the significance of Paulson's

comments come to bear on Heaney's attempt to fuse himself with the landscape by treating it as a collection of "part-objects." Another of Paulson's comments is illuminating: he talks of "a landscape that is shaped toward . . . the symbolizing of natural objects as extensions of the human body," of landscape as "probably the most powerfully cathected of objects, recreated in the mind as a displacement from the viewer's body to the suggestive shapes of trees, ravines, hills, and above all points of intersection that recall the originary areas of the female body" (9). Heaney's case is an interesting one. In North the "landscape of desire" concerns an explicitly sexual desire. In WO one needs to stretch the term "desire" to include the desire to see landscape and the body as one and the same object. I see the peculiar dissolution of the self that takes place in "Land," "Gifts of Rain" and "Oracle"--a dissolution that corresponds to a dissolution of landscape as a concrete external object and its reconception almost as a subject--in these terms. By merging the self and landscape, making his voice and its voice indistinguishable ("small mouth and ear / in a woody cleft, / lobe and larynx / of the mossy places"), he is moving to a point at which the resultant speech becomes a culturally symbolic act. A landscape which contains the history of everything done in it and to it is given a voice by the speaker whose being becomes one with it. I want to turn to Heaney's conception of the nature of this history briefly.

I have mentioned previously that in "At a Potato Digging," "'Eliza'" and "Requiem for the Croppies," Heaney's focus is on history as event: the famine of 1845 in the first two instances, and of the Vinegar Hill "conclave" of May, 1798.

Towards the end of DD history is imagined as an experience. In the poems of the present volume, history is neither event nor experience, but a sort of timeless present, more notable for the product it leaves embedded in the landscape than for its reality as event.<sup>7</sup> The recurrent predilection of Irish poets to mould the details of historical flux into the stable permanencies of a mythic conception may be glimpsed here, and is to become more noticeable as Heaney continues his development into North. There are suggestions of the permanent stasis of an unchanging Irish identity that requires uncovering, and the signs of that identity are to be found in the artifacts which the culture leaves stratified in landscape. History, in fact, appears as a laying down of strata in an always developing but paradoxically predetermined landscape. Though enriched by the different layers of invasion, linguistic colonisation, and racial experience, the fundamental structure of the landscape remains unchanged. It absorbs, retains, preserves, but develops according to a form determined in prehistory. The poet's soundings are therefore of different layers of landscape, each part of which implies the historical whole. The treatment of landscape almost as a subject and not as an object perhaps recalls Heaney's comment that landscape is "almost an element to work with as much as it is an object of admiration or description" (qtd. in Terence Brown, Northern Voices 173), but more importantly, it allows the self to be implicated in talk of landscape more easily.

The poet's sense of self and of the poetic imagination is markedly similar to his apprehension of nature and history. It is instructive to notice a number of Heaney's comments:

My view and way with poetry has never

been to use it as a vehicle for making statements about situations. The poems have come up like bodies out of the bog of my own imagination (qtd. in Brown 181).

I think that the drama and interest of the self may be the real subject, but in this country, the self is so closely involved with the society that produces it, and it is so bonded into the communal life . . . ("Meeting Seamus Heaney" 10).

This idea of the self having its stratifications, its bog-like depths, its passive retentive capacity, suggests a self almost indistinguishably blended into the dense complex of Irish natural and historical experience. Ireland and her numinous presences forged unchangeable patterns in the basic structures of landscape and self, and the similarity between these allows the poet to explore Ulster's contemporary social and political crisis by attending to his own memories and obsessions.

The difficulty of distinguishing between the depths of the poet's body and the depths of the landscape in poems like "Toome," "Gifts of Rain" and "Oracle" is thus instructive, not accidental, even if it is felt to occasionally weaken the force of the poems. The poet has here become the landscape as far as that is possible, by embedding himself in it, living its life from within, and locating himself in a position from which he speaks its speech and vice-versa. The attempt is to cover the language with his language as completely as possible. This implies that the poet who started out from a

position of detachment and estrangement--from his historical community as much as anything else--has, paradoxically, moved to a position from which he promises to become its spokesman, since by talking the language of the landscape he is talking the language of a historical community that has been absorbed and preserved by that landscape.

These conclusions should be tested against the poetry itself.

#### V. The Place-Name Poems.

In the group of "language and place-name poems" we see Heaney's first genuinely successful attempt to create a poetry that stirs mutual vibrations between landscape and language, and which begins to move in the direction of a confrontation with the "matter of Ireland." Heaney attempts not only to create a sense of unity by putting fragmentary constituent elements of his experience into meaningful interaction, but also seeks to perform a similarly synthetic function on the divergent "senses of place" that he sees in Irish literature. This wider, cultural, motive is the first of its kind in his poetry. In his essay "The Sense of Place" he points to different ways of perceiving and poetically using landscape that a variety of Irish poets, both past and present, have utilized. His statements on Yeats, Kavanagh and Montague warrant inclusion here. First, his comparison of Yeats and Kavanagh:

Where Yeats had a conscious cultural and,  
in the largest sense, political purpose  
in his hallowing of Irish regions, Kavanagh  
had no such intent. . . . Kavanagh . . . ab-

jured any national purpose. any belief in Ireland as 'a spiritual entity.' And yet, ironically, Kavanagh's work probably touches the majority of Irish people more immediately and more intimately than most things in Yeats. I am not going to say that this makes Kavanagh a more important writer, but what I do say is that Kavanagh's fidelity to the unpromising, unspectacular countryside of Monaghan and his rendering of the authentic speech of those parts gave the majority of Irish people, for whom the experience of life on the land was perhaps the most formative, an image of themselves that nourished their sense of themselves. . . . (Preoccupations 137).

The place-name poems appear initially to fit solidly into the line of Kavanagh: Anahorish and Broagh are names of townlands bordering on the farm Mossbawn where Heaney grew up; Toome--where he went to school--is not far away. The correct pronunciation of the names is an issue in the poems, and Heaney chooses a vocabulary that shows fidelity to the local rather than the cosmopolitan: "rigs," "docken," "pad." Heaney is thus moving towards the "authentic speech" he praises in Kavanagh. And yet he goes beyond the fidelity to the known and loved, unspectacular landscape of one's own past that Kavanagh so impresssively exhibits. I will contend that he too has a cultural and political purpose, like Yeats, though obviously their different "tribal" loyalties yield different results. He continues his discussion of Kavanagh and brings John Montague

into focus.

<sup>a</sup>  
Kavanagh's place names are there to stake out a personal landscape, they declare one man's experience, they are denuded of tribal or etymological implications . . . . They are names for what is known and loved, and inhabit the universe of the actual with other words like 'butter,' 'collar and reins'. . . . Kavanagh's place names are used as posts to fence out a personal landscape. But Montague's are rather sounding lines, rods to plumb the depths of a shared and diminished culture. They are redolent not just of his personal life but of the history of his people, disinherited and dispossessed. What are most resonant and most cherished in the names of Montague's places are their tribal etymological implications. . . . There is an element of cultural and political resistance and retrieval in Montague's work that is absent from Kavanagh's. . . . The ancient feminine religion of Northern Europe is the lens through which he looks and the landscape becomes a memory, a piety, a loved mother. The present is suffused with the past. When he walks the mountains and farms of his neighbours, he can think of himself as a survivor, a repository, a bearer and keeper of what

had almost been lost (140-42).

Heaney tries to do both. He labours to produce a representation of the "universe of the actual" that is filtered through as tribal and historical a sensibility as he finds in Montague. The apparently simple, spontaneous place-name poems, seemingly innocent of any conscious cultural or political purpose, take on a different colouring when viewed with these statements in mind.

"Anahorish," the first of these, will serve as an introduction to the poems in which there is a transubstantiation of a particular landscape or a particular experience into language; in which, for the first time, a phonological as well as a physical topography is posited. It begins with a savouring of the translated phrase "place of clear water," an attempt to render in English the translucent crispness of the Gaelic word as both a place and a possession. The word evokes images of a lost, pristine, pastoral place, the Edenic purity of which initially, and briefly, enchants the poet. The sense of purity in the scene is enforced by the restrained use of adjectives, adverbs and modifiers, one result of Heaney's decision to use a short line. It is raised above the level of rural, nostalgic sentimentality by the accuracy of the description and the delicacy of the poet's ear in its alertness to the differing effects of subtle variations of sound and rhythm, but, more importantly, by the admission of an archaeological and linguistic element into the verse. In "Anahorish, soft gradient / of consonant, vowel-meadow" there is a strange combination of abstract idea--the relationship between name and place--and "what is known and loved . . . the universe of the actual." This bedding of the abstract in the concrete gives the impression that his subject is per-

fectly ordinary. This effect is one of the attractive features of the place-name poems, and helps create the characteristic sense that the connection made is spontaneous and unpremeditated.

Underlining the impression Heaney seeks to create that the connections made are both unpremeditated and quite ordinary is his continuation of the same sentence across the stanzaic break and into "after-image of lamps / swung **through** the yards / on winter evenings." The appositional structure of the sentence gives to the first two clauses something of the empirical veracity of the lamp image. The "after-image" is deliberately ambiguous: it could as easily refer to an after-image on the poet's eye, that is, to a personal visual memory, as to an after-image on the absent eye of the landscape itself.

"Anahorish," as both name and place, carries within itself the memory of the past actions of its inhabitants. Personal memory and a kind of genetic memory are fused.

The italicization of "Anahorish" stresses the physicality of the word. It prepares the reader for a conception of the name as an object with topographical features and a history. It also emphasises the specificity of its pronunciation. The fluid movement from this physicality to the mood of dream-like recall in the lamp image has the effect of imbuing language with multiple meanings. The lines seem to restore to language its pictorial essence, its intimate relationship to a putatively "natural language" in which signifier and signified are essentially rather than arbitrarily connected, and its function as a vessel of communion with the past. The Edenic echoes in the poem's first lines might be taken further: the first act of language--Adam's act of naming, and blessing--is seen

to remain efficacious in this landscape of the poet's past.

Finally, the retentive syllables of the place-name contain the actions of the past community that inhabited the townland: "With pails and barrows // those mound-dwellers / go waist-deep in mist / to break the light ice / at wells and dunghills." The archaeological term "mound-dwellers" and the present tense of "go" suggest the genetic continuity that links the poet and the past through landscape and language. The delicacy and particularity of the poet's perception and recall in "go waist-deep in mist / to break the light ice" allows the mound-dwellers to emerge as living presences, their actions analogous to that of the poet, who "breaks the light ice" that covers language and place-name to reveal what lies hidden below.

Speaking of the writing of poems like "Anahorish" and "Broagh" Heaney has said that they "convinced me that one could be faithful to the nature of the English language--for in one sense they are erotic mouth-music by and out of the anglo-saxon tongue--and at the same time, be faithful to one's own non-English origin, for me that is County Derry ("Unhappy and at Home" 65). We see the truth of this in the poems mentioned, and should notice the possible glimmerings of a "cultural and political purpose" behind both Heaney's statement and the poems themselves. Some features of the poems tentatively point in this direction by going beyond an innocent "faithful[ness] to one's non-English origin." One notices the beginning of a distortion of the mellifluous English iambic line that Heaney utilized so effectively in his earlier work. The ending of "Broagh," a poem in which the relations between landscape and language are broadened to include an overlapping with the physical body (in "The

garden mould / bruised easily" and "its low tattoo"), provides an example. There is not only a spareness and stringent tightness to the lines that is foreign to the earlier poems, but also a concern with the distinctiveness of colloquial language that we find throughout WO. One finds corroboration for this in Heaney's statement that "Back then I thought that that music, the melodious grace of the English iambic line, was some kind of affront, that it needed to be wrecked" ("Artists on Art" 412). We might also see the initial stirrings of a note of cultural resistance in the last lines: "that last / gh the strangers found / difficult to manage." Heaney postulates the existence of an insular communal identity based on pronunciation in these lines. The community of language-users is defined in terms of "strangers." Heaney's term "non-English origin" carries the same force. It is not ingenious to see these statements against the backdrop of Irish political history and the understandable need of the colonised subject to define and return attention to those aspects of his cultural identity that indicate cohesiveness, pride in his identity and the place which fosters it, and the differences between it and an intrusive or antagonistic culture.

A subliminal political motivation might therefore be seen in Heaney's use here of a "field of force." The elements of pronunciation, landscape, the body, weather and communal identity interrelate to naturalize the poet's relationship to the community, and the community's relationship to the land. As natives of the place, they alone can say "Broagh"; they alone can "speak" the landscape. Strangers--those unable to pronounce the name--do not belong there. In this fact lies one of the first oblique suggestions of how Heaney is

to deal with the public crisis: "not by accepting the terms of the public's crisis, but by making your own imagery and your own terrain take the colour of it, take the impressions of it."

One cannot, however, read "Broagh" primarily as a political poem. Its wit, its imaginative ingenuity, its sense of delight at the discovery of unexpected parallels: these blur any such intention. Not that a political poem cannot sustain such features; the poet simply has other things in mind. The evocation of place, even simply for its own sake, ranks higher in terms of his motivation. It is within the larger context of WO, within the broader "field of force," that the features I have stressed are noticeable.

In "Anahorish" and "Broagh" one does not feel that the connections between different elements of the poet's "field of force" have been contrived; the poems work obliquely and intuitively, without any sense of strain. "Toome," the last of the place-name poems with which I want to deal in this context, risks more by dealing with a more obviously contrived connection.

Perhaps its most interesting feature is that it conveys Heaney's search for a means to align the investigation into the self with an investigation into landscape in disarmingly literal fashion. The physical act of speech, the saying aloud of the word "Toome," is imagined as a process whereby entrance into the depths of history and the self is achieved. The vital hinge upon which the move from physical act to conceptual exploration turns is the word "slab." In a manner that is characteristic of Heaney, one aspect of a metaphor that initially appears fanciful gives way to another which surprises with

its aptness. So the "dislodged / slab of the tongue" works wittily: language is for the poet the product of a physical body's movements, not something abstract. Thus he draws on what it is like to actually say the word and chooses a concrete image of shape to convey that physicality. The resultant "slab" allows both body and landscape simultaneously to be the subjects of the remainder of the poem.

The italicization and repetitive intonation of "Toome, Toome" undermines the referential function of the name, and is a way of making it strange once more. Repetition deprives the spoken word of some of its meaning, allowing it to become the vessel for the communciation of other presences latent in the vocable. So the name becomes a locale in which "a hundred centuries' // loam, flints, musket-balls, / fragmented ware, / torcs and fish-bones" are discovered. This catalogue of the historical detritus of a "souterrain" of the self and of the culture is temporally retrogressive, and is indicative of a violent past that lies accessible, albeit in fragmentary form, in the stratifications of land, self, and poem.

This seems to be a further progression in the movement begun in "Bann Clay" and "Bogland," a progression that has by no means yet become predictable. The exploratory quality of the verse remains, and does so into the last stanza, though here the effect is less satisfactory. The final Medusa-like image conveys in a vague way a sense of the poet's communing with primal bases through a penetration into the darkness of the self and its home ground. What the poet discovers is not the anticipated evidence of past human habitation but something living and growing. The frisson of the last line returns us to the child poet's discoveries in "Death of a

Naturalist" and, more explicitly, in "Vision." At this late stage, there is still not much evidence of progression: history blurs into myth once again in a relatively unsuccessful manner.

There is a sense in the place-name poems that something larger and more significant than the ostensible subject lurks on the outskirts of the poems. It remains unclear whether this is a communal spirit, the natural language of the landscape, its hidden history or some other primal state. These are for the most part intimations, worked into the texture of the poem's evocation of places. They remain largely unexplored. One of the main foci of attention in the poems is the interrelationship of landscape and language. It is as if these hide within themselves intimations of other things. Heaney is more adventurous when he becomes more explicit. The results are poems in which landscape and language are seen to contain the freight of political allegiance and tribal resonances in more noticeable form.

#### VI. "Land" and "Gifts of Rain."

Heaney's identification of the self with landscape, and his merging of the "languages" of both, is intensified in "Gifts of Rain" and "Land." Technically, both are more adventurous than anything Heaney has previously written. The sequence form in each case allows him to break down the stable presence of the self at the centre of the poem. The poems themselves become fragmentary, with the inevitable suggestion that a larger order overreaches both the self and the stances it adopts. In each case, the sequence as a whole becomes a means of getting at the wholeness of the elusive "field

of force."

"Land" is about the development of a relationship and of an aesthetic attitude to landscape. Heaney moves further in the direction pointed by the place-name poems in the sense that his speaker seeks identification not so much with the community living on the land, but with the land itself.

The opening section deals with the relationship of a stable self to a stable landscape. The speaker prepares a valedictory attitude to the landscape. Somewhat surprisingly, he is not leaving the land for somewhere else, but leaving his status as a human inhabitant of the land. In the second section the valedictory piece of art which he leaves to the landscape is constructed of the elements of the landscape itself: "old wet leaves, / rush-bands and thatcher's scollops, / . . . new straw and harvest bows." The art-work issues in a presence that is part of the land, either as a territorial numen, a fertility goddess, or a simple collocation of ordinary objects.

The third section carries the progression still further. The poet is not now at a distance from the land, nor is his relationship to the land mediated through the art-work. He speaks instead from within the land, with his ear in a "loop of silence," lying with his thigh-bone and shoulder "against the phantom ground." The subject of these lines is the poet's development of an acute sensitivity to the noises of the imaginary landscape. The distance between subject and object is reduced when, by becoming like the hare to which he listens, he is snared. The "small drumming" he expects to hear could be the metrical beat of the poetic line. If so, the speaker is captured by his own art, which he can yet wear almost as

a trophy: "swinging / an ear-ring of sharp wire."

"Gifts of Rain" extends this identification of speaker and land. It also introduces an historical dimension. The first section equates the self and a being in the landscape. A distance is set up between speaker and creature by the pronouns used, although these could refer to a rhetorical double. The exploring creature is more than simply a human being in the landscape; he is peculiarly animal-like, a being that is mammal, but who moves towards identification with the inanimate land. His ability to change form is hinted at by the observation that he is "Still mammal." A deconstitution of the stable subject and a dissolution of the empirical landscape occur in the same moment. The creature's ability to "sense weather" suggests a connectedness with the land. The fact that, imagistically, the river is also animal-like indicates that the two inhabit a realm in which a merger is possible if not already accomplished. Both explore: the river "goes uprooting" and he "fords / his life by sounding." What they explore is an undefined interior life, which might be synonymous with the life of the landscape.

The more obviously human man of the second section is tied tightly to the round of natural process. He is part of the cycle that unites sky, water and ground. Yet he is also the only discordant entity. The image in the line "breaks the pane of flood" anticipates the lines "like a cut swaying / its red spools through a basin." That the landscape contains the latent potential to inflict pain must be set aside its concomitant nutritive and fructifying properties: this seems to be the suggestion of the comparison between the blooming flower and the cut. The word "spools" sustains the ambiguity

between human and animal established in the first section.

Graham Martin comments on the last eight lines of the section:

We see the man in 'hooped,' and simultaneously grasp the metaphorical implication that he is 'bound tight' to the field he cultivates. The earlier 'pane,' equally visual, also anticipates the final image of the mirroring water which unites sky, earth and the man's arms thrusting through to the flooded crop. Description and metaphor here blend in the evocation of an 'atlantis,' concrete enough to be grubbed for, yet retaining the elusive character of a human dream. The poem offers less an observed scene than a complex interplay between natural process and laborious human hope (390).

When "Their world-school<sup>ed</sup> ear" is used in section III it is unclear whether "Their" refers to the rains or to the community. It is intentionally left ambiguous because a merger is desired. "Their" ear can hear "the race / slabbering past the gable": this introduces history as a presence in the perfectly ordinary landscape again. The ear rather than the eye is the main organ of perception throughout: in the second half of the section, the speaker listens for the message and meaning of the land. "I cock my ear / at an absence": he listens for what is there, but also for what is not. Only a naturalized land-man would be able to "hear" the latter. He wants intimations of past lived relationships to the land, and he wants them for the sake of continuity. The meanings of "the shared calling of blood" and of "Soft voices of the

dead" remain elusive, yet he would question them.

The density of effects generated by Heaney's "field of force" is fully visible in the final section of the sequence. The Moyola river has a phonological dimension: it has "tawny guttural water." It is musical: it is "its own score and consort"; it is "reed music, an old chanter. . . ." In "consort" we hear a note of sexuality, which is picked up in "bedding the locale" and later in the image of "A swollen river." Both language and landscape are implicated in the phrase "bedding the locale / in the utterance" which shows landscape acting on language as well as being reflected in it. In "an old chanter // breathing its mists / through vowels and history" landscape acts on history as well as absorbing it. One also notes that, like a body, the river breathes. There is a dynamic interaction of all these elements rather than sets of one-way relationships.

The speaker's place in this dense web of interrelationships allows him to be the (implicitly sexual) partner of the landscape, privy to its secrets and meanings. The implication of pregnancy in "A swollen river" relates to the "mating call of sound" which "rises to pleasure me." The pleasures of intimacy with the land make him rich ("Dives"). As a poet, and because of his naturalized relationship to the land, he becomes the "hoarder of common ground"--the person most able to speak its language and become a vehicle for its historical meaning. The sequence as a whole is aimed at using a "field of force" to allow the poet to become one with the landscape, thereby gaining access to its meaning and its history for communal purposes.

If the sequence lacks a sense of shapely completeness

as well as a clear direction it is because there is no formulated intention guiding its movement. The poem is exploratory; it is a sequence of "soundings" made in the attempt to write a poetry that is coterminous with the whole of the poet's experience and which can include a sense of his territory's community and history. The sequence form is used to synthesize the poet's awareness of his contemporary situation with an awareness of the permanent presences of race and history. It issues in a poetry that is semi-public and racially conscious but which also caters to the preoccupations of the self.

"Gifts of Rain" is positioned at the point of speech, but before any actually meaningful statement is made. The suggestion that relationships exist between landscape, history and language is not really itself a statement but anticipates a statement. The problem of speaking out becomes a political problem in WO because of the poet's emerging consideration of his problematic position in regard to his literary, linguistic and political traditions. As a poet writing in English for a largely English audience, he is faced with the problem of speaking in the language of the oppressor about a reality that supposedly expresses itself "naturally" in the indigenous language. We remember that "Anahorish" is not merely a "place of clear water"; the translation is not quite good enough: the Irish word is needed to fully understand the place and its history. By aligning Irish experience with the Irish language, Heaney has landed himself in a difficult position.

## VII. Traditions.

By writing in English and having his work published in

England Heaney naturally runs the risk of being co-opted by the tradition against which he seeks to stand. The entry of political factors into his poetry creates problems since they highlight the links between political motives and speech and thus inevitably between politics and poetic speech. The problem is that he finds poetic utterances hiding political motivations, and thus needs to forge a position from which he can talk in English yet establish his resistance to the implicit politics of the literary tradition in which he writes.

"Bog Oak," the first of the poems with which I want to deal, moves towards a recognition of the problems. It is placed early enough in the volume to play an important role in establishing the relationship between language, landscape and politics. The weightiness of the opening stanza becomes less pronounced as the poem progresses, and becomes gradually more and more spare as well as self-conscious as the subject matter undergoes a similar transformation. The description of the oak as "A carter's trophy / split for rafters, / a cobwebbed, black, / long-seasoned rib" carries within itself the implication that history is recoverable. The natural object is perceived as the product of human labour and artistry, and affords a direct link to the moment in history of its production. Mention of it stirs up images in the consciousness of the poet of Ireland's dispossessed populace and of rural deprivation:

I might tarry  
with the moustached  
dead, the creel-fillers,  
  
or eavesdrop on

their hopeless wisdom  
 as a blow-down of smoke  
 struggles over the half-door

and mizzling rain  
 blurs the far end  
 of the cart track.

The blurring of vision in the last lines quoted here signifies the transition from descriptive empiricism to a necessarily imaginative consideration of what lies "beyond" the "far end / of the cart track." At the point at which the poet seeks to see beyond what is empirically there in the landscape, an ideological component inevitably enters.

The point of real interest in the poem emerges in the following lines: "The softening ruts // lead back to no / 'oak groves,' no / cutters of mistletoe / in the green clearings." Reference to what is not there in the landscape indicates what is foremost in the writer's consciousness. The poet makes a conscious decision not to see one imaginative possibility in the landscape. A cultural choice in regard to tradition seems to be made. References to oak might, in terms of an English and continental tradition which draws on classical literature and versions of pastoral, conjure up associations of Arcady's groves and its druidic presences. But this is foreign to the wilder, more bitter experience of Ireland. If we heed Heaney's statement that "you can write about, or write out of, a sensibility or a set of images which imply a set of values. . . . I think Yeats helped me . . . to realise that by choosing certain material, almost, you were maintaining certain values" ("Raindrop" 27) we might

glean something of his intention.

The poet is aware of some of the attractions offered by a tradition as rich as that represented by Spenser, but the context in which he mentions that poet is bitterly ironic. Rather than follow the logic of the tradition itself and imagine "oak groves" and "cutters of mistletoe," the poet "perhaps" sees Spenser himself, the representative of Romance culture but also the colonial administrator. The activity of "dreaming sunlight" is not easy in the Irish context, where the dreamer is "encroached upon by // geniuses who creep / 'out of every corner / of the woodes and glennes' / towards watercress and carrion." The values implicit in a certain poetic mode are seen to be part of the process of dispossession. Language hides political allegiances and the poet's function would seem to include the laying bare of the different assumptions that underlie apparently neutral statements.

The self-consciousness about his own poetic processes that Heaney displays in a poem like "Bog Oak" gives the lie to what might, with reference to some of his other poems, be an accurate perception by Seamus Deane:

The imagery of burial and resurrection in WO commemorates a resurgence of energy in Heaney's tribal traditions and civilizations being reborn [sic]. He truly feels and communicates the resurgence of energy in his tribe which he is channeling by using the skills that don't belong to his tribe, but the tradition that put his tribe down into the bog. I think he's not fully aware of this irony. His

poems aren't sufficiently reflective in that way (qtd. in Terence Brown, Northern Voices 283).

I would contend, to the contrary, that in particular poems Heaney is reflective in just the way that Deane appears to desire. Considerations of technique are important in this regard.

In WO, the iambic pentameter line that dominated the earlier work with its weight of poetic and linguistic ore and debt to the traditions of his English forebears (it is the chief Spenserian tool) is all but abandoned in favour of looser, generally two-stress lines that are stripped of the richness that characterised the longer line. There is a conscious attempt to widen the scope of the poetry, and the influences that one notices are more American than English. While Deane may be making a valuable point, it should be qualified. The subject matter of "Bog Oak," "Traditions," and "The Wool Trade" should be acknowledged as reflective in the way Deane desires. The skinny quatrain, although it often threatens to confine through family resemblance emotions and sentiments that pull in different directions, does to a certain extent free Heaney of the lushness that occasionally acted as a narcotic on certain disturbing aspects of his early verse. It also embodies a poetic declaration of independence that, if not always borne out, is at least almost always on the periphery of the poet's consciousness, making the verse politically and culturally conscious if not committed.

"Bog Oak" illustrates the poet's coming to consciousness of the political implications of a certain type of poetry and language. "The Wool Trade" is an even more oblique approach

to the same general topic. The epigraph at the head of the poem, part of Stephen Dedalus's silent meditation on the fact that he and the Dean of Studies who are sharing civilities have in fact no common language, establishes that the same words are semantically as well as acoustically different for different sections of the same language community. The phrase "the wool trade" is something entirely different in the soft, warm, vovelling speech of an English or continental culture to what it is in the harsher sounds of the Ulster dialect. In terms of the "field of force" that Heaney deploys in the volume, fidelity to a type of speech implies fidelity to the subject-matter which lies inextricably embedded in that speech. In the poet's speech one cannot hear the activities of shearing, baling, bleaching and carding that are heard in the other man's speech. His speech implies, by compulsion, a different reality: "And I must talk of tweed, / A stiff cloth with flecks like blood." The reality that allowed land, flocks of sheep, and human activity to "conspire" (and we note the pun on spirare--to breath--that animates the later bodily reference to the tongue) is no longer accessible. The note of lament in the interjection "O," the past tense of the sentence, the reference to a "lost" syntax and the image of fading tapestries in a gallery "of the tongue" confirm this. A different reality--an altogether more violent and intractable reality--has replaced it.

The violence and inflexibility suggested in the last line are so much a part of his Irish situation that they are implicit in the very artifacts of the poet's world. It is of these artifacts and of this world that he "must talk." The poet works toward an expression of his realization that

his speech, a symbol and constituent element of his identity, constrains him to talk of certain subject-matter. The dominant tone of the crucial final lines is one of resignation through necessity.

The poem ends on this note of realization and resignation. Action to be taken in accordance with it--his actual talking of the "tweed"--is deferred. A point of consistency in the volume as a whole is just this deferral of speech, a putting off of what must be said in favour of an investigation into what underlies the language to be used in those future statements.

A problem he faces concerns questions of traditions. Into which linguistic or literary tradition will he fit (or position himself) in his bid to make future statements? If he is to avoid the potential pitfall glimpsed in "Bog Oak" and the irony to which Deane refers, he needs to be both careful and clear on this point. In "The Backward Look" and "Traditions" he addresses the problem, again obliquely and by implication.

The title of the first of these poems is evidence enough of how Heaney feels about the possibility of using Gaelic as the medium of linguistic and cultural renewal. Rather than being a preparation for future speech, the poem is an investigation into one of the modes no longer meaningfully open to the poet as a medium. In the poem Heaney imagines the failure of the Irish language as the staggered flight of a snipe. The snipe's leaving its nesting ground is analogous to the language having lost its basis in the nutritive source of its origins, dispersing itself "into dialect, / into variants." The act of transliterating the variant Irish names

for the snipe into English ("little goat of the air, / of the evening, // little goat of the frost") is not an act of recovery or renewal, but a re-enacting of the process whereby the language began the move toward extinction. Following the paths of extinct birds, the snipe heads over a landscape of military fortifications and the potential of violent death into the dubious security of the "gleanings and leavings / in the combs / of a field worker's archive." The important point here is that the snipe "disappears" by so doing. This lament over the death of a language is at the same time a rejection of "the backward look" as an adequate response to the problems of contemporaneity.

The place-name poems might have suggested to Heaney that the indigenous language of his place could provide a meaningful vehicle for his concerns, as it indeed does in those poems; here, Heaney rejects Gaelic as an option. Having done so, he turns his attention to English, and the divergent traditions it offers the Irishman.

The purpose for which Heaney puts his "field of force" to work in section I of "Traditions" is to indicate the extent to which the indigenous linguistic and literary traditions have been subjugated by the English language. English both violently ("bulled") and seductively ("that 'most / sovereign mistress,' / beds us down") subjugates Ireland's "guttural muse." Its instruments are poetic tradition ("alliterative tradition") and "custom." Using imagery of phonology ("guttural"), the body ("her uvula grows // vestigial, forgotten / like the coccyx), and landscape ("yellowing," "into/the British isles"), Ireland is portrayed as the passive recipient of various forms of cultural and political violence. The degene-

ration of the muse is important: the movement from section I to section II provides justification for the assertion that she is "forgotten." As "The Backward Look" suggested, Ireland's indigenous language no longer provides a meaningful option.

Ulster's dialect is reputed to be more similar to Elizabethan English than other forms of English spoken today. In section II Heaney indicates how the originary position formerly accorded the indigenous language is now occupied by this more recent language. His references to "grass-roots stuff" and "cherished archaisms" indicate that Elizabeth and Shakespeare now stand where the "guttural muse" once did. Heaney points to the other side of the Elizabethan coin, of which he ironically says, "We are to be proud. . . ." He notes the "furled / consonants of lowlanders / shuttling obstinately / between bawn and mossland." In the speech patterns of these "lowlanders" is to be found the linguistic parallel to their political obstinacy. Elizabethan English, a pride in which might be thought to come from education, proves to be another vehicle of political subjugation; another tradition Heaney cannot follow.

Heaney moves from linguistic to literary tradition in section III, and again--as in "Bog Oak"--he reveals the hidden political motivations underlying an English literary tradition. MacMorris, the stage-Irishman, the supposedly representative stock character of "Ireland," is seen to fuel political presuppositions in Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience. "[A]natomies of death" is another phrase from Spenser's "woodes and glennes" passage in his Veue of the Present State of Ireland (Spenser 243) and reinforces the sense that the dominant English tradition is to be resisted rather than used. The attempt in Henry V to

forge a Greater British consciousness through "representative" national figures of the calibre of MacMorris, Fluellen and Jamy reinforces through illustration the assertion in section I that "custom" "beds us down into/the British isles." MacMorris's rhetorical question is answered four centuries later by Leopold Bloom, that estranged and lonely wanderer. In Bloom's words, Heaney would appear to opt for Ireland, for a tradition that takes its lead from Joyce. Joyce's hyper-consciousness of words and recognition of linguistic realities are cognate to Heaney's concerns (as is illustrated by the epigraph to "The Wool Trade") and make him an attractive candidate for the position. One does, however, recall that Bloom is Jewish--an outsider in Ireland--and that Joyce chose silence, exile and cunning rather than any form of communal identification. If we see a choice in the final section, then, it is the choice of a tradition of isolation and alienation, a tradition that stresses not the "Irish" but the individual and, again, political consciousness rather than political commitment.

#### VIII. Speaking Out: "A New Song."

It is understandable then that so many of Heaney's poems in WO anticipate rather than make statements, that speech is constantly deferred in the volume. Two patterns of imagery found throughout the volume are interesting in this regard. The first pattern is built up of multiple references to the mouth, especially to the organ of speech, the tongue: "His tongue went whoring // among the civil tongues"; "under the dislodged // slab of the tongue / I push into a souterrain"; "But now our river tongues must rise / From licking deep in

native haunts"; "that tongue of chosen people"; "How they hang / Fading, in the gallery of the tongue!"; "the swinging tongue of his body"; "The tongue's / Leashed in my throat."<sup>8</sup>

The second set of images refer to the ear: "if I lie with my ear / in this loop of silence"; "Their world-schooled ear // could monitor the usual / confabulations"; "small mouth and ear / in a woody cleft, / lobe and larynx / of the mossy places"; "my ear swallowing / his fabulous, biblical dismissal"; "stop my ears against the scream."<sup>9</sup> One might draw from this the implication that the poet is attempting to listen, with a wise passiveness, to the articulate speech implicit in the very artifacts of his world before talking out of the knowledge he thus gains.

In WO there is hardly any programmatic impulse at all. Instead, there are innumerable sensitive, exploratory "soundings" of names, places and traditions. There is a curious reticence at the point of speech. Heaney understands and elucidates the covert presences and unrevealed motivations which might underlie the numerous possible modes of utterance open to the speaker in contemporary Ulster. Most of his poems in WO do not issue in concrete statements about the Northern Irish situation, although they point in that direction. Against the backdrop of this elaborate hesitation, one poem is immediately noticeable for its attempt to issue such a statement. The poem is "A New Song."

Much of my discussion so far has been concerned with Heaney's attempt to constitute a position from which to speak. I have suggested that his "field of force" might have as the reason for its existence the potential it offers a would-be spokesperson. In the place-name poems, "Land" and "Gifts

of Rain," an attempt is made to naturalize the poet's relation to the landscape to such an extent that his voice becomes its voice, and his act of speaking out of the land is in a sense coterminous with an act of speech by the land. This naturalization of the relationship between speaker and land is the first enabling factor that allows "A New Song" to produce its statement. The other enabling factor is a traditional one. Although Heaney does not specify it in his poems on tradition, the Irish genre called dinnseanchas does to some extent provide a way forward. The genre comprises "poems and tales which relate the original meanings of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology" (Preoccupations 131) and forms one obvious basis of his place-name poems. It is worth mentioning that both these devices allow the poet access to a communal voice, something against which the ending of "Traditions" militates.

"A New Song" draws on both the "field of force"--which allows associations from earlier poems to flow into this poem and give added reinforcement to the connections adumbrated here--and the traditional sanction of the dinnseanchas, though it is not itself one. The poem is indicative of the central dilemma Heaney experiences at this stage of his development. It combines his skill of evocation and ability to give natural phenomena a textual veracity with an attempt to adopt an adjudicating, prescriptive, or prophetic stance toward communal experience. The result sheds light on certain limitations of his work, and provides an implicit justification for his more usual avoidance of such a stance.

The first three stanzas excavate the associations of a place by using its name as a starting point. Derrygarve

is viewed with nostalgia as a lost Arcadian place. The poet's memories of it are vivid and soothing, but the place is remote: "Vanished music, twilit water, / A smooth libation of the past / Poured by this chance vestal daughter." The note of acceptance of irreversible history on which "Traditions," "The Backward Look" and "Linen Town" conclude is not, however, conceded to here. What makes Heaney capable of recovering history in the last two stanzas is his utilization of the "field of force" and its ability to represent a supposedly irrecoverable history as permanently present in each of its constituent parts. The stanzas read:

But now our river tongues must rise  
 From licking deep in native haunts  
 To flood, with vovelling embrace,  
 Demesnes staked out in consonants.

And Castledawson we'll enlist  
 And Upperlands, each planted bawn--  
 Like bleaching-greens resumed by grass--  
 A vocable, as rath and bullaun.

The relationship between river and body in the earlier "stepping stones like black molars / Sunk in the ford" prepares us for the appearance in the verse of "our river tongues." One can see clearly how the poet's "part-object" identification-- his symbolizing of natural objects as extensions of the human body, perhaps of his own body--facilitates a degree of slippage. A unitary and detached perceiving self at the opening of the poem gives way to "our river tongues" by line 13. The links forged by Heaney's "field of force" between landscape, language, the poet's body and his (absent) community allow the river

to appear culturally archetypal. The ambiguity of the word "must" in "our river tongues must rise" is counterproductive: it is almost impossible to adjudicate between equally feasible readings which see the relevant statement as either a prediction or an exhortation. The poet does not distinguish between the call to action and the acknowledgement of determinism that both inhere in the statement. The ambiguity is further complicated by the use of military as well as amatory imagery in the description of the imagined resurgence: how does one reconcile "vowelling embrace" with "flood" and "enlist"?

The final stanza is obscure, possibly as a result of the poet's having been carried away by the metaphoric density of his conceit. It appears to say that the Planter fortifications (Castledawson, Upperlands, "each planted bawn") will be "enlisted" in the cause of a resurgent national language. If for a moment we remove the parenthetical penultimate line we see the root of some of the obscurity: the line can be read to say either that "each planted bawn [will be made] A vocable," or "each planted bawn [Is] A vocable." Either the imposed and alien fortifications will be included forcibly into the Irish language, or, as a result of time's passage and in accordance with natural processes, the bawns have already become part of the land and can therefore "naturally" be accorded a place in the emergent inclusive language. Such a language can synthesise and accommodate both the relatively modern colonial fortification and the "rath," the prehistoric Irish fort. The obsolete "bullaun," a ritual basin stone, is also included to preserve the beneficent properties of the land and offset **its** violent implications. This is a continuation of both the "libation" and the "embrace" references. The

second reading sees the initial imposition on the land--"staked out," "planted," "bleaching-greens" (a reference to the Irish linen industry)--as being reversed by the processes of the land itself. The flooding waters de-define the original division and staking-out of the land; that which was planted begins to grow in its new environment; grass grows to reverse its former appropriation.

This "Irishing" of colonial plantation place-names is thus either an act of reclamation by an indigenous, female, flooding principle which eases them into Ireland's natural rhythms, or an aggressive counter-action, matching military takeover with military resistance and a different variety of takeover. This last possibility raises an even greater problem in the poem: finally, what sort of takeover bid is this? Even at the end of the poem it is unclear whether the resurgence is linguistic or cultural. Heaney seems to have lost sight of the fictive nature of his "field of force," thereby blurring the distinctions between what is essentially an enabling poetic device and a cultural reality easily mystified by such metaphoric excesses. The fuzzy, abstract notion of an unspecified "Resurgence" that emerges at the end of the poem is the logical outcome of Heaney's applying his osmotic imagination in the form of the "field of force" conceit to important cultural issues. Behind the cryptic verse is a somewhat confused stance, a lack of clarity about what exactly to propose in response to a situation which appears to demand commitment. Heaney's complex conceit not only leads him into these difficulties, but compounds them.

In terms of the direction my discussion of WO has taken thus far, the end of "A New Song" provides a kind of conclusion. The movement of the volume seems to begin with a simultaneous recognition of estrangement<sup>n</sup> and of the need to speak. To combat the former and facilitate the latter Heaney has developed a "field of force" that embeds him in the landscape and gives him a voice: the voice of dispossessed Ireland. His anguished recognition of a lack of available traditions enhances the attractiveness of utilizing such a voice. Eventually, in "A New Song," he tries it out. Unfortunately, it is not entirely successful.

This putative development makes it sound as if Heaney has narrativized the poems of part I of WO. I do not intend to communicate such an impression. WO is, rather, a volume of exploratory "soundings"; it contains a number of different approaches; Heaney tries and abandons different modes in a dynamic search for a poetic means of coming to terms with the problems generated by the Ulster situation. This does not deprive the idea of a "field of force" of its relevance. It does, however, place it in perspective. In very different ways, the three poems I will now discuss are dissociated from the line of development I have outlined; in "The Other Side," "A Northern Hoard" and "The Tollund Man" Heaney follows other routes to "the matter of Ireland."

If "A New Song" is weakened by its inadvertent revelation of the poet's ambiguity and by a lack of clarity in his attitudes towards his subject, "The Other Side" succeeds because it dramatizes those very same features. Heaney does not try to hide them, but makes a poem of them. The self emerges from the dense web of associations in which it is seemingly entrapped

for much of WQ to appear as a more defined, coherent and troubled entity. The poem does not assert the existence of a "field of force" linking language, landscape, religion and the body as much as accept it as part of the underpinnings of the poet's ordinary experience.

The complex intertwining of these elements is a subsidiary concern in the lines: "I lay where his lea sloped / to meet our fallow, / nested on moss and rushes, // my ear swallowing / his fabulous, biblical dismissal, / that tongue of chosen people." The aim is to characterise, and explore, the distance separating the speaker from his Protestant neighbour. He does this with a subtlety that deepens the significance of the more obvious differences between the two men. Different relationships to landscape and to speech reinforce political and religious differences: the speaker lies "nested" in the landscape while his "neighbour laid his shadow / on the stream" and swung "his blackthorn // at the marsh weeds"; his ear "swallows" while the neighbour "prophesies."

As a recognizably human, emotionally undecided individual, the speaker stands slightly detached from, but still implicated in, the system of allegiances that inhere in landscape, language and religion. His sense of detachment is noteworthy: in presenting a stable self at the core of the poem, the poet is again adopting the position of an outsider. It is significant that the two most vivid renderings of a sense of estrangement in the poem are not both related to the distance between the Catholic speaker and his neighbour. One of them is; the exquisite final sentence captures the poignancy of that estrangement. The other, perhaps more interesting, example is found in the lines: "He puts a hand in a pocket // or

taps a little tune with the blackthorn / shyly, as if he were party to / lovemaking or a stranger's weeping." Here the poet gives expression to another's sense of estrangement. The speaker watches his neighbour watching the Catholic ritual, and in so doing, distances himself from his own "side" as well.

It is the interaction and progression of essentially emotional complexities that lend the poem its force, and give it a flavour significantly different to most of the other poems in the volume. Heaney takes less risks in a poem like this than in those which present a dissolution of the self, making it a ghostly presence enmired somewhere in a glutinous web of cultural interrelationships. But it pays off. He avoids the danger, present in those other poems, of drawing attention to the fictiveness of certain of his assumptions about culture.

And yet, the success of "The Other Side" is indebted to the earlier poems of WO.

It would not have been possible for Heaney to produce his effects here had he not previously established the multiple links between his different concerns that elsewhere endanger poems with the weight of their contrivance. The fact that the primary focus on the drama of the self takes place against a backdrop of complicated sectarian allegiances that are merely alluded to but immediately understood in terms of his "field of force" illustrates the tendency of Heaney's poems to "live off one another, sometimes in happy incest, sometimes in a sudden sea-change, by remaining alike and yet profoundly different, as though the genes of his inspiration had suddenly combined to create an extraordinary poem which nevertheless

bears a strong family resemblance to its lesser brothers" (Deane, "Irish Poetry and Irish Nationalism" 20).

In this way the poet manages to turn what at times looks like an unmanageably complex conceit to his advantage.

The contrast to the earlier poems that "A Northern Hoard" presents is of an altogether different sort. Where earlier poems explored landscape, the body and religious ritual as aspects of an encompassing unity that was poetically enabling, the relationship between these entities in this sequence creates a sense of phantasmagoric horror. Heaney here approaches the Northern Irish situation with a different form of indirection. The logic of development in the different sections, and across the whole sequence, is that of the nightmarish imagination. The lines, "the din / of gunshot, siren and clucking gas / Out there beyond each curtained terrace // Where the fault is opening" contain the most explicit references to the war in Ulster in Heaney's first three volumes. They are, however, embedded in a context the main focus of which is the private, interior anguish of the speaker.

I do not intend to deal with the sequence in great detail; rather, I want to highlight those aspects of it which indicate its place in the context I have outlined for WO. First, some general comments on the transformed use of the "field of force." Heaney does not utilize the beneficent associations of religious ritual--appeasement, libation, sanctity--that find expression elsewhere. A far darker conception, centred on the inversion of healing ritual and implicit references to Biblical violence and plague, pervades the sequence. Examples are plentiful: the occult rite that closes "Roots," its reference to "Gomorrhah," the possible Biblical allusion "my smeared

doorstep" in "No Man's Land," the word "plague" in "Stump," the nightmare that has come to replace regenerative rites and Christian celebration on the occasion of Hallowe'en in "No Sanctuary."

In the first four sections the body is violated, cauterized, infected, diseased and unable to heal. Projections from the body onto landscape heighten the sense in the poem of fragmentation, disfigurement and pain. Where the poet earlier sought to fuse himself with the land, he now seeks to escape a landscape of which he is indissolubly a part--like a "spirochete" in the body of the land, like a cauterized "black stump of home." The landscape is enormously threatening: faults open in it; it contains "scorching smells" and "red dog's eyes"; he finds himself between the equally ominous "shred-hung wire and thorn." Both the body and landscape provide metaphors for the nature of his condition and that of his land, conditions he cannot escape and to which he continually returns: "I deserted, shut out / their wounds' fierce awning, / those palms like streaming webs. // Must I crawl back now . . ."; "I am riding to plague again"; "I'm cauterized, a black stump of home."

Heaney's earlier use of the "field of force" gave him a means of bringing into relation divergent aspects of his poetic material; it gave him a means of controlling potentially intractable situations and subjects. In "A Northern Hoard" the continual sense is of a loss of control, of impotence, of an inability to act or speak, and of horror in the face of these facts. "Tinder" is the most substantial of the poems in the sequence, and pulls the "hoard" of fragments toward some sort of coherent statement. Using the analogue of the

discovery of fire, it draws on the discrepancy between hope and uncontrolled tragic results.

Out of the desolation presented in the first part of the poem, the speaker attempts, with the meagre resources of flints, "Cold beads of history and home," and hope, to produce something of use. The attempt is in the face of a number of odds: ignorance, inability and harsh surroundings. With only flints, with no tinder, linen or iron, the small hope must fail. The "cave-mouth flame // Of leaf and stick / Trembling at the mind's wick," but in actuality, it produces only "a weak flame-pollen" that does not "grow". There is an enormous, disturbing discrepancy between the questioning hope--"What could strike a blaze / From our dead igneous days?"--and the results. That blaze, rather than being productive, destroys. Rather than providing light and warmth, and animating those dead igneous days, it reduces everything to cinder. In the aftermath of the destruction which could not have been foreseen and which confounded both hope and expectation, an even more desolate, because hopeless, condition emerges. The thoughts that the poet hoped would kindle some spark are part of the residuum: "our thoughts settle like ash." The group whose hopes, loss of hope and numbed realisation the speaker articulates, are left facing "the tundra's whistling brush // With new history, flint and iron, / Cast-offs, scraps, nail, canine": with the scraps and shards that Heaney elsewhere attempts to animate and unify. The entire poem is a moving allegory of the ignorance of hopes in the face of predatory circumstances. Heaney's most pessimistic and disturbed poem, "A Northern Hoard" not only presents the trauma of internalizing a reality of political violence, but subtly undermines the

potentialities of his previous poetic device by using its terms to produce markedly different effects.

Lastly, there is "The Tollund Man," the finest poem in the volume and the most obvious indication of the direction the poet is to take. The poem goes further than any of those dealt with so far in its self-consciousness about its own processes. It is of course imperative to look at "The Tollund Man" in the context of Heaney's later "bog poems" and I intend to discuss certain aspects of it in my analysis of those poems. The poem does, nonetheless, play a crucial role in WO. I want to concentrate on that role here. In its dramatization of the attempt to shift the focus of the poetry from a personal search and indecision to an embodiment of communal experience, it confronts the possibility of failure. In "Tinder" the results rather than the possibility of failure formed the subject. In WO, Heaney occasionally uses the unity of his field of force as a means towards speech or towards a form of political commitment. When he confronts the intractable material of Ireland's historical strife in this poem, however, the results are somewhat different.

The poem begins with a pledge to undertake a pilgrimage to a site of both past and present significance. The tone is almost that of longing: "Some day I will go to Aarhus / To see his peat-brown head." Aarhus is the place where the Tollund Man lived, died and lay for millenia<sup>n</sup>; the place where he is now enshrined. We might note the happy coincidence of the semantic ambiguity "Aarhus-our house"; this anticipates the direction of the poem (beginning with a promise to go and ending at home) and facilitates the superimposition of Ireland on Jutland.

The description of the Tollund Man himself is in terms of his having been fused with the land and its processes. Heaney's objectifying curiosity allows the connections to be made: "his peat-brown head"; "The mild pods of his eye-lids"; "His last gruel of winter seeds / Caked in his stomach." Heaney's tone is almost reverent in his accurate description of "The mild pods of his eye-lids." The physical suggestiveness of "mild," a sense of the body's delicate vulnerability, and the first mention of a possibility of regeneration ("pods") combine in a line held gently together by a soothing assonance that is nonetheless somewhat disturbed by the slightly explosive distinctiveness of the uncharacteristic sound made by the word "pods." The suggestion of a regenerative potential is, almost immediately, qualified by the word "Caked." Its hard "-ed" ending provides an aural contrast to the sibilance of "seeds" and "pods," which is matched by the ideational contrast between seeds as symbolic of growth and the archaic ag<sup>g</sup>lutination<sub>A</sub> of dormant grain. The possibilities of a symbolic resurgence and of its potential failure are hatched at almost the same moment in the poem.

In the first two stanzas, as in the lines "Naked except for / The cap, noose and girdle," the vulnerability of the body is poignantly conveyed, its status as victim established. The delicate modulations of sound in the first few stanzas, playing off the sensual touch of "-s" sounds and long vowel sounds against the blunter "-ed" endings, the "-k" sounds of "skin cap," "country," "Caked in his stomach," "Naked" and "cap," the harshness of "dug him out" and "gruel," all create a tension between the tone of gentle reverence and a more disturbing objectifying curiosity. In the line "I

will stand a long time" Heaney acknowledges a need to plumb the depths of the mysterious disturbing dimensions that run almost unacknowledged below the surfaces of his conception of the Man in terms of the land, of his status as an object that is "dug out," and of the gently insinuated but disquietening word "noose."

The first lines are therefore not only descriptive but also exploratory. This exploratory quality lies in <sup>a</sup>telling relation to the tone of apparent conviction that follows it. The move is from "sounding" to statement:

Bridegroom to the goddess,

She tightened her torc on him

And opened her fen,

Those dark juices working

Him to a saint's kept body. . . .

These lines communicate a great deal. The Man's ritual significance--the important role he performed in the archaic rites of regeneration--is evoked with full appreciation of its cultural veracity. His "saint's kept body" is sanctified, proof of the genuine religious significance he embodies. The epithet "kept" functions not only to express the literal meanings of "preserved" and "concealed" but also connotes a sense of immortality and a suggestion of concubinage. Simultaneously insinuated into the verse are the more disturbing linkages between sexuality and violence, procreation and death, and healing and wounding. What appears to me more important than any of this, however, is the tendency of the "dark juices" of nature and sexuality not really to foster life and growth, but to preserve, concretise, petrify living tissue into arte-

fact.

The dense web of Heaney's "field of force" establishes itself with accuracy and force; "[t]he connections are not narcotic, or luxuriated upon, as was sometimes true of earlier poems" (Deane, "Irish Poetry and Irish Nationalism" 21).

The poetic voice generating these connections is not, however, concealed by them. The poet's characteristic desire to see his different imaginative concerns interpenetrate has significant consequences for the presentation of the Tollund Man. His tendency to accept the objectifying of the Man is now almost complete. Earlier, the poet was more ambivalent: a note of concealed discomfort underlies the lines "To see his peat-brown head, / The mild pods of his eye-lids" and "In the flat country nearby / Where they dug him out." That note is now gone. To conceive of the corpse as "a saint's kept body" is to no longer think of it as belonging to a once vulnerable and suffering man; its status is now more that of an artefact, a receptacle carrying the symbolic import poured into it by the poet. This is even more true of the description of the Man as the "Trove of the turfcutters' / Honeycombed workings." The Man is here almost pure object, a valuable find uncovered by a form of labour that bespeaks a culture that is whole, self-sufficient and productive.

The mystification of both the Tollund Man and the culture he rejoins as a symbol of value is the result of Heaney's objectifying imagination and of his reliance on the conceits of his "field of force." The conceits allow him a means towards poetry, towards speaking out in a culturally significant way. They lie at the source of his attempt, in the next section, to resurrect the Man as the prophet of cultural renewal.

But they also threaten to sabotage the emotional complexity of his earlier response to the corpse itself. Elsewhere Heaney is content to simply rely on particular conceits as established realities and, as a result, some of the poems fail. His self-consciousness about his own imaginative processes in this poem, however, makes him turn this potential weakness into the poem's central strength. The first section ends with the lines "Now his stained face / Reposes at Aarhus." The pain and pathos of the Man's condition, established earlier, is again evoked by the words "stained face" and "Reposes." The quiescence of his repose, with its suggestion of an achieved cessation of activity, a rest from the exertions through which he has been put as ritual sacrifice and cultural symbol, should work in combination with the implications of the word "Caked" to alert us to the potential failure of the subsequent attempt to resurrect him.

Edna Longley says of the Tollund Man: "related to 'the moustached dead, the creel-fillers' in "Bog Oak" the Man becomes the logical conclusion, the terminal case, the reductio of ancestral dispossession and oppression" ("North" 75). By stressing this aspect of the Man at the end of the first section Heaney gives the poem much of its drama and significance. The Man's weariness, his need for repose, will have to be overcome by the power of poetic metaphor if he is to become the symbol of cultural regeneration, and the drama of the struggle between these contrary impulses constitutes one of the poet's implicit comments on the nature of the poetic enterprise in Ireland today.

Significantly, the first line of the second section reads "I could risk blasphemy." This circumspect affirmation indi-

cates the poet's self-consciousness in going outside internalised dogma and risking the possibility of straying into culturally inappropriate terrain. The lines "Consecrate the cauldron bog / Our holy ground and pray / Him to make germinate" rely for part of their force on the previously established relationships between landscape, religion and sexuality. The attempt is once more to move from exploration to prescription, from observation to action. The will to germination in these lines is based on a tropological conceit. The Man appears as a Christ-surrogate whose death and resurrection might symbolize redemption or restoration for the slaughtered victims of Irish history. The attempt to image resurrection founders on the material it confronts:

The scattered, ambushed  
 Flesh of labourers,  
 Stockinged corpses  
 Laid out in the farmyards,

Tell-tale skin and teeth  
 Flecking the sleepers  
 Of four young brothers, trailed  
 For miles along the lines.

These stanzas catalogue the victims of historical strife, of sectarian and religious violence. The painfully dismembered bodies of apparently innocent people ("labourers," "four young brothers"), together with the precision and poignant vulnerability of the lines "The scattered, ambushed / Flesh of labourers" and "Stockinged corpses / Laid out in the farmyards," recall Heaney's other catalogues of fragments that call out for restorative unification.<sup>10</sup> The idea that from the frag-

ment can grow the whole, which is based on the analogue of natural vegetable growth from seed to plant, owes a debt to an earlier image pattern in the poem. The pattern obscures the distinctions between seed and body, between the reproductive potentials of human beings and of nature. The present lines continue the pattern, take it into the realm of politics, and allow an expedient, if questionable, confusion of natural regeneration with politico-cultural resurgence. The section ends with a reference to an actual atrocity committed in the 1920s by the B. Specials.<sup>11</sup> Four brothers were murdered by being tied to a moving train. The manner in which the impetus of the first stanza of this section grinds to a halt on the sad scraps of human flesh left by the journey of the four brothers would appear to be a comment on the intractability of the historical material which the poet's regenerative impulse finds difficulty in overcoming. The fact that the section ends there, and that the attention is thereafter shifted onto the poet himself and onto the actual person of the Tollund Man, introduces a consciousness of failure into the poem.

The importance of this lies in the fact that the poem shows an awareness of the difficulty involved in relying on the creation of a fictive unity of multiple poetic elements to solve pressing cultural problems. It would seem that cultural renewal cannot depend on a trope, and with the realisation of the gap separating poetic utterance from political action, the poet turns from the unfulfilling talk of resurrection to a contemplation of the self.

The presence of the Tollund Man in the third section is the presence of an actual person, no longer that of an object or symbol. This change in his status allows the poet

to identify with the Man. Both men journey, one on a tumbril as part of a fertility ritual leading inevitably to his death, the other in a car on an imaginary pilgrimage to a land filled with atavisms. The positions of the two men are related by analogue rather than conflated: their respective journeys are differentiated by the qualifiers "Something" and "Should" in the lines,

Something of his sad freedom  
As he rode the tumbril  
Should come to me, driving,  
Saying the names

Tollund, Grabaulle, Nebelgard,  
Watching the pointing hands  
Of country people,  
Not knowing their tongue.

Perhaps the Man's "sad freedom" is a freedom from choice, the consequence of being bound by ritual necessity to a communal purpose, "sad" because it leads to violent death. "Something" of this might be assimilated to the role of the poet undertaking a latter-day pilgrimage, but the sustaining rituals of iron-age Jutland find no communal equivalents in the present: the rites of the speaker are self-generated, "blasphemous."

To recognize that "Something" and "Should" are not only qualifiers but also express desire is to become aware of a note of exquisite poignancy in the lines. Heaney self-consciously dramatizes himself driving. His "Saying the names .// Tollund, Grabaulle, Nebelgard" suggests that he requests directions from the "country people" of Jutland, but might also signify an attempt to make his liturgical enumeration

of place-names yield significance. With this latter possibility in mind, it is useful to read "Tollund, Grabaulle, Nebelgard" in the context of the place-name poems of WO, in which the vocable of a name was made to fracture under the force of liturgical repetition to reveal its store of hidden history. Things are different here. "Anahorish" called up for the poet "mound-dwellers" with whom he could identify; in the present poem the "pointing hands / Of country people" are as much correlatives of detachment as directional guides and the speaker's incomprehension of their collective "tongue" is a signal of estrangement rather than identification. The speaker's stance of estrangement is important; it lies at the root of, and is coupled with, an aspiration to partake of rituals, a community, a language, from which he remains excluded. The note of estrangement, implying a cruel consciousness of potential failure, leads into the last stanza, one of the finest in the poem:

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

The demonstrative "Out there" suggests the security of the "here," of the stance of detachment and non-involvement. It also communicates an intimation of the precarious, exposed position that being outside, amongst the atavisms in a land that itself has a killing potential, involves. The phrase "man-killing parishes" links landscape, religion and violence to produce an essentially different effect to that produced by many of Heaney's other such conceits. There is nothing contrived or strategic about its use here; it is, rather,

symptomatic of a consciousness that feels the threat of violence so intensely that everything external to the self becomes suffused with a feared capacity for violence.

The bald statement with which the poem ends is perhaps as far as the poet eventually feels he can go. Having extended the boundaries of the private imaginative realm of the first section to include the political realm of the "man-killing parishes" of Jutland and Northern Ireland, having aspired towards providing symbols of cultural regeneration and toward the "sad freedom" of the Tollund Man, and having confronted both the intractability of the material with which he deals and the potential for failure, he settles for a minimal statement of personal emotions. In the simple "I will feel lost, / Unhappy and at home" we see how the iron-age Jutland connection has been effective in summoning up profound feelings he has about the situation in Northern Ireland.

By retreating into this position and talking out of its privacy, Heaney has paradoxically come to talk publically of his own sense of failure and exposure. Suffusing these lines is his sense of being at once distanced from and yet in possession of territory that is "home" but also menacing. The poet's unhappiness could be ascribed to his feeling the necessity of having to deal with subject matter from which he would rather shy away, but cannot because it constitutes his home ground. It is the price he pays for his attempt to gain access to a poetical mode of political significance. The last lines contain the sense of having returned to the point of departure unfulfilled but changed; or feeling impotent, but accepting one's impotence and failure. This is a hallmark of the honesty of this confessional moment. It casts doubt

on the efficacy of Heaney's other attempts to do the restorative job for culture, questions the efficacy of poetry itself in as demanding an environment as the Irish one, but, in its self-consciousness, eventually makes of these painful emotions a genuinely successful poem.

"The Tollund Man" is the most significant watershed poem in Heaney's first three volumes. Much of the earlier poetry points toward it, and it signals the direction of new departures. It attempts to speak out publically, using the conceit Heaney has earlier established to allow contemplation of himself and some of the dimensions of his experience to become the medium for a more communal expression. It fuses a contemplation of the self and the theme of self-growth with a sensibility more attuned to the political dimension of his home area than was visible at any earlier stage. The mythic terrain of North is opened up here with a fortunate degree of self-consciousness of the difficulties involved in attempting to use a personally-generated mythic conception to solve or give expression to cultural problems. The note of uncertainty and wariness that attends this widening of scope gives the poetry some of its characteristic quality. Its immediacy, tentativeness and sensitivity to the possibility of failure are, significantly, to diminish in the later volume.

X.

The importance of the poem derives partly from Heaney's having made in it an attempt to speak the speech towards which much of WO gestures but does not dare. One noticeable feature of the resultant speech is its attempt to heal, appease, and

provide relief. Heaney's later work often returns to this desire. The movement from the desire to a consciousness of its potential failure finds expression not only in "The Tollund Man" but in important thematic and imagistic patterns that run throughout the volume. There are, firstly, the indications of despair, the pain, the "semaphores of hurt" that elicit the restorative impulse. These range from expressions like "Is there a life before death?" (the dedicatory poem) and "The touch of love, / . . . Grows helpless in our old Gomorrah" ("Roots"), to the pain latent in the poems dealing with women's experiences in part II of the volume, and the almost universalised pain imaged in "Limbo" or "First Calf." Against this is set the possibility of regeneration and recovery in the archetypal call of the Moyola in "Gifts of Rain" and "A New Song," the possibility of reconciliation and appeasement in "Summer Home," the imagery of religious miracle and restorative ritual, of resurrection and Easter, of eggs used as symbols of fertility.<sup>12</sup>

Again, the possibilities of effective healing are qualified: the lines "Why do I unceasingly / arrive late to condone / infected sutures / and ill-knit bone?" ("No Man's Land"), "What do I say if they wheel out their dead? / I'm cauterized, a black stump of home" ("Stump") make the point. Against the motif of resurrection must be set the Tollund Man in his resistant repose and the painful portrayal of the crucified Christ in "Limbo" and "Westering" (possibly "those palms like streaming webs" from "No Man's Land" is also an allusion to the crucifixion). Against the regenerative power of ritual and religion stands the potential for their abasement and futility ("The Last Mummer," "The Other Side," "Roots," "No

Sanctuary"). Alongside the propitious use of egg symbolism is the reference to nest-robbing in "Somnambulist" and the imagery of broken or infertile eggs (the seeds and pods in "The Tollund Man"; "Cairn-Maker").

The see-saw movement between desire and reservation constitutes one aspect of the quality of exploratory tentativeness that marks WO as a whole. The person of the poet, inhabiting these poems in different degrees of visibility and in a variety of forms of estrangement and dispossession, is constantly seeking a mode of speech that regulates his quest for a definition of the self to the pace of his culture. "The Tollund Man" is Heaney's most ambitious, and effective, poem in this regard, and its success opens out into the prospect of North.

#### XI. Part II.

The individual poems of part II do not detain one long if one's focus is on the larger rhythms of the poet's poetic development. Bernard Sharrat captures concisely and pertinently the essential effect achieved by Heaney's use of a bipartite structure in WO. The effect becomes a hallmark of North as well. Sharrat says,

Pt II of Wintering Out signals a sharp transition to private poems and concerns. . . . here the contrast with Pt I seems to give these fragments of ordinary living a poignancy they would not generate of themselves: a retreat from terror into domesticity is a different kind of assertion from the mere building of un-

threatening privacy. A walk in the country, witnessing a calving or nostalgically seeking a favourite spot, an evening swapping stories around the fire, a child [sic] lost and found on a cold night, become significant in this explicit division of Pt I and Pt II as a way of emphasising a different permanence, another and human timelessness and continuity. When the internment-camp has become a familiar landmark on the motorway journey and the hooded, dumped corpses are numbered in round figures, the insignificant, the ordinary, the domestic take on the compelling attraction that home has for the exile or the imprisoned. (369-70)

Chapter 4. North

## I. Introduction.

In North, Heaney both develops and departs from the poetic procedures of WO. Instead of seeking to make statements about situations, the exploratory poems of WO develop a set of conceits or "field of force" with the implicit aim of facilitating future speech. North is an outgrowth of WO in that it continues the exploration of the former volume further into the political and cultural domain, again utilizes the "field of force," and attempts (with only partial success) to embody the speech which WO seems to promise. The momentum of the poetic exploration is generated by a dialectical tension between dual motivations. For if politics and the desire to engage with politics form one of the poles at the source of North, the desire to evade, transcend or escape from politics forms the other. The space between these desires constitutes the "hatching grounds" of the poetry.

One cannot determine the extent to which the poet was explicitly pressured to respond poetically to the escalating conflict in Northern Ireland after the publication of DD and WO, but what is obvious from the poetry is that he internalised the need to respond. Whether actual or imagined, that pressure leaves its mark on the poetry.

The introspection that features in the most important poems in WO forms part of North too, but the poet's engagement with the objects of his obsession in the later volume is so intensified that, paradoxically, his self-searching becomes synonymous with public expression. The reason for this lies in the nature of

those objects. The objects upon which the poet's gaze is transfixed are constituted as historical and political entities. In part I Ireland's Viking past and Glob's book throw up material that is treated by the poet as part of his own imaginative property at the same time that it forms part of his historical heritage. By tapping the root of his personal responses to this material, his expressions are made to carry historical and political resonances.

As always, however, Heaney is reluctant to adopt the mantle of the political spokesman or cultural diagnostician. The poems he writes seldom reveal either of his contradictory desires in their pure form; an uncomfortable coexistence of contrary motivations in the same poem is far more frequently found. In North the dialectical tension between contrary emotions itself becomes a poetic subject. Heaney's inability to resolve the conflict one way or the other leads him to make poems in which he contemplates the ability of the poetry itself to sustain those tensions and to adequately represent the reality of which they are part. This deflection of interest is one reason that prevents North from embodying the deferred speech promised in WO. Heaney's scrutiny of his own poetry frequently involves an acknowledgement of the dangerous temptations proffered by the poetic imagination. It can promise specious resolutions and provide avenues for various forms of indulgence. In the face of dangers such as these, the poet's need to validate poetry in the predatory conditions of its production becomes a defining feature of the poems in North.

Increasingly, Heaney's anguished attention has focused on his own art: on the limitations imposed on it and the functions it can fulfil. North is the most reflexive of all his volumes in that the poems, irrespective of what they deal with, deal also with themselves. As a consequence of his need to allow the politics of Northern Ireland into the enclosures of his poems, he is almost persistently concerned with the ability of his poetry to respond adequately to the phenomenon of violence that is so inextricably a part of those politics.

The degree of planning that went into the arrangement of the poems and the structure of the volume is unprecedented in Heaney's oeuvre. WO split uneasily into two parts, doing so for no very good reason. The division between parts I and II of North has, on the contrary, fostered criticism which takes the view that "the structure of the book is its meaning." Morrison, who is responsible for this statement, has exhaustively outlined what he takes to be the nature and significance of the division:

In North, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say, the structure of the book is its meaning: the placing and interlocking of the poems amount to the creation of a historical myth. . . . In Part I the 'North' explored is northern Europe over the last 2000 years; the dominant verse-form is the compressed, 'artesian' quatrain already employed in Wintering Out; the tone is reverential, formal, serious; and the language is deeply rooted in the past, to the extent of reviving defunct and archaic words. In Part II 'North' means contemporary

Northern Ireland; the dominant verse-form is the rhyming quatrain in iambic pentameters; the tone is conversational, irreverent, humorous; and the language is contemporary and at times journalistic. Concerning itself with a divided culture, North is at odds with itself--but fruitfully so.

The binary structure of North is more, however, than an example of 'form' reflecting 'content': it satisfies a temperamental need in Heaney. His essays, reviews and interviews repeatedly advance the idea that there are two kinds of poetry and two kinds of poet: les vers donnés as against les vers calculés; the poetry of chance and trance as against the poetry of resistance and perseverance; the poetry of 'sinking in' or the poetry of 'coming up against'; the instinctual or the rational; the feminine or the masculine. . . .

He provides several more such oppositions, before concluding, Heaney sees his career as having fluctuated between two different types of poetic composition, Death of a Naturalist, for example, having been laboured over and 'made,' the place-name poems of Wintering Out having been 'given.' The distinction of North lies in its self-conscious incorporation of both kinds of poem, the instinctual mode making up Part I, the rational Part II. (53-54)

Much of this is accurate, but the elaborate set of binary oppositions Morrison invokes to explain why Heaney chooses to divide North is a dangerous if seductive critical tool. North cannot be simplistically divided. A reductive criticism is fostered by overemphasising the division and thereby precluding consideration of the diversities within each part and the extensive areas where the different parts overlap. It is dangerous to view the division between the two parts as rigid and the relationship between them as oppositional. The presence of the important dedicatory poems calls into question the assertion that the structure of North is simply bipartite, but leaving this issue aside for the moment, one would assert that the two parts together represent an organic form rather than a strict opposition.

Morrison's point appears to be that a reading of the poems in part II--which deal explicitly with the poet's situation in the politics of the present--is significantly enriched when seen against the backdrop of the wider historical vista sketched in part I. Seeing the present against the pattern of the past produces a "historical myth." This is acceptable insofar as one's reading of the one part enriches one's reading of the other, but the formulation remains a little too neat since neither part is reducible to one thing.

Part I does deal with an expansive historical period, but the poet's perception and representation of it continually shifts. He writes from a multiplicity of motivations: in some poems he mythopoeically reduces history to cyclical patterns; in others he attempts to wrest historical veracity from just such an impulse, whilst in a third set he turns myths and histories into

heuristic figures in the drama of his artistic self-definition. Nonetheless, there is a developmental progression across the whole of the part, though this is neither linear nor stable. It actually results in the poet's denial that the mythopoeic and "symbolic" response to politics is an adequate one, and he thereafter turns his attention to the various modes of "explicitness" in part II. In this sense the artistic mode of part II--which can be differentiated from that of part I--provides an alternative; in other instances, it acts as a complement. Poems in both parts, for example, combine to form one term of yet another of the structural oppositions of the volume, that between the "Mossbawn Poems" and the main body of North.

## II. The Dedicatory Poems.

"Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication for Mary Heaney" contains two of the most interesting poems in North. Both stand outside the bipartite structure of the volume. The primary dialectical tension in the volume between the poet's contradictory impulses to be either detached or involved in politics seems to find no concrete manifestation here. The central subjects of history, politics and violence appear to be absent. The nostalgic recollection of scenes from a personal past, of a woman baking and of labourers in a field, are apparently strange subjects for the public Heaney to place at the outset of the volume in which he confronts politics most directly. And yet there is logic in the choice.

In these delicate poems the poet impresses us with his lightness of touch, his painterly sensitivity to atmosphere, and the technical competence with which he captures the complex interplay of emotions associated with his former home. One responds initially to the dazzling, if circumscribed, demonstration of these qualities in two remarkably contained, accomplished pieces.

To read the poems in the context of North, however, is to become aware that they represent far more than this. They do not, as one might imagine, challenge the anguished political introspection of most of North by providing a possible alternative perspective. Rather, they illustrate a mode of poetic apprehension and inclusiveness which the substantially more terrifying terrain of the rest of the book calls into question. They are poems written at the outset of an exploration into areas that question the basis upon which they are articulated. This does not detract from the significance of the "Mossbawn" poems; it simply illustrates the extent to which the <sup>1</sup>politics of Northern Ireland have played a role in the development of Heaney's work.

A close analysis of the poems will reveal the quality of poetic inclusiveness that allows for the note of quiet celebration and cultural confidence. The internal economy of the poems' workings must be appreciated before we can understand how the poet comes to view with suspicion precisely that quality of poetry which is here most distinguished: its ability to include and absorb under its aegis the forces which threaten its composure.

## i. "Sunlight."

The first line of "Sunlight" is characteristically simple and yet rich. This line, anticipating the movement of the poem as a whole, might have been written to validate Wordsworth's remark about the poet's "disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present"(737). The quote is not gratuitous: Heaney's Wordsworthian sympathies are often on view in North, as elsewhere. The placement of the word "absence" in the line constitutes it as an almost physical presence. No void can be "sunlit": there are thus suggestions of hidden form in the phrase "sunlit absence." These are enhanced by the formal punctuation at the end of the line, which needs to be distinguished from the informal punctuation of white space that follows each line of poetry.<sup>13</sup> Without the full stop, "absence" would open out into the blankness of the page's white space, would be significantly more suggestive, elusive and indefinable (Heaney exploits just these possibilities further on: "here is a space / . . .," " And here is love / . . ."). With it, the "absence" is ever so slightly constrained, moved a little towards the rigidity of shape. We experience a sensation the "Mossbawn" poems continually produce: something hidden--an indefinable source of light, heat, life--is playing somewhere just beneath the surface of everyday objects and actions, and filling the innumerable spaces we usually do not perceive, giving them form.

From "sunlit absence" to "The helmeted pump in the yard": the move is from one extreme to the other, from a delicate, abstract suggestiveness to a vivid concrete presence. From there it goes to "water." Pulling these divergent elements into relationship and coexistence is some unnamed quality of "sunlight" that is and is not simply the light from the sun. Note that the lines "The helmeted pump in the yard / heated its iron" are reflexive. The pump is heated, and yet it is that which heats itself.

Even more interesting is the subsequent "water honeyed // in the slung bucket." There is more in these lines than a simple resemblance between water and honey due to the play of light. These lines too, are reflexive: the water is "honeyed," but it also "honeys." It is, and is not, the agent of its own transformation. Going even further, it is the product of that transformation whilst remaining itself. It is honey--and thus partakes of the rich associations of that substance--whilst being water; it behaves and looks like honey whilst remaining the ordinary substance in the casually "slung bucket." The ability of these reflexive images to stretch the imagination to its limits in this way is central to Heaney's purpose.<sup>14</sup> By exploiting the closed economy of the reflexive image he aims to create an aura of inexplicable magicality around perfectly ordinary objects.

The impression we receive is that ordinary objects have a life of their own, yet are bonded into the larger life. Each is distinct, but is not defined absolutely nor isolated from the multitude of equally distinct objects that surround it. Also--and this is important for the longer view of North--nothing

is static. What initially appears static (the "helmeted pump" before the enjambment, for example) is only apparently so. The description of the sun--the source of light itself--demonstrates this point. "[T]he sun stood" is how line 6 ends. With the simile of the griddle leaning against the wall this would seem to suggest stasis. In order to create the impression of a heightened moment in time and not that of a fixed tableau, Heaney leaves off the formal punctuation, letting that "stood" hang there precipitously. By necessity, what might have been an end-stopped line is reintegrated into the processes of time:

the sun stood  
like a griddle cooling  
against the wall

of each long afternoon.

The passage of time is subtly intimated in the participle "cooling" and in the carefully placed word "each," which suggests succession and is charming precisely because it looks so casually placed. None of this really detracts from the impression of stability and orderly development which the lines also convey. Movement within time never simply becomes chaotic flux. Heaney's creation of a sense of casual rhythmic movement within a panoptic steadiness is central to the success of the poem.

The moment at which the woman in the poem is introduced provides an interesting development: "So, her hands scuffled / over the bakeboard." The phrase "her hands scuffled" threatens to contradict what the poem has thus far established about movement and order. The word "scuffled" implies confused movement and disorder. Like the military connotations of the

word "helmeted," it threatens to upset the stability of the poem. In context, however, this threat is partially subdued by the domesticity of the poem. Also, the "scuffling" takes place "over the bakeboard," that is, within a defined space. The seemingly innocent preposition here deprives "scuffled" of whatever menace it has since, if we are to visualise hands moving "over" a bakeboard, we imagine control and delicacy as well as vigour.

More importantly, the word "So" with which the sentence opens is the stroke of genius which allows Heaney to admit this "threat" into the poem. This is because it also provides a means of defusing and then incorporating the threat into the larger framework of the poem. "So" implies consequentiality. If the use of the word is initially puzzling, the problem resolves itself brilliantly: she bakes as a "consequence" of the absence being sunlit, of the pump heating its iron, the water "honeying," and the sun only apparently standing still. In other words, she bakes because of the "rightness" of her relationship to these processes. She is accorded a status similar to that of the other objects; she is a distinct but connected entity in a world of animated interdependence. If we read "So" as "in the same way" the same <sup>i</sup>point is made, but in a different way. Whatever the energy of "sunlight" animating the entire scene is, she too transmits and receives it.

Heaney does not propose that some esoteric mystic unity of being underlies the situation he describes; the logic of his unity is a consequence of the implications of his images.

One sees his fidelity to the humility of his subject matter and to the depth of emotion it evokes in the next five lines. After the bustle of "scuffled," the woman attains the only point of real quiescence in the poem:

the reddening stove  
  
sent its plaque of heat  
against her where she stood  
in a floury apron  
by the window.

"[S]tood" is firmer here than was the case with the sun. She is in fact treated almost as an object; this is partly the work of the prepositions "against," "in" and "by," partly an implication of the concretised plaque image, and partly the result of a painterly conception of the scene. There are resemblances between Heaney's poetry and the visual arts here. The use of "reddening" to describe an increase in temperature is our first clue. This is followed by a vision of the woman softly illuminated by an absent source of light (we translate the stove's "plaque of heat" at least partly into the visual medium). The vision is astonishingly Vermeer-like. This point of stasis is not frozen but constitutes a "spot of time." As so often in Heaney, surfaces contrive underlays of meaning. The sentence as a whole has placed the woman firmly within her surroundings, yet this moment of silence gives her a measure of pensive independence and emotional depth. Her "scuffling hands" could never have led us to expect anything quite like this.

This still moment depends for its force on its brevity. The intensity of the experience creates an artifice of prolongation. There is both a huge space and a very short one between the last quoted lines and "Now she dusts the board / with a goose's wing, / now sits, broad-lapped, / with whitened nails // and measling shins" ("the tick of two clocks" will later remind us of this moment). The abrupt shift of tense, the movement back into activity, and then the slow receding into a relaxed, capacious easiness and the return to the observation of minutiae are strategies suggesting continuity, the poem's theme. Action and inaction, past and present, the ordinary and the mysterious: these are some of the dichotomies that melt and flow into one another in the slow dance of sunlight on domesticity.

Edna Longley has commented favourably on the "[t]wo emotionally and rhythmically expansive endings" of the "Mossbawn" poems ("North" 90). Of all the possible endings in the work of a poet whose last lines are usually impressive, Longley is right to isolate these for praise. "Sunlight" ends:

here is a space  
again, the scone rising  
to the tick of two clocks.

And here is love  
like a tinsmith's scoop  
sunk past its gleam  
in the meal-bin.

"There was a sunlit absence. / . . . here is a space / . . .": the progression has been an interesting one. The white space opens out beyond "a space." There is a space indeed, but it is

not one of emptiness. "Sunlight" has taught us that rays of light fill the gaps and spaces in experience. This space is different("here" not "There"; it is not an "absence") but open to the same influences. The line is powerful because so pregnant with meaning. Working only by suggestion and by the expectations raised in us previously, it communicates the potency of this moment and this "space" without defining and thereby limiting it. One aspect of the "space" we must not forget is that it is a space on the page, the gap in the poem that is filled by that which animates the poem as a whole. Once we penetrate the space dividing the lines, a consummation is reached in that "again," which is both the fulfilment of continuity and a new departure. The "scone rising / to the tick of two clocks" fills and does not fill the space. It provides outlines and suggestions, like the sunlight in "sunlit absence" did. The scone is its own fulfilment, and also the fulfilment of the labour described in the poem.

It is as though the scone fills this space but also receives the energy required for its "rising" from this space. Again, a participle does the work of aligning motion with order. The scone rises "to the tick of two clocks"; that is, within time and at a pace with its minutiae ("the tick"). But there are really two times; the clocks tick together but are distinguishable. Heaney's dichotomies of presence and absence, ordinariness and mystery, past and present and process and stasis are not gobbled up into a greedily encompassing unity in this image. The concentration is on distinctiveness, relationship and coexistence, not on separation or absolute fusion. The effect is one of peace, and of quiet celebration.

"And here is love / . . .": the similarity of wording makes "love" as suggestively rich and openly unpredictable as "a space." Though both "love" and "space" are potentially abstract, they are, by the context of the poem, drawn into the very stuff of life, living off it whilst enriching it. This is the suggestion even before the "emotionally . . . expansive" image of the "tinsmith's scoop." The image is a consummation: delicate, precise, and magical. The teasingly impossible idea of a scoop "sunk past its gleam" is so "right," so without strain, in such concordance with the remainder of the poem that it provides a conclusion that is nowhere as final, though as satisfying, as any closure. Sunlight continues to play on everything, the invisible included. In Longley's accurate formulation: "the subtle chiasmic assonance 'gleam'--'Meal' dramatises the complete subjugation both of 'love' and the poem--and the poem because of its love--to what they work in" ("North" 90).

ii. "The Seed Cutters."

Formally, "The Seed Cutters" occupies a strange place in a volume that, for the most part, seeks to undermine the long line and iambic richness of the traditional complex forms of English poetry. (Part I attempts to do so by neglecting them, part II by making them swallow a tone and subject matter foreign to them). In this poem, the rich formality of the sonnet form is made to

contain a fidelity to the local textures of Heaney's culture at the same time that it allows his empiricism and concreteness ample rein.

I have quoted before Heaney's statement that, "Back then I thought that music, the melodious grace of the English iambic line, was some kind of affront, that it needed to be wrecked. . ." ("Artists on Art" 412). The "political" motivation of such a view, and of the manifold poems in North which reflect it, should be placed alongside his actual practice in "The Seed Cutters." The discrepancy shows how, in the "Mossbawn" poems, Heaney is attempting something different to what he does in the rest of North. The pleasures and appeasements provided by formal excellence occupy him here. A "political" and "artistic" motivation might be thought to part company at this point.

The first sentence of the sonnet introduces continuity as a theme of the poem. Though the distance separating the speaker from the labourers is physical, its verbal conception is in terms of temporal hyperbole--"hundreds of years away." This abstraction makes the seed cutters appear almost unattainably distant. Thus the note of yearning. Overcoming this yearning is the function, and a theme, of the poem. Poetry itself provides the means. The abstraction distances them, but the sentence as a whole simultaneously begins to bring them closer: they only "seem"(present tense--and here continuity is also implicated) years "away." That "away"(rather than "ago") keeps them within the spatial distance of the present whilst suggesting the historical continuity they symbolise.

Once more, Heaney uses the line adroitly. By tagging the beginning of his apostrophe onto the end of the first line, he contains the first sentence within limits that prevent an unmanageable expansiveness. Ciaran Carson remarks: "the apostrophe works perfectly; we realize how Breughel's realism, his faithfulness to minutiae, are akin to Heaney's, and what could have been portentousness takes on a kind of humility" (185-6). Also implicated is a suggestion of the ahistorical notion of the permanent recognizability of artistic excellence.

Another formal aspect of the lines that deserves comment is Heaney's use of the caesura. The poem moves from the use of a terminal caesura in line 1 to a progressively more consistent use of the medial caesura. The effect of this is to give the seemingly casual speech rhythms a degree of formality that heightens the sense of an orderly poetic construction. It is one of the means the poet utilizes to elevate the rural domesticity of his subject to the level of formal art.

The line "They kneel under the hedge in a half-circle" illustrates advances Heaney has made. In "At a Potato Digging," which "The Seed Cutters" superficially resembles, the poet laboured to introduce the religious machinery of "the famine god," "a seasonal altar of the sod" and the "libations" of the labourers. In both WO and elsewhere in North, Heaney is guilty of an equally laboured stacking of parallels between the various elements of his poetic terrain. But here he is considerably more subtle, suggestive and persuasive. "[K]neel" and "half-circle" only tentatively begin to intimate the existence of a religious dimension to the relationship between labourers and land. This

evocation of the religious dimension of rural experience is preferable to the more elaborate, and less convincing, connections Heaney makes elsewhere.

The concluding line of the first quatrain continues the high standard: "They kneel . . . / Behind a windbreak wind is breaking through." This line recalls, and exemplifies, the close connection between word and thing that obtains in Heaney's early poetry and which diminishes in North. It is as if the wind fractures not only the object but also the word "windbreak," revealing its etymology by breaking it into its component parts. This combination of effect on word and thing gives the wind an inordinately tactile force. The rhyme which closes both line and quatrain serves brilliantly to contain the destabilizing wind within an artistic frame which is both pictorial and verbal. The force of the wind prevents the view of the seed cutters from becoming stylized and slightly lifeless, whilst the rhyme maintains the balance.

None of this is--to use Carson's term--portentous; the abstract meanings work subtly and by implication. The poem remains an exercise in absolutely simple language that aims to describe an ordinary rural scene. This does not limit its more profound ramifications. "They are the seed cutters": nothing could be more straightforward and simple; neither could there be anything more seemingly straightforward. For in the interaction of the words "seed" and "cutters" we have the barely visible drama which is later acted out in more explicit, though still veiled terms:

the seed potatoes

Buried under that straw. With time to kill

They are taking their time. Each sharp knife goes  
 Lazily halving each root that falls apart  
 In the palm of the hand: a milky gleam,  
 And, at the centre, a dark watermark.

"Drama" would seem an unusual word to apply to this passage. Yet if we see "The Seed Cutters" in the context of North, what manifests itself elsewhere as a tension between beauty and cruelty, ceremony and violence, the "Dying Gaul" and "each hooded victim" is also evident here, though to different effect. If religion is revealed as a covert presence in the poem, so too is violence. Introduced by the vaguely threatening wind, the theme is taken up in "With time to kill" and "Each sharp knife goes. . . ." It is not accidental that consecutive lines end with these phrases. A threat of violence hangs over the end of each line; it is made to appear imminent by the verb forms of both final words. Once again, as was the case with the wind, the threat is dispelled by what follows immediately thereafter. Within the relaxed ambiance of the rural setting, and within the poem, the threat is, without any sense of strain, appeased by a convincing alternative to violence. The alternative is not in the least extraordinary; it consists in the very nature of quotidian rural activity: "they are taking their time"; "Lazily halving each root."

This tension is finally resolved in the description of the cut potatoes. There is a sense of revelation, of richness and quiet celebration in that "milky gleam" and "dark watermark" which is as much the result of the unexpected direction the threat of violence has taken as of the rhythm and assonantal clusters that given the lines their distinctive movement. The

poem almost gives the impression that the richness of the potatoes is revealed as a result of an act of potential violence. Violence appears not only averted but transformed.

The line "Buried under that straw. With time to kill" takes on new meaning when viewed in this light. Christopher Ricks has drawn attention to what he calls the "anti-pun" in poetry, by which "another sense of a word is called up only to be fended off" ("Force of Poetry" 142). In this case "Buried" is prevented from carrying connotations of infertility and death because of the pressure exerted on it by the word "kill" at the end of the line. The implication of "The tuck and frill / Of leaf-sprout is on the seed potatoes / Buried under that straw" is obviously one of fertility, and so tends to preclude the negative suggestions of "Buried." Heaney enforces this impression by using the word "kill" in close proximity, thereby conjuring up meanings to dispel them. Enforcing it even further is the possibility of taking the potatoes rather than the seed cutters as the subject of the lines "With time to kill / They are taking their time." Such a reading creates a sense of delayed burgeoning which puts even more pressure on the word "Buried."

That "kill" should be used in this way to increase the suggestions of fertility in preceding lines creates the impression that violence can paradoxically be turned to productive rather than destructive ends. The submerged wit and fugitive suggestiveness of the strategies employed make this seemingly simple poem one of the most appealing and technically accomplished in North but, in the course of the volume, Heaney comes to distrust the quiet confidence with which this initial attitude to violence is communicated.

The poem has gradually narrowed its focus from the huge spatial and temporal distances of its opening to the watermark at the centre of the seed potato. This has seen the fulfilment of the poet's self-imposed artistic challenge to "get them true." The concluding lines provide another variety of fulfilment:

O calendar customs! Under the broom  
 Yellowing over them, compose the frieze  
 With all of us there, our anonymities.

The phrase "calendar customs" captures nicely the interplay of local and universal in the poem by drawing on the suggestiveness of both the abstract system (something we hear in a phrase like "calendar year") and the well-thumbed, tacked-up, homely document itself. It also exhibits the poet's tacit assent to a form of ritual. The delicacy with which the final scene is circumscribed and defined by the prepositions in "Under the broom / Yellowing over them" and the demonstrative "there" raise questions of artistic composition. These are taken up by "frieze," a surprisingly accurate description of the almost sculptural solidity Heaney's work sometimes approximates. Most impressively, "frieze" and "Yellowing" are put into productive interaction. The connotations of ageing, maturation and decay which adhere to the participle represent the passage of time which is not "frozen" by the pun at the opposite end of the line. Rather, the poem itself--exhibiting both the composition and the composure that "compose" suggests--is a living form positioning the "passionate transitory" (Kavanagh's term) within a framework of permanence.

Heaney's formal competence is again remarkable. The last line of the third quatrain of the sonnet at first seems awkwardly placed: its semantic shift of emphasis seems to detract from the unity of the quatrain and signify a formal destabilization. The final couplet arrests this potential, and ends the poem on a note of conclusive closure. The semantic force of the couplet, which concerns the loss of identity in a larger whole, shifts attention away from the poet himself to suggest that artistic form itself provides the ultimate stabilities of order and enclosure.

The concluding lines try to reconcile what appear as contradictory impulses elsewhere in North. One of the impulses springs from the poet's fidelity to his culture and from his consciousness of himself as a hyper-observant outsider excluded from the sense of cultural continuity and inclusiveness that the poem aims to define. This impulse takes the form of wanting to subsume the self through anonymity with the subjects of the collective life. What usually constitutes the contrary impulse is the desire to achieve the appeasements of the complete poem. In accordance with this impulse, the self does not partake of its actual conditions but attempts to transcend them by immersion in the pleasures of formal excellence. Heaney has concluded "The Seed Cutters" on a note of expansive composure that appears to fulfil both impulses.

What distinguishes the contradictory impulses here from the form they take in the remainder of the volume is that the community on which the speaker focuses his attention is conceived in manifestly apolitical terms. Rather than providing a

touchstone with which to measure the main body of North, therefore, the width of the poem's inclusiveness and its compassion need to be seen in separation from the rest of North.

There is a palpable note of nostalgia in "Sunlight" which is also faintly heard in "The Seed Cutters." One effect of the apostrophe in the latter poem is to suggest that the reason the poet seeks to capture the activity of the labourers in the workings of the poem is to sustain them for posterity. Art obtains a degree of validity if it can be seen to re-animate a lost past. The poems in the main body of North deal with a less manageable past and a more frightening present. As such, they question the applicability of the composure and inclusiveness of both "The Seed Cutters" and "Sunlight" to their substantially more terrifying terrain.

### III. The Antaeus Poems.

The two Antaeus poems--"Antaeus" and "Hercules and Antaeus"--occupy positions of prominence in North. They form an envelope which encloses the poems of part I. Each poem is reliant for part of its force on the presence of the other. It is for this reason that "Hercules and Antaeus" carries more weight in the context of North than it does in Heaney's Selected Poems, where it appears alone.

The Antaeus poems suggest themselves most obviously as political and artistic allegories. They provide a perspective of invasion, colonisation and dispossession to act as the framework

within which the poems of part I must be seen. This perspective is not static. The temporal and structural relationship of the poems make it clear that the poet's perception of the efficacy of his mythic material changes. "Hercules and Antaeus" readdresses issues raised in "Antaeus" after certain developments in poems in part I have significantly altered his outlook. It initially seems an error of judgement that Heaney should have put the unremarkable "Antaeus," an early poem which he himself calls "a little bit self-conscious" ("Meeting Seamus Heaney" 22), in its prominent opening position. Reasons for this decision are provided by the context of part I, and especially by "Hercules and Antaeus."

Heaney has set the terms for discussion of the two poems. He says of "Hercules and Antaeus":

I got these notions of two kinds of  
 intelligence, and then it meshed with . . .  
 Yeats's idea of singing from contact with the  
 soil, 'everything Antaeus-like grew strong',  
 and it suddenly struck me that Antaeus is  
 beaten, that Hercules comes along, lifts him  
 off the ground and sweeps him out of the way.  
 The Hercules-Antaeus thing came to seem to me  
 as a myth of colonization almost, that Antaeus  
 is a native, earth grubber, in touch with the  
 ground, and you get this intelligent and  
 superior interloper who debilitates the native  
 by raising him, taking him out of his culture,  
 his element, and making him without force.  
 You could think about Ireland in those terms:

it's almost rudderless, culturally ...

Hercules represents the possibility of the play of intelligence. . . . That led into the poetry of the second half of the book, which was an attempt at some kind of public voice. . . . ("Meeting Seamus Heaney" 22-23).

Hercules represents the balanced rational light while Antaeus represents the pieties of illiterate fidelity. . . . This poem drifts towards an assent to Hercules, though there was a sort of nostalgia for Antaeus. . . . ("Unhappy and at Home" 63).

The important points as regards "Antaeus" are the Yeatsian idea, the "pieties of illiterate fidelity" and the sense of nostalgia. The date given at the end of the poem is significant. 1966 marks not only the date of composition but also the year in which DN, Heaney's first volume, was published. The inclusion of the date admits into "Antaeus" an autobiographical element. The journey from "Antaeus" to "Hercules and Antaeus" might signify a journey of poetic development, and the poems which separate them stages on that journey.

What "Antaeus" communicates most forcibly is a sense of "singing from contact with the soil." The same theme was evident in poems in DN. Accompanying this fidelity to the land is a conception of the allegorical hero and of heroic allegory as supposedly unproblematic phenomena. Antaeus stands in strict opposition to his future antagonist: he represents solidity, a

nutritive relationship with landscape, and the "pieties of illiterate fidelity." There appears to be a close and intense relationship of identification between poet and speaking protagonist. Heaney obtains easy access to a myth that serves his purposes. The choice of Antaeus is felicitous: there can be established a strict equivalence between the situations of the poet and his mythological counterpart.

In the poems of part I the poet investigates a variety of forms of myth. He draws on a past of Viking invasions and mythologises that historical set of events; his conception of Glob's bog people is mythopoeic; he borrows from classical mythology; and he utilizes a set of conceits in the manner of WO in the poems "Ocean's Love to Ireland," "Aisling," "Act of Union" and "The Betrothal of Cavehill." Finally, in "Hercules and Antaeus" he revisits the terrain of classical mythology which "Antaeus" inhabits unproblematically. The conception of myth in the earlier poem is implicitly re-examined, found wanting, and exposed. Myth emerges as an element in political life in this last poem, and the attitude to it provides the bridge to the more "declarative" mode of part II.

One of the most notable features of "Hercules and Antaeus" is that the older poet invokes phrases and ideas from his 1966 poem only to undercut, redirect or wrench new meanings from them. If the poet's implicit identification in "Antaeus" is with Antaeus, the earth-grubber, the later poem reveals an affinity between the poet and the "balanced rational light" of Hercules. This is chiefly evident in the "intelligence" and controlled technical competence with which the defeat of Antaeus (what he represents and the poem named after him) is narrated. The device

most frequently used to produce this effect is the transplantation of a phrase from a context in which it carried connotations of strength, fortitude or resistance to a context which generates quite different meanings.

"Sky-born and royal," the first line of the later poem, provides an example. In "Antaeus" the words refer to the "realm of fame" to which the speaker's prospective antagonist would aspire. In the context of a description of Hercules, with which the later poem opens, the words are given proleptic force. We are made aware of Antaeus's defeat even before it is narrated, since Hercules has either already attained that realm--the implication being that we simply have to wait to be told how he got there--or it is of his intrinsic nature to belong there--the implication then being that Antaeus will soon be defeated as if by necessity.

There are several other examples of the device. The metrical arrangement and imagistic content of the lines from "Antaeus," "I cannot be weaned / Off the earth's long contour, her river-veins" and "Girded by root and rock / I am cradled in the dark that wombed me" foreground a sense of elemental connectedness to the earth that obliges us to associate infancy with rootedness rather than with weakness or dependence. In the later poem, Heaney reverses the earlier associations by slight, but deft, alterations to context, phraseology and metre. Immediately prior to the lines "Antaeus, the mould-hugger, // is weaned at last" we read, "black powers / feeding off the territory." The force of that "feeding"--suggestive of an almost parasitical dependence--is different to anything in "Antaeus."

Two of the lines quoted above provide an example of another technical device which demonstrates how the acquired rational consciousness of the poet serves to undermine the apparent stability of Antaeus. The lines are, "Antaeus, the mould-hugger, //is weaned at last." In the curiously ethereal pause created by the punctuation of comma and white space between stanzas we are given just enough time to realize that the impression of stability created by the metrical emphasis on "hugger" is illusory, and that the act of hugging mould--loose earth--symbolizes instability itself.

We can read "Hercules and Antaeus" as a political allegory with strong autobiographical overtones. Antaeus's relationship to the land (his mother) is conceived in the earlier poem as one of seemingly inextricable closeness and fecundity. In one of the central lines of the second poem ("a fall was a renewal") Heaney uses this fact to communicate a grim political irony. A relationship of intimacy with the landscape, which the oppressed natives of Ireland and other colonies might be thought to possess, allows military defeat, violence, oppression and imperial conquest to be endured. No essential change of identity or relationship to the land results. This only occurs when the native is "raised up." Access to education, the monuments of imperial culture, an alien "type of intelligence" and historical consciousness allow this particular form of defeat. A "dream of loss // and origins" comes to replace the former stable, rooted physical relationship to the ground.

Autobiographically, the development is clear. The poet feels nostalgia for a relationship and type of intelligence he may once have possessed. The grim reality of his alienation from

such a consciousness--the result of his education and poetic career--necessitates another perspective. For this reason he uses the "new" tools of acquired "rationality" and poetic wit to undermine his earlier conception of Antaeus. He recognizes his alienation, his having been "raised up," and the irreversibility of the process.

To accompany this knowledge, the poet has become aware of a political dimension to his earlier reverence of Antaeus. In the powerful last lines of the poem Antaeus, lifted by Hercules, is described as "a sleeping giant, / pap for the dispossessed." The final line gives a twist to the equation of breast-feeding with nurture proposed in "Antaeus." The dispossessed of history, whom Antaeus represents (his position being analogous to those of the legendary heroes in "Balor will die / and Byrthnoth and Sitting Bull"), remain in a state of cultural infancy, receiving what meagre sustenance ("pap") they can from a history and mythology of defeat.

The "dispossessed" are given suck ("paps") by the mythological figure whose erstwhile position was similarly dependent and infantile. Antaeus, symbol of dormant and then defeated nationhood, of a particular mode of artistic apprehension or "intelligence," becomes the "pap." This enhances the sense already created of a people dependent on and inextricably tied to a source of supposed nurture which is in fact a source of defeat.

Finally, Heaney makes an implicit comment on the use of and belief in a national myth of defeated heroism. The comment is simultaneously personal and public. At the public level, he addresses a question of ideology. The myth of Antaeus concerns

colonisation, not only as a past event but as a continuing phenomenon. The "dispossessed," being "unweaned," continue in their subservient position by identification with a myth that is easily accessible and easily digested ("pap" again). The myth issues in a form of cultural indulgence that replaces the possibility of political action in the present with a loving recollection of past heroism.

At an autobiographical, and poetic, level, the older Heaney questions his earlier easy appropriation of the myth. The idea of "singing from contact with the soil" was attractive, even enabling because of his background, but it was part of an early stage, a period from which he has had to "wean" himself. A poetic resolve to maintain contact with the soil may be debilitating if it begins to preclude other areas of experience. Political areas, for instance. The ambiguity and difficulty of the move from the relatively apolitical verse of his early years to the politically conscious verse of North is the correlative of his need to realize that Antaeus is defeated, that he owes as much to Hercules as to his former hero, and that to ignore the shift is to endanger the continuing relevance of his work.

The last lines of the poem provide the passage to the different, more public and explicit voice of part II. Heaney reaches this point only after conflating a variety of myths in part I. His use of and relationship to myth is neither static nor consistent. He uses individual myths, whether borrowed or self-generated, as devices facilitating the discovery of certain of his emotions and sensations, as structures to anchor the swirl of private feelings and make sense of them. He is eclectic in his choice of mythic material, not attempting, as did Yeats, to

generate a comprehensive mythic system. And when he feels that there is a danger in continuing to use mythological material, he abandons it, as he does in part II. "Hercules and Antaeus" registers the danger, and anticipates the decision.

#### IV. Other Allegorical Poems.

In the carefully structured part I of North, the Antaeus poems enclose three loose but discernably linked sets of individual poems. The first set spans the staggered progression from "Belderg" to "Bone Dreams," the second continues the exploration into the so-called "bog poems," while the third comprises the poems "Ocean's Love to Ireland," "Aisling," "Act of Union" and "The Betrothal of Cavehill." Amongst the least successful and least important poems in part I, the poems of this last set are linked to each other and to the Antaeus poems by proximity and, with the exception of the last poem, by the use in each of an allegorical mode.

"Antaeus" and the final poems in part I draw inspiration from either classical mythology or Irish history. The scenarios used come complete with a store of cultural accretions and a set of determinate actions and relationships. The poet is attracted by the allegorical mode because it provides a narrative cogency and pre-given framework within which he can work. These supports are put to good use in "Hercules and Antaeus." They can, unfortunately, also be abused.

In the two main poems of the 1970s Heaney chooses to explore the relationships between correlated levels of meaning in the manner of WO. The failure of "Ocean's Love to Ireland" and "Act of Union" is largely due to the poet's overburdening of the stabilities of the allegorical framework with the weight of these correlations. Heaney relies on historical events--Raleigh's rape of a maid in Ireland; the Act of Union--to act as the backbone to a body of concerns that proliferate alarmingly. He appears more interested in the stacking of parallels than in what these might communicate. At moments in WO, the perception of some connection between, say, language and landscape was communicated with the force of a revelation. In the <sup>later</sup> poems, his drawing of parallels between his different concerns becomes almost mechanical. The allegorical framework contributes to the damage by appearing to hold everything together.

In "Ocean's Love to Ireland" the poet compacts history, geography, language, sexual violation, pronunciation and poetry in so contrived a manner that the ingenuity of the enterprise displaces from the centre of attention whatever commentary may have been intended.

"Act of Union," coming almost immediately after the overworked phallic symbolism and neat correspondences between colonial, physical, linguistic and literary conquest in "Ocean's Love to Ireland," falls prey to the same criticisms. The poem opens and closes impressively. The first four lines are finely suggestive of unspecified growth, of the varying pace of a movement towards birth and life that is also a movement into pain. The lines manage to graft the human body onto landscape

without any sense of strain: a similar effect distinguishes the final sentence of the poem. Between these two points, however, the poet mercilessly wrings his conceit.

The fluid interchange of levels between sexuality, politics, history, landscape, violence and the human body is so centrally the focus of interest that the poet's feelings are almost totally obscured. It seems surprisingly inappropriate then that Heaney sees the poem as "a kind of pregnancy poem . . . the only kind of family [poem] I've written. It's part of the guilt of having fathered the pain as well as the child" ("Meeting Seamus Heaney"13).

Significantly, the most unassuming of all the poems at the end of Part I which draw on either mythology or history is also the least discordant. The minor but enchanting "Aisling" is proof that Heaney is capable of successfully utilizing classical mythology, and thus should not have been almost totally ignored by Heaney's commentators. It is only mentioned, and then briefly, by Morrison (Seamus Heaney 64) and Bernard Sharrat (374). The meaning of the poem escapes easy formulation, remaining elusive, almost visionary. The "decadent sweet art" it mentions is imaged in the very sounds of "Like the wind's vowel / Blowing through the hazels." That exploratory, languid and slightly elated note ends a stanza in which the poet and his poetry are recognized as subjects of the poem.

Something both playful and quizzical is heard in "'Are you Diana...?'" ; this note is quickly replaced by the slightly shocking suggestion of imminent tragedy in the poem's final question: "And was he Actaeon, / His high lament / The stag's exhausted belling?" Does "high lament" signify nobility, fear,

affectation, or the cry before being torn apart? Is "exhausted" here because of the hunt, "belling" because of the desperate courting? Nothing is finally clear, but the suggestions are rich: the presence of the goddess, the interface between sex and death, the poet's tacit identification with the sacrificial victim--all features of the bog poems--hover on the periphery of this poem. We are given a vision of coupling as inexplicably violent, of myth and sexuality as bound up with the unutterable violence of chance misfortune. The poignancy of Actaeon's implied death is linked to his sensitivity, his stature, and, perhaps most interestingly in the context of North, to the gap between his "decadent sweet art" and the reality of the hounds.

"Aisling" is nonetheless a slight poem. Wedged between the more substantial allegorical pieces some of its delicate forcefulness is lost. The longer poems inevitably provide the last comment on Heaney's use of borrowed mythological and historical material. This material proves unequal to the task of holding in place the poet's already strained conglomeration of concerns.

Heaney is more successful when attempting to generate a mythical conception of his own than when he utilizes ready-made material. The responsibility of subjectively creating a tentatively mythic structure around the figures of the bog people seems to have curtailed somewhat his tendency to overload the slight narrative framework of his allegorical poems with matter too weighty for them. It also seems to have elicited from the poet a range of feelings and concerns, a degree of sensitivity, and a self-consciousness about his own poetic procedures that far exceed in quality anything found in these allegorical pieces.

V. Part I as Sequence.

North is, as I have indicated, Heaney's most carefully structured volume. It is possible to see in the sequence of poems that separate the "Mossbawn" poems and "Antaeus" from "Hercules and Antaeus" a developing perspective and a certain order. Heaney broadens the range of his subject to include new and more explicit historical, political and cultural terrain. Whilst there cannot be said to be the logic of a strictly linear narrative progression at work, it seems indisputable that the poems collectively follow the direction of a developmental exploration.

That the poems are part of a sequence rather than simply self-enclosed units can be seen in the explicit links--at the level of imagery, vocabulary, and subject--that Heaney draws between them. One is disinclined to attach too much importance to particular cases of repetition of a word or phrase until one notices how pervasive is Heaney's use of the technique. Consecutive poems often repeat the same word or phrase, establishing hardly noticeable links of continuity: the "longship's swimming tongue // was buoyant with hindsight," reads "North"; in "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces," which follows, the "line" in the first section becomes a "swimming nostril," and the poet uncovers "a longship, a buoyant / migrant line." Similarly, "Viking Dublin" ends with "My words lick around / cobbled quays," while "The Digging Skeleton," the following poem, opens, "You find anatomical plates / Buried along these dusty quays." At the beginning of "Bone Dreams," the speaker talks of discovering a

piece of white bone, and describes it as "a small ship-burial," which makes little sense if we do not remember the earlier "North" and "Viking Dublin."

Analogous instances pervade the poems: "black glacier" appears twice ("Funeral Rites" and "Bog Queen"), "neighbourly murder" becomes "neighbourly, scoretaking killers";<sup>15</sup> "amber" surfaces in three poems;<sup>16</sup> there is a progression from "dream-bower" to "dark-bowered" and "Come to the Bower";<sup>17</sup> the words "floe," "gleam," "spine," "vertebrae," "crock," "memory," and "profiled" are amongst those which very subtly link poems, and the imagery of armour, of treasure, of dreaming, of stripped flesh, of swallowing and digesting, and of the body as a container is too insistent to be merely coincidental. In some poems--the sequences particularly, and especially "Kinship"--the density of such repetition is astounding.

This is at the basis of what Deane calls the "family resemblance" of Heaney's individual poems and shows the poet circling the same terrain again and again. One should go further than merely noting the existence of these links. Scrutiny of the contexts in which they occur will reveal the poet readdressing, reassessing or passing beyond certain earlier formulations and conclusions. There is not a linear progression from poem to poem, but the multiple links between poems alert us to a different form of narrativization that characterises part I. It is the narrativization of the workings of an exploratory consciousness.

Some comments on the mode of poetic exploration used by Heaney might be ventured. It is characterised by a refusal to be satisfied with positions reached and conclusions posited, an

always developing exploration that recognizes achieved attitudes as temporary and insists upon a movement of greater honesty and a merciless reassessment of supposed certainties. The poet exhibits considerable self-awareness and the degree of self-critical vigilance is high.

The poems do not evidence a uniformity of approach to their subjects; rather, the poet's investigating consciousness follows an intimation to a conclusion before reassessing or dropping it for other investigations. Running throughout is a simultaneous uncertainty and need to attain certainty. This is continually manifested in the poet's awareness of the limitations of his art in the circumstances of its production.

## VI. Violence.

Issues of art and of how it is to deal with violence are among Heaney's perennial concerns in North. Increasingly, violence has become a central issue in his poetry, and its different forms loom over the whole of the volume. It is instructive to note comments made by John Fraser on violence:

There is in fact no one thing, no chemically insoluble and analysable substance, that is violence. . . . As Hans Toch observes in Violent Men, 'the concern with violence is directed at a myth. It demands an ocean where there are islands; it constructs a monolith in place of diversity; it calls for formulas

to cover complexity: and it presumes  
 cure-alls where we have no diagnosis' [Toch  
 1]. The range of actual violences is  
 enormous. . . . The functions of violence are  
 also numerous--violence as release, violence  
 as commu*n*ication, violence as play, violence as  
 self-affirmation, or self-defence, or  
 self-discovery, or self-destruction, violence  
 as flight from reality, violence as the truest  
 sanity in a particular situation, and so  
 on. (9)

It will be necessary to differentiate between Heaney's  
 treatment of violence in parts I and II of North, and also within  
 part I itself. One notices different intentions behind Heaney's  
 responses to violence. He desires to locate and define the  
 murderous atavisms of his society, to discover ways of appeasing  
 these, and to find a role for poetry in relation to them. He is  
 concerned to reactivate an awareness of the unutterability of the  
 experience of physical violence. He draws on an imagery of  
 violence done to the human body as a means of grounding his  
 political analysis in the textures of everyday experience.  
 History is often not abstract or notional in this poetry; it is  
 the process whereby concrete human bodies undergo tangible  
 physical violence. At certain points he attempts to see a more  
 generalised violence not as an aberration but as an ineradicable  
 part of political life. He also, however, stresses that while  
 pain and death may be events in the world of politics, they are  
 never reducible merely to that. It is in poems which evidence  
 Heaney attempting to take violence out of the merely political

realm and make of it a cultural constant that he is in danger of colluding with violence, of becoming, in Carson's phrase, a "laureate of violence" (185). Christopher Ricks has, in a different context, made remarks which are worth quoting at some length. His subject is the dangers for poetry when it is dealing with atrocity.

A principled distrust of the imagination is nothing new. One triumph of the imagination is that it can be aware of the perils of the imagination, the aggrandisements, covert indulgences, and specious claims which it may incite. Great art is often about the limits of what we should hope for even from the greatest of art, and among the many things which the imagination can realize on our behalf, one such is the limits of the sympathetic imagination.

A poem by Geoffrey Hill speaks of 'The tongue's atrocities' ('History as Poetry'), compacting or colluding the atrocities of which the tongue must speak, with the atrocities which--unless it is graced with unusually creative vigilance-- it is all too likely to commit when it speaks of atrocities. For atrocity may get flattened down into the casually 'atrocious', or it may get fattened up into that debased form of imagination which is prurience. So the

general burden of the imagination's  
 self-scrutiny presses particularly upon all  
 such art as contemplates (in both senses)  
 atrocities. (Force of Poetry 285)

This is relevant to Heaney's treatment of violence in North. It illuminates and qualifies two of his basic aims : to recognize violence as a constant in history, and to provide some sort of appeasement in poetry for the suffering caused by it. Ricks's comments draw attention to the impulse in Heaney that gives to violence a sense of its complexity, and which neither luxuriates in it nor simply disregards its importance; they also direct attention to those points which deserve Ricks's strictures by providing evidence of the "casually 'atrocious'" or of prurience. His comments on the "limits of the sympathetic imagination," on the results of a lack of an "unusually creative vigilance," and on "that debased form of the imagination, which is prurience" are pertinent to a number of individual poems. One thinks of the final lines of "The Digging Skeleton," of the conclusions of "Come to the Bower" and "Bog Queen," of the poet's attitude towards the girl in "Punishment," of the lines "report us fairly, / how we slaughter / for the common good // and shave the heads / of the notorious" in "Kinship," of the imagery of violence in the allegorical poems, and of much of part II. One would want to recall a poem like "The Tollund Man" in this regard, both for its keen awareness of the limits of the artistic imagination and for the "creative vigilance" of its contemplation of atrocity.

North also contains moments which illustrate Heaney's awareness<sup>e</sup> that art can only tentatively encompass atrocity. In the volume he plays off--to use terms from "The Grauballe

Man"--"beauty" versus "atrocious," but the balance is often not quite as simple as the lines "hung in the scales / with beauty and atrocious" would seem to suggest.

In an analysis of each of the poems from "Belderg" to "Kinship," I want to illustrate Heaney's staggered development across the collectivity of poems and investigate the points at which he succumbs to or resists the temptations and attractions of becoming a celebrant of violence.

#### VII. From "Belderg" to "Bone Dreams."

"Belderg," "Funeral Rites," "North," "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces," "The Digging Skeleton" and "Bone Dreams" constitute a loosely grouped set of poems which opens the main body of North and continues the work of WO. The poems also introduce and worry at several of the themes which animate the "bog poems" and the volume as a whole. They extend and modify Heaney's oblique approach to the politics of Northern Ireland in WO. They draw on the complex "field of force" of that volume and continue its archaeological and etymological explorations, and aim to fulfil the earlier promise of future speech by presenting the experiences of contemporary politics in the context of a wider Northern European history. The potential emergence of the promised speech is signalled by Heaney's replacement of his ability to subtly evoke concrete presences with a much more explicit, abstract thinking voice. Certain phrases--"A landscape fossilized," and "persistence / A congruence of lives"; "we pine

for ceremony"; "violence and epiphany" and "'Lie down in the word-ward'"--explicitly name what was deeply implicit in earlier poems.<sup>18</sup>

The first of the poems, "Belderg," revisits the terrain of the "Mossbawn" poems and "Antaeus." Heaney's purpose is to reveal the social history underlying the name "Mossbawn," and to question the unproblematic conception of an Antaeus-like relationship to landscape. The simplistic connectedness of protagonist or community to landscape is denied by a specifically historical perspective. The poem is an act of recognition of what he has learned from someone else--the other person who speaks in the poem.

The first part of the poem draws on an analogue of body and landscape in Heaney's characteristic fashion : the quernstone is the "eye" of the landscape, contained in as well as covered by the "lid" of peat which, in terms of the pun, is both container and eye-lid. The implicit "body" of the landscape lies unrevealed below the "blanket bog." When the latter is stripped off, a "fossilized" landscape is revealed. Heaney's usual procedure of envisaging past life-processes as absorbed, preserved and fixed by landscape is only altered when the other speaker speaks for a second time:

Before I turned to go

He talked about persistence,

A congruence of lives,

How, stubbed and cleared of stones,

His home accrued growth rings

Of iron, flint and bronze.

The poet's act of turning to go, as if he had come, seen and recognised, and had no more to learn, is countered by the other speaker's drawing attention to "growth rings," an organic image suggesting growth through different historical periods. The remainder of the poem turns on opposing conceptions of history.

On the one hand, there is the "landscape fossilized" view, which sees historical processes as complete, culminating in static words and artifacts that preserve elements of the past. This is the poet-speaker's view. He sees in the name "Mossbawn" an English-Irish opposition and though he uses the image of a "forked root" and the phrase "mutable as sound," the associations he attaches to the word are delimited. He sees "bawn" either as an Irish word, finding "sanctuary" thereby, or as a word carrying historical connotations of colonialism. Significantly, enclosures--of fort, "~~walled-in mound~~" and sanctuary--are implicated in his language, and the line "Persistent if outworn," though it acknowledges continuity, lays stress on the persistence of something static, an object capable of being worn out.

On the other hand, there is the conception of history that arises from the other speaker's observations and questions. His view takes history to be a process. The images associated with his speech connote growth, development, and antecedent determinants. "His home accrued growth rings"; he "crosses" (as in horticulture) "my old home's music / With older strains of Norse." This is in contradistinction to the poet, who stresses the "foundation" rather than the mutability of sound. He enquires after the antecedent, yet still growing, "Norse ring on your tree." His view of history goes further back, it stresses growth rather than stasis, and it sees history as vitally

present--not in the form of a fossilized past but as a continuing process. While the dedicatory poems-- especially "The Seed Cutters"--managed when dealing with the same place to illustrate "A congruence of lives" and the coexistence of the persistent and the transitory, they neglected the specifically historical dimension; and while "Antaeus" illustrated a relationship of connectedness to the land, its rigid dichotomy between Antaeus and Hercules ignored any anterior determinants--the part played by the Norse element in "Belderg."

The divergent conceptions of history are synthesised and further elucidated in the final lines of the poem:

I passed through the eye of the quern,  
  
Grist to an ancient mill,  
And in my mind's eye saw  
A world-tree of balanced stones,  
Querns piled like vertebrae,  
The marrow crushed to grounds.

Rather than approach history with the intellectual detachment of the archaeologist or etymologist, the poet attempts imaginatively to make himself subject to historical process. The earlier "growth rings" of house and name prepare us for the image of the "world-tree." The "world-tree" of history is conceived as a living structure, exhibiting the stability and flexibility of a trunk or a spine, but also being subject to potential collapse or catastrophe, possibilities suggested by "balanced" and "piled like vertebrae."

Involvement in the historical process is an experience of perpetual pain and suffering, of exploitation and of being crushed. The poet's penetration "through the eye of the quern" (we recall the "pupil dreaming") into the "body" of landscape and history is a movement into the central column of the pile of quernstones which is also the locus of the soft living matter of marrow in the spine. As "Grist to an ancient mill," he is that which is swallowed, pulverized and ejected by the process; he resembles the marrow which in the last line is "crushed to grounds." This is one of Heaney's most powerfully disturbing acts of identification with the dispossessed victims of history. History is seen as organic, with the experience of violence at its centre. And that violence--a historical constant--is paradoxically both acutely destructive and productive of a consumable substance ("grounds").

If "Belderg" establishes violence as a historical constant, "Funeral Rites" seeks an ahistorical cultural response to violence, and finds it in ritual.

Unlike the "Mossbawn" poems, which subtly implicate a mild form of violence in their domesticity and manage thereafter to appease its destructive potential, "Funeral Rites" gives a far more explicit, and cruder, expression to the need to assuage. The poem opens with a splendid evocation of the bodies of the poet's remembered "dead relations." They are not inert in death but strangely animate: their wrists are "obediently" sloped, something imperceptible seems to transfer energy from the "dough-white hands" to the "puffed knuckles" which unrinkle, and

light plays on their bodies. The opening section conveys a sense of initiation: initiation into the mystery of death, into the meaning of ceremony, into aesthetic awareness.

Thereafter, the move from a familial past into the present "atrocities" of "neighbourly murder"--a grim irony--is surprisingly smooth. Obviously a contrast<sup>a</sup> is intended, but the speed with which the poem moves from the first section to "we pine for ceremony," from the subjunctive "I would restore" to the present tense of "family cars / nose into line," from remembered<sup>e</sup> "tainted rooms" to "megalithic doorways" does not illustrate the "unusually creative vigilance" Ricks rightly calls for. Ceremony appears to be some sort of disembodied elixir, ritual a form of "somnambulism." In a poem which seeks to respond meaningfully to the endemic violence of the Ulster situation, it is surprising that violence is not engaged with but shunted off, the "cud of memory / allayed" with disconcerting ease.

By colliding the horror of the present "neighbourly murder" with an imagined ideal past of "ceremony" and "customary rhythms," the poet seeks to direct his energy towards revealing the value of ritual and of life against their devaluation by the casual sectarian murder. One reason why the poem does not succeed is that it creates a polarity between ritual and violence. "Violence" is named unproblematically and remains largely abstract, while the end of the poem attempts to simply transmute violence into beauty. Another reason is that the rituals envisaged are static and lifeless. The last section of the poem makes this clear. Heaney equates a mythic past and the present in "imagining those under the hill // disposed like Gunnar." The stasis of a mythic conception permeates his

description of Gunnar, who chants verses about honour, lies in a formalised setting ("four lights burned // in corners of the chamber"), and turns to the moon with a frozen bodily gesture. The poet does not confront but rather exorcises violence from the poem, and the static and heroic conception of ritual never makes of it a meaningful, realistic or attractive alternative . . . unless one finds the obliteration of consciousness implied by "Somnambulant women, / left behind, move / through emptied kitchens" in some way attractive. Despite the poet's salutary intentions, the sense that the entire poem is in some important sense an evasion of the real issues makes it ultimately unsatisfactory. The significant features one carries from the sequence are the poet's realization of the centrality of death and violence, and a sense of his passionate need to assuage.

"North" is a fitting title poem for the volume, since, like so many other poems in North, it addresses itself to problems of artistic composition. Unlike "Funeral Rites," it exhibits Ricks's "general burden of the imagination's self-scrutiny" in that the temptations offered by a mythological or historical violence are initially acknowledged only to be questioned later on and implicitly rejected.

In the opening lines the poet both desires and anticipates revelation. The words "only," "secular" and "unmagical / invitations" reveal a consciousness of the absence of something. As in some of Heaney's earlier poems ("Storm on **the** Island"; "Bog Oak") a concentration on what is not there in the landscape actually reveals a desire to find there something worthy of

attention. This sense is increased by "the hammered shod of a bay," which may imply the existence of an absent supernatural agent. Edna Longley comments:

The somewhat abstract adjectival sequence--  
 "secular", "unmagical", "fabulous"--gives the  
 show away. . . . "Suddenly" (at the end of a  
 stanza) introduces "fabulous raiders" to [the]  
 fable-hungry poet too much on cue. They also  
 open <sup>u</sup>communication with remarkable speed. . .  
 ("North" 83).

She is, of course, right so far. What she draws attention to is the speed with which the vacuum created by the absence of a poetic subject is filled. "Funeral Rites" had its Vikings intruding into contemporaneity with equivalent ease. Yet what she fails to see is that Heaney later acknowledges the temptations to which she believes he succumbs and thereafter implicitly rejects them.

Heaney is drawn into a description of "those fabulous raiders" that extends over two stanzas and reveals, in phrases like "hacked and glinting," the attractiveness of their mythical violence as a subject for poetry. But he ends the description with the lines, "[the raiders] were ocean-deafened voices / warning me, lifted again / in violence and epiphany." The obvious question is, "About what is the poet warned?" In view of the direction the poem subsequently takes, it seems likely that the warning concerns the "violence and epiphany" offered the poet as subject matter. The point the poet wants to make is that the attractions of a noble barbarous violence and abstraction itself are dangerous precisely because they are so readily available as

"relevant" commentary on contemporary politics and because they are so full of what Ricks calls "covert indulgences and specious claims."

This view is corroborated by an earlier typewritten draft of the lines. The draft is corrected by hand to read, "ocean-deafened voices / warning me off [these last two words are deleted], cursing the necessary / mystique of violence. / The longship's swimming tongue // declared against epiphanies. . ." (qtd in Tony Curtis, Art of Seamus Heaney 60). Even if the sense is clearer here, Heaney was right to cut these lines. The phrases "warning me off," "the necessary mystique of violence" and "declared against epiphanies" are more cumbersome than the final concise, if more oblique lines, "warning me, lifted again / in violence and epiphany."

Having become aware that the manner in which the Vikings promise to fill his lack is specious and offers poetic dangers, Heaney moves on to a consideration of the aesthetic message he receives from the "longship's swimming tongue." Instead of advising the poet to pay attention to the mythic, the longship advises him to consider the local, the petty, the historical as well as personal experience and apprehension. "Thor's hammer"--and here we recall the absent agent of "the hammered shod of a bay"--might represent the same mythical power and violence which the "fabulous raiders" first introduce. It might also be an artistic reference, suggestive of the rhythmic regularity and "beat" of metre. The catalogue of phenomena to which "Thor's hammer swung" is perhaps meant to imply the unspectacular reality of historical<sup>c</sup> life both past and present. Drawing on the first possible meaning of "Thor's hammer," this

would suggest that the historical movement has been one from mythical heroism to mundane secular bickering, to the "tedium, the unconsciousness, the deceit, the vengefulness" (McGuinness, "Hoarder of Common Ground" 88) of a politics in which "exhaustions nominated peace"--are called peace or call for peace --and in which memory incubates "the spilled blood"--a case of the proverbial "violence begets violence" being the historical principle of Irish and Northern European political life. The alternative, artistic, reading of "Thor's hammer" suggests that the catalogue provides fitting subject-matter for the contemporary poet; that the focus of art has moved, or should move, from Thor to the stuff of ordinary political, commercial and interpersonal life.

This motive, and the longship's next piece of advice, lead the poet away from his noble Vikings and away from political life into a confrontation with his own art. In the last three quatrains of "North," Heaney presents himself as the unresponding recipient of the longship's aesthetic. The dialectical conflict in North between the rival needs to engage with the political realities of Ulster on the one hand, and to remain disengaged from them on the other, finds expression in this shift of direction. The longship's statements are imperative where previously they were descriptive: "Lie down / in the word-hoard, burrow/the coil and gleam"; "Compose in darkness"; "Expect aurora borealis"; "Keep your eye clear"; "trust the feel of what nubbed treasure / your hands have known."

The poet is instructed to retreat into himself, to have as his goal a true alertness to the surface textures of ordinary things and feelings. Yet this retreat is not an evasion of the

previously elucidated subjects of Viking myth and political history. The "word-hoard" is manifestly historical, "aurora borealis"--a Latinate contribution to the word-hoard--carries aetiological significance in Norse mythology,<sup>19</sup> and the skaldic "bleb" and "nubbed" recall older traditions. Added to this is the "gleam" that bears connotations of hidden brilliance from "Sunlight" and which emanates from the interiority of the poet himself. The "darkness" in which the poet is to compose is a different darkness to some of his earlier darkness<sup>s</sup>: it is simultaneously personal and historical, simultaneously the darkness of the body ("furrowed brain") and that of the landscape ("burrow"; "bleb of the icicle").

Heaney once again proposes introspection as a justifiable poetic reso<sup>p</sup>nse to the subjects of history, politics and violence, and once again also, the perspective is future-based; a mode for speaking out in the future is proposed, and thereafter adapted to new conditions as these arise in subsequent poems.

"Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces" is one of three six-part quatrain sequences in part I that share numerous similarities and some weaknesses. "Viking Dublin," "Bone Dreams" and "Kinship" resemble each other in technique and function. The<sup>e</sup> is a ui<sup>n</sup>iformity of section length, line stress and stanza shape within each poem; individual sections occasionally lack the degree of self-containment necessary to justify the divisions made between them, while the yoking together of other sections at times seems forced. In "Viking Dublin" Heaney does, however, manage to

produce a compelling sense of simultaneously gathering up and relating the divergent explorations of other poems and of breaking new ground.

The sequence follows "North" and readdresses the links between a history of invasion and issues of artistic composition. As if providing an illustration of the viability of the advice of the longship in "North," contemplation of art and introspection become means of penetrating to a putative principle of Irish political history. The first movement of the sequence encompasses the first three sections and invites a reading in terms of poetic art.

The creative process itself is the scarcely veiled subject of section I. On the artifact of bone being contemplated, "a small outline // was incised, a cage / or trellis to conjure in." The words "outline" and "cage" suggest that limitations are imposed by artistic form, but the line "or trellis to conjure in" reverses the implication. Like a vine creeping round the structure of a trellis, the artistic "line" is magically animate, having almost a life, identity and autonomy of its own.

Heaney stresses that the "line" and the artifact are parts of some larger entity : perhaps of a body ("jaw-bone"; "rib"; "portion"; "bill"; "nostril"), of an art work ("trial pieces") or of something still larger. As in WO, his attention is drawn to fragments ("antler combs, bone pin<sub>s</sub>, / coins, weights, scale-pans" and "shards of the vertebrae, / the ribs of hurdle, / the mother-wet caches").

The lines "interlacings elaborate / as the netted routes / of ancestry and trade" provide the clue as to what the larger entity might be. Heaney's choice of the simile of "netted routes"

is interesting. In order to perceive a resemblance between what is described--which takes place in time--and the solid line on the bone we need to take the activity described out of time. Every moment of trade, and every generation, is preserved and represented synchronically. Maps illustrating trade routes and genealogical trees represent their subject matter in this way. It is a way of viewing history as a permanent presence. The lines that go to make up what looks like a "net" also act as a net, catching the history of "ancestry and trade" in the lines of the trial piece and the poem. Because history is recoverable in this way, the moment of invasion is imaginable if the line is scrutinised closely enough ("magnified").

The purpose of all this is to illustrate that art and poetry, like Heaney's landscape, are memory banks of history. They provide a means with which to recover history. The larger entity toward which Heaney gestures is manifestly historical. Each fragmentary archae<sup>o</sup>logical find bears testimony to a history of invasion; ordinary, everyday objects are marked with its hidden presence.

The modulation from "shards of the vertebrae" to "mother-wet caches" in the penultimate quatrain signifies the potential emergence of something whole from a violent and destructive past. The implicit suggestion in the final line is that a "buoyant / migrant line"--something capable of continuity and influence--might survive the fragmenting violence of Dublin's history through the agency of art. If the line on the trial piece can be thought to mirror the path of the invading Viking

longship in section II, then the present artist's poem, through recovering and representing that same line, acts as a medium of continuity.

The dominant effect of sections I to III is to establish that, irrespective of any artistic intention, the historical set of circumstances governing the creation of an art work persists and is recoverable in the artifact itself. The second movement of the sequence--the last half of the poem--focuses more closely on the poet himself and on his position as an artist acted upon by historical circumstance and by his artistic and political heritage. If the line on the artifact resembled a line of poetry in the first movement, it now comes to resemble a line of descent.

What may have appeared as a recipe for evasion of historical circumstances in the advice of the longship in "North" is shown to be the opposite: the determining effects of the poet's political and artistic heritage turn his introspective attempts at self-definition and identification into statements about external circumstances.

The Viking past provides Hamlet as a model for the artist. His position is that of a sensitive intelligence feeling the torment of being constrained by a set of events beyond his control to act in a certain way, and of being unable to do so. Heaney ingeniously selects and presents details that make of the Hamlet situation an objective correlative for the situation of the artist--Heaney himself--in the circumstances of contemporary Ireland.

There are points of obscurity in the final sections of the sequence. The lines from the penultimate quatrain of section V, "With a butcher's aplomb / they spread out your lungs / and made you warm wings / for your shoulders," have about them a debilitating vagueness. The lines communicate some sense of an unspecified, horrific violence, but the attempt to specify more accurately necessarily involves guesswork. I believe the obscurity at this point is revealing, not so much of the poet's meaning but of his predicament. Heaney is initially attracted to his Viking "ancestors" in the lines redolent with invigorating freshness which open the section: "Come fly with me, / come sniff the wind / with the expertise/of the Vikings." Yet he also recognizes a darker side of historical reality: the Vikings were "neighbourly, scoretaking / killers, haggars / and hagglers." The tension between these rival feelings is the first we should notice in section V.

The second tension is between his archaeological craving to rediscover and represent the persistence of the past--evidenced throughout the sequence--and his desire to escape history. This latter impulse is less obviously noticeable. Imagery of flight in sections IV and V alert us to its presence. I shall approach the relevance of this imagery by another path: by noticing Heaney's subtle references to the specifically Irish strain of his artistic heritage. Section VI obviously makes Synge a presence, while the line "Old fathers, be with us" recalls both Yeats and Joyce. Jon Stallworthy first noted the reference to Yeats and commented:

In the prefatory poem to *Responsibilities* (1914),  
Yeats had asked

Pardon, old fathers. . . .

Merchant and scholar who have left me  
blood . . .

Heaney's 'fathers' are older than Yeats's;  
'scoretaking killers', whose legacy of blood  
is blood shed as much as blood transmitted,  
a legacy of violent death as much as a legacy  
of life (168-69).

The last lines of Joyce's Portrait of the Artist provide the equally, if not more, important allusion: "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead." As in the novel, we are meant to think of Icarus as well as Daedalus, and this returns us to the relevance of the imagery of flight. The Daedalus myth suggests both an aspiration to escape oppressive conditions with the aid of some kind of art and the inevitability of failure. The word "pinioned" from section IV works in the same way: it simultaneously suggests the existence of wings and their uselessness. It also connotes pain. Section V opens with the aspiration--"Come fly with me, / come sniff the wind"--and moves to a recognition of personal entrapment in the sordid violence of the present (also a characteristic of the past).

It is in the context of the Icarus myth that one might return to try make some sense of the confusing lines, "and made you warm wings / for your shoulders." The desire to escape history, which Heaney often shares with Joyce, and which might be implicit in these lines, is--in terms of the analogy with Icarus's flight--doomed to failure.

My suggestion is thus that the obscurity of the lines in section V derives from the tension experienced by the poet in his fidelity to contrary desires: to the desire to recover and represent his historical antecedents on the one hand, and to the desire to escape history on the other. The tension seems to deny both clarity and coherence, and the poetry might momentarily fail, but revealingly so.

In the final quatrain of this section Heaney subsumes the tensions he experiences to an allegiance to his "Old fathers." The "Old fathers" he discovers are different to those of Yeats and Joyce. He rejects Yeats's heroic and Joyce's mythic "Old fathers" in his resigned allegiance to historical predecessors who put the same amount of effort into creating as into destroying: "Old cunning assessors / of feuds and of sites / for ambush or town." Heaney's readiness to accept this demystified conception of his historical predecessors evidences an advancement beyond the potential attractions of "violence and epiphany."

The surprising final section of "Viking Dublin" does not progress beyond the point reached by the end of the penultimate section. It serves rather to underline and validate points previously made. By the almost exclusive use of verbatim quotations from The Playboy of the Western World (Synge 148) Heaney illustrates his earlier assertions about the passivity of the artist, about the continuity of historical antecedents through art, and about the hidden community of concerns that can permeate art works of different chronological periods.

The protean "line" that links the path taken by the invading Viking longship with the lines of the poet's verse, with the Viking child-artist's trial-piece, with the "netted routes / of ancestry and trade," and with the generations that intervene, necessarily also passes through the work of Heaney's literary predecessors. Jimmy Farrell's concern with bones, Vikings in Dublin and historical continuity could easily be Heaney's. The same "line" passes through Synge and Heaney, and the continuing influence of all of Heaney's "Old fathers" is established. Interestingly, the poet's words "lick around / cobbled quays, go hunting / lightly as pampooties / over the skull-capped ground." In this they resemble the exploratory "swimming nostril." The poet's work is tied, as if by necessity, to the historical ground off which it lives.

Like Synge's words in "Viking Dublin," Heaney's fairly close rendition of Baudelaire's "Le Squelette Laboureur" meshes neatly with many of his larger concerns in North. The developing exploration I have been tracing in part I reveals Heaney's emergent allegiance to the historical rather than the mythic. "Antaeus" and "Funeral Rites" are implicitly challenged by the poems which follow them. "The Digging Skeleton," in its turn, might be thought to challenge this trend. It would have done so had not Heaney made subtle alterations to the Baudelaire original and placed it in the context of Part I. Heaney prevents the poem making an altogether ahistorical statement by hinting at a political dimension to the suffering he portrays. He does this by implicating the land itself in images which suggest bodily pain. It is not fortuitous that the lines "Mysterious candid

studies / Of red slobland around the bones" and "Your skinned muscles like plaited sedge" have a distinctly Irish flavour. The clause "Some traitor breath // Revives our clay" reiterates the equation of land and body, and links this to the notion of a whole divided against itself, which is the condition of civil war. Yet the political dimension is never primary; the effect created by the last lines owes little to Heaney's, or any, political reality:

And by the sweat of our stripped brows  
 We earn our deaths; our one repose  
 When the bleeding instep finds its spade.

Violence, in all its variety, and in its unchanging persistence forms one of Heaney's essential subjects. In this poem pain and violence appear as transhistorical, universal phenomena. Not even the dead escape. The final lines make one recall Ricks's comments on atrocity, and question whether the poet manages to avoid, or falls prey to, a sense a pleasure in vividly realizing this moment of suffering. In his discussion of violence in art Fraser says,

What does invite [empathy]--what enables one to project oneself into someone else's world and see it as continuous with the one that one knows oneself--is anything that permits one to see the other as an agent. . . . [T]wo of the most important factors making for empathy are a sense of the individual as engaged in work, and a sense of the physicality of the body.(60)

Both factors are present at the end of Heaney's poem as they are in Baudelaire's original. The former is made more poignant by the inexplicable uselessness of the labour ("What barns are there for you to fill?") and by the shocking idea that the oblivion of eternal death is the sought reward for the work. The last line communicates a piercing sense of the physicality of the body, rendered still more effective by our recognition that the desire for repose must be strong enough to necessitate the self-inflicted pain.

Through his own empathy ("my patient ones") and the power of his imagining of violence the poet precipitates the reader's feelings of empathy for the inhabitants of the relatively bizarre "someone else's world" of anatomical drawings and skeletons. The closely structured interdependence of poems in North suggests that our ability to penetrate into that world is analogous to our ability to penetrate into the world of the ordinary sufferers of the Northern Irish débâcle. There are of course no strict parallels, but it is of the nature of North as a volume that one is inclined to make the connections.

Heaney's allusions to and quotations from past artists in "Viking Dublin" and "The Digging Skeleton" reflect at a literary level his preoccupations with historical continuity. In "Bone Dreams" he reverts to the procedure he develops in WO. Once more he elaborates an ingenious and extensive set of conceits to link landscape, history, the body, etymology and sexuality. His theme is again historical continuity, and the determining effects of landscape and history on the identity of the self. The precision and surprising aptness with which the conceits were previously

utilized are, however, absent from the sequence, and the associative, dream-like use of the conceits loses itself in abstraction.

The word "bone," the object it designates, and the etymologies of words associated with it unpack their history in the first sections of the sequence. By reading the etymological "ban-hus" literally Heaney manages by the end of section III to represent the body as a mere container for larger forces.

The second half of the poem takes off from this point, moving "back past / philology" to a "memory" that is geological, archae<sup>o</sup>logical and historical. The dissolution of the "I" and its projection into external objects recalls but does not emulate the poems in WO in which the poet spoke in the voice of the landscape. The sequence suffers as a result of its being largely given over to the mechanical reassertion of connections made more effectively elsewhere, and of some unfortunate instances of awkwardness. One example will suffice: Heaney attempts to compact the lover's body with a fortified landscape in lines like "I have begun to pace / the Hadrian's Wall / of her shoulder."

The delicate and exact final section on the mole has as its function the setting side-by-side of a historico-geological memory and a personal memory in order to validate the notion that the landscape, its history, and its inhabitants are part of each other. It is not weighty enough to salvage the sequence, one reason being that it makes essentially the same point as do previous sections, albeit far less laboriously.

In his approach to the subject of the relationship of Ireland to England in "Bone Dreams" Heaney ends up using abstract conceits and strained connectives. His problem is essentially

methodological, with the techniques evolved in WC appearing hackneyed. It is therefore understandable that he turns to the enabling material offered by Glob in his The Bog People. Glob's material is useful to Heaney in that it allows the superimposition of his obsessions onto the objective matter of real bodies that can yet function as symbols. He is thereby able to evade the potential dangers of abstraction that weaken a poem like "Bone Dreams."

Before moving on, it is profitable to recall the staggered line of development from "Belderg" to "Bone Dreams." These poems cannot be thought to form part of a coherent group. Yet the poet's attitudes to violence and the possible responses to it, the problematics of representing historical issues in poetry, and his relationship to his place develop and undergo constant re-evaluation in a manner that makes of the poems a linked sequence.

Heaney's perennial concern with violence links these poems with the bog poems. A feature that appears in both sets of poems is an ambiguous attitude to this phenomenon, viewed by the poet as perhaps the single most important constant feature of history. It should be noticed that he does not usually allow acts of violence to explicitly enter his poems. Violence is either a potential or, more often, something that took place long ago but left its marks on what survives into the present. What he does render vividly are moments of pain, as at the end of "The Digging Skeleton."

His ambiguity concerning violence per se is that sometimes he views it as a purely destructive phenomenon, while at other times he sees in it a productive potential. He sees violence as

productive of itself, as in the line "memory incubating the spilled blood," but this is not the aspect I wish to stress. It is when Heaney intimates--usually through imagery of vegetable growth, sexuality or birth--that violence is capable of producing consequences which are not entirely negative that he risks becoming "a laureate of violence." The imagery of trees, wheat and grounds in "Belderg," the movement from swords and death to "the mother-wet caches" in section III of "Viking Dublin," and the sexual imagery in sections IV and V of "Bone Dreams" provide examples of the trend, but it is not until the bog poems that this perception of violence comes fully into focus.

#### VIII. The Bog Poems.

Heaney's discovery of Glob's book in 1969 was propitious. For a poet who has consistently sought residual traces in his landscape--be these relics, shards, scraps of a lost tongue or a lost culture--to substantiate his intimation that the landscape preserves its history, Glob's preserved bodies represent a very rich find. At one level, the existence of the bog people serves to validate certain of Heaney's established views. They provide proof that the landscape does literally preserve aspects of its past. They illustrate that violence is not simply an aberration but an integral part of social life. Their physical being suggests that violence can be transmuted, into art or into beauty. The physical parallels between them and the victims of "atrocities, past and present, in the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles" (Preoccupations 57-58)

indicate that the present can be understood in terms of the past. The fact that they emerge from the dark depths of landscape suggests that Heaney was right to constitute those depths as a realm of significance.

Yet Heaney goes even further. The intensity of his engagement with the bog people--the nature of the gaze he levels at them, the degree of intent in his careful scrutiny of them--is one factor that makes these poems the most important group in the volume. At the root of this intensity is more than a desire to see in the bog people proof of his previous convictions. What Heaney looks to find in the curious bodies of the bog people is nothing less than the meaning of the landscape and of its condensed past history. It is for this reason that the most insistent pattern of imagery in the bog poems represents the bodies in terms of the landscape, and landscape in terms of the body. The landscape too is a body with a capacity to ingest: images of stomachs, food and digestion recur. The things which the bodies resemble most closely are not to be found in the human realm but in nature: in the itemizing of the features of both the Grauballe Man and the girl in "Strange Fruit" comparisons with natural objects (bog oak, basalt egg, wet swamp root, mussel, prune-stones, wet fern, and so on) far outnumber comparisons of any other kind. There are also examples of complete fusion: "my breasts' // soft moraines," "the black river of himself," and "she was a barked sapling."

The order in which the poems appear is interesting, as is what actually occurs in each. The most striking feature of "Come to the Bower," the first poem, is the insistence with which the speaker seeks to penetrate into a landscape in which is embedded

the "dark-bowered queen." This queen resembles not simply the Norse Queen Gunhild (Glob 69-79) but "the goddess of the ground who needed new bridegrooms each winter to bed with her in her sacred place, in the bog, to ensure the renewal and fertility of the territory in the spring" (Preoccupations 57). The sexual innuendo of the final stanza tends to align the speaker with those bridegroom-victims through his willingness to become one with the woman through sexual union. This development is a manifestation of the poet's previous attempts to become part of the land.

The interrelation of landscape and bog body is most fully exploited in "Bog Queen," the only poem in which the poet adopts the persona of one of the bodies. The persona is even more obviously not just the Iron Age queen, but also the earth-goddess, Nerthus, the land itself, Kathleen Ni Houlihan or another spirit of Ireland. Of the group, this poem is in many ways Heaney's most self-assured: the mantle of the mythic persona is easily adopted; her body, which is conceived as a text that cannot be deciphered easily ("My body was braille," "the illiterate roots // pondered and died / in the cavings / of stomach and socket"), is laid bare to the scrutiny of the reader; her voice has the ring of authenticity. In contradistinction to the final three bog poems, Heaney penetrates into the body and consciousness of the queen with a facility that gives the pronouncement of the poem its tone of self-assurance.

In the drama of the final stanzas, an act of violence awakens the dormant and estwhile passive national consciousness and precipitates its re-entry into history. The figure of the queen appears as the permanently present yet latent principle of

Irish political life. Hers is the one body actually found in Ireland, on Lord Moira's estate in County Down in 1781 (Glob 103-104), and the sectarian connotations Heaney has inscribed into "turf-face and demesne wall" through his previous poetry and criticism establish the Irish connection (see "A New Song" line 16; Preoccupations 35). Yet "dreams of Baltic amber," "phoenician stitchwork" and "the nuzzle of fjords" extend her domain. The result is that the Irish connection is subsumed in a far larger temporal and geographical pattern. The mythic conception tends to suggest the existence of a historical principle that has recurred throughout Europe's history and across its frontiers. Violence is the trigger that activates the principle. Heaney's statements about developments in 1969 reinforce such an interpretation:

Then, as things progressed, you had the original blueprint of the society and the psyches that make up the society. It just re-established itself. I don't think people were really shocked at the violence because it was as if that fundamental blueprint was being ratified again, that this was the shaped reality. ("The North" 166)

There is a deferral of meaning in both "Come to the Bower" and "Bog Queen." In the former poem, the speaker penetrates the landscape and the body of the woman but, by the end of the poem, has not yet obtained absolute possession. In the latter, the voice in the poem speaks from the interiority of both land and woman, but what the queen represents is not fully articulated.

The poem ends at the moment she re-enters history. The meaning of her existence--if it signifies more than a vague notion of historical determinism--remains elusive.

In each of the poems which follow--"The Grauballe Man," "Punishment" and "Strange Fruit"--the poet stands face to face with a body. His stance is important. It is not the stance of an active observer: the stance of "Come to the Bower," of the end of "The Tollund Man," of any of the "driving poems" in DD. It is the stance of someone with a fixed gaze. The bodies he looks at simultaneously promise meaning and conceal it. The simultaneous promise and concealment of meaning, the fixed gaze, the distance between subject and object (rigidified after the first two poems) all cohere to suggest that the relationship between the speaker and the body resembles that between a viewer and an art-object. His gaze, which seeks to penetrate and take over their bodies, does not fall upon any meaning which the bodies have to give up, neither the meaning of the landscape nor of its past history. As is the case with all the bog poems, he sees simply what is there: eye-lids, a skull, a mark left by a gorget, wrists, heels, insteps, "her drowned / body," a girl's head, her skin, teeth, hair and nose.

This results in the poet being thrown back onto himself and onto the workings of his own artistic consciousness. Thus the bodies, which the poet's gaze constitutes as potential sources of meaning, do not provide meanings about landscape or history, but facilitate the creation of poems : poems in which the poet's self-consciousness displaces history at the centre of attention.

An interesting feature of part I of North is that the poems which most explicitly allow the contemporary politics of Northern Ireland into their enclosures--on the basis of the physical resemblances between the bog people and contemporary victims--are not primarily concerned with those politics. "The Grauballe Man" and "Punishment," like "The Tollund Man," do confront the political situation of Northern Ireland. But, as Heaney said about all the poems in North: "those poems aren't really politically directed; they are--or, in their first function, they were--allaying moments for myself" ("Artists on Art" 412). Heaney's primary concern is not with the politics but with his artistic predicament when faced with them. The dialectical conflict between the desires to become engaged and to remain disengaged from the politics of his place remains unresolved in these poems, which derive their success from the integrity and self-consciousness with which they are executed.

In critics' commentary on "The Grauballe Man," "Punishment" and "Strange Fruit" the lines most often quoted and discussed are those with which each poem ends. The poems depend for a large measure of their effect on the motion of reflexivity, the revelatory turning back on the self, that characterizes the closure of each. In all three cases, the final lines call into question the procedures and tendencies of the poem and the prior attitudes of the poet. The last poem, "Strange Fruit," does so both for itself and for the collectivity of bog poems:

Diodorus Siculus confessed  
His gradual ease among the likes of this:  
Murdered, forgotten, nameless, terrible  
Beheaded girl, outstaring axe

And beatification, outstaring  
 What had begun to feel like reverence.

The manner in which this poem opens, with a profusion of decorative figures, with the compulsive application of metaphor and simile to the passive body of the girl in an attempt to make it yield up its essence, collapses in these lines to allow for a far sparer and more accurate diction. It is as if the poet is made aware of possible excesses and indulgences of the artistic imagination through the resistance offered by the body and the land to his imaginative forays.

Heaney has said that an earlier version of the poem "had ended up with a kind of reverence, and the voice that came in was a rebuke to the literary quality of the emotion," to which he adds, "you have to be wary of literary emotion" ("Meeting Seamus Heaney" 19). He has preserved a sense of that earlier version in the somewhat precious moment of repose, "His gradual ease among the likes of this," but has also provided the necessary rebuke. Heaney does not simply single out "reverence" as the questionable emotion; he also refers to "axe / And beatification." There are dual dangers: the temptation to beatify the victims of violence, and the temptation to venerate the violence itself.

"Strange Fruit" ends impressively. The perspicacity of its final moments is not solely the result of the previous, unsatisfactory conclusion but also of the poet's failure, earlier in the poem, to compel the body to yield up its meaning for poetic utilization. The poet's awareness of the dangerous path he treads in transforming the dead bodies of the bog people into artistic symbols and metaphors of his condition also attend the two most famous bog poems in North.

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The revelatory last lines "The Grauballe Man" and "Punishment" collide the "aesthetic" safety of the poet's original musings with the real world of political violence. To obtain a clear sense of the force of that ending in "The Grauballe Man"--how it modifies but does not negate what went before--we need to look closely at the whole of the poem. It starts very well:

As if he had been poured  
in tar, he lies  
on a pillow of turf  
and seems to weep

the black river of himself.

This is the most suggestive of all the reflexive images in North. We register a subtle shock after the stanza division when we realize that "weep," which initially appears intransitive, is actually transitive and takes the weeper as both its subject and its object. The attempt to see the Grauballe Man as a body wept by himself, to see him both as source and product, leads us into the peculiar world of the reflexive image, into "[its] teasing knot of clarity and inconceivability" (Ricks, Force of Poetry 40). The "clarity" in these lines derives from the shared liquidity and colour of poured tar, "the black river of himself," and the tears wept; the "inconceivability" from the balance that holds apart yet brings together the paradoxes of activity and passivity, of movement and repose, of the animate and the inanimate, and of sorrow and propitiation.

Ricks observes that the reflexive image "is a figure which both reconciles and opposes in that it describes something both as itself and as something external to it which it could not possibly be" (Force of Poetry 34). Among the things which the figure "reconciles and opposes" here are nature and art: the Grauballe Man is in nature ("on a pillow of turf"), of nature ("the black river"), and he produces what is natural (he "weeps" himself), yet his status is almost that of a work of art. The use of a mould in sculpture is suggested not only by "poured / in tar" but also by the later "vivid cast" and by the sense of a movement from fluidity to solidity.

We have difficulty visualizing the Man as both sculptor and sculpture, as creator and creation (and creature). He keeps eluding imaginative and visual attempts to pin him down. The interminability of our attempts establish his strangeness: in the three quatrains which follow, he becomes still stranger whilst paradoxically becoming progressively more knowable. The paradox of the reflexive image is that it allows its subject to be two things and one, simultaneously. As both source and product, the Grauballe man is autogenous. He is abstracted from the ordinary round of life and death. He can symbolize both dissolution and creation, and also the balance and conflict between them. Both the existence of oppositions and the potential for their reconciliation are acknowledged by the reflexive image, which makes it the ideal figure for Heaney's purposes here.

The first lines of the poem prefigure the symbolic uses to which the Grauballe Man will be put. The reflexive image encourages us to make political analogies: conflict and

resolution, sorrow and propitiation have their political counterparts. But art and the artist are also implicated: the artist as the person who not only perceives the relationships and gives them expression, but is capable of creating relationships and forging connections in antagonistic conditions. Heaney uses his highly complex figure to make of the Man a symbol of the art work which contains (includes and holds within limits) conflict as well as fostering its opposite.

In the string of comparisons which follows the opening lines the artistic imagination both perceives and creates links that inextricably tie the Man to the bog. Each comparison has the feel of definition and finality, the poet having captured the immediacy of the resemblance and fixed it in words. Yet the second terms of the comparisons undercut the fixity by carefully insinuating a movement from petrification to life. The movement goes from the inanimate ("bog oak," "basalt egg") through the barely animate ("swan's foot" and "wet swamp root") to the fully animate mussel and eel. Even within these divisions there is development: the oak lived once, the egg will live; the swan's foot is grown, the root will nourish growth; the mussel is enclosed by the "purse" of its shell, the eel by the less constraining mud.

The next step--to the level of archaic humanity--makes the Man more fully animate: "The head lifts, / the chin is a visor./ raised above the vent / of his slashed throat. . . ." These lines interrupt the lyric "reverence" of the dutiful attention the poet gives to the body in <sup>r</sup> preceding quatrains, but "The head"--not "His head"--signals a continuing objectification. The second line suggests that the body resembles a suit of armour

which, recalling the metaphor of the mussel, protects an inner vulnerability of living tissue. Thoughts of the possibility of violence and of protection against it occur to us simultaneously. Similarly, the harsh "slashed throat," which threatens to reproach the poet for the imaginative freedom with which he has ranged over the body, is almost immediately soothed by the following line: "that has tanned and toughened."

The presence of the word "tanned" in the same quatrain as "The cured wound" prevents us from reading the latter phrase as a naïve assertion of the healing powers of time, nature or art. These connotations are not banished but tempered by the terminology of leather-making; the "wound" persists, but neither as a horrific "slash" nor as something totally healed and forgotten. It "opens inwards to a dark / elderberry place." That is, it leads to what is substantially more mysterious, alluring and inscrutable than either a bleeding hunk or a lifeless artifact.

My explicit use of artistic terminology thus far derives from a conviction that an intense concern with the art of poetry finds reflexive expression in this poem as in many of Heaney's others. He advisedly raises the issue of the status of the Grauballe Man in the form of questions: "Who will say 'corpse' / to his vivid cast? / Who will say 'body' / to his opaque repose?" The poet knows he is treading on precarious ground. In view of the focus of his attention thus far the blunt and unquestionably objective nominations "corpse" and "body" cannot be denied their validity, but are made to appear reductive. Nevertheless, the poet risks much in seeming to prefer "vivid cast" and "opaque repose." These phrases communicate in a totally different way to

"corpse" and "body" and keep his concern with art very much in view: "vivid cast" draws on both meanings of "vivid" and describes both the Man and the art work; "opaque repose" hints at the presence of hidden meanings in the artifact, and at a "repose" which is paradoxically both deceptive and genuine.

By opposing these sets of phrases Heaney indicates his recognition that his carefully crafted art is being taken to the edge of its competence. Beyond his precise itemising of the first part of the poem and beyond the fragile delicacies of "vivid cast" and "opaque repose" lies a reality which threatens to entirely disrupt these poetic procedures. The questions asked give the poem an emotional rigour by recognizing the dangers which threaten it.

At the same time the poet's apparent preference opens him to the criticism that he adopts a posture of irresponsible aesthetic detachment. Such a view ignores his insistence thus far that the world which includes art, propitiation and stasis cannot be simplistically separated in any absolute way from the world of "life," violence and process. It ignores his demonstration of the coexistence and interaction of those different worlds.

The final part of the poem deals specifically with the poet's own relation to the Grauballe Man. Two noticeable changes are evident. Firstly, the poet replaces the landscape as the chief agent of transformation. The landscape transformed the Man from a sacrificial victim into a mysterious artifact and allowed him to be born from the bog--the landscape's history bank, its "memory." The poet's memory then takes over to "perfect" the violated body. Secondly, the movement we have traced from the inanimate to the archaic human in the first part of the poem

culminates in images from modern human life. The humanising images of the foetus and the "forceps baby" attempt to reclaim the Grauballe man from his mysterious autogenous otherness and from his status as a work of art. He is reclaimed for the human world and for the ordinary round of birth and death from which his weirdness first distinguished him. No longer objectified, he at last appears human. Where the poet previously stressed the "vivid cast," he now stresses the "body."

The poet is concerned to sketch a personal history, the chief event of which is the transformation of what was simply a "twisted face // in a photograph, / a head and shoulders / out of the peat" into what the Man becomes by the end of the poem: a kind of touchstone, a means of probing into the values and politics of the present.

In the course of the poem, the Grauballe Man accrues peculiar credentials for this function. Killed as a sacrifice, he played a central part in the sustaining rituals of his community. His physical being makes him almost an art work, and also a symbol of the potential transformation of violence into its opposite. He is the product of the combined forces of landscape and history. In the last part of the poem the poet adds to this heritage: the Man not only died by violence but is reborn through it; he is also subjected to the transforming power of the poetic consciousness.

Let us turn to the final quatrains. The poem ends:

but now he lies  
perfected in my memory,  
down to the red horn  
of his nails,

hung in the scales  
 with beauty and atrocity:  
 with the Dying Gaul  
 too strictly compassed

on his shield,  
 with the actual weight  
 of each hooded victim,  
 slashed and dumped.

This ending is puzzling because it admits variant and contradictory readings based on what one imagines goes into each of the pans of the scale Heaney uses as his main image. I believe that the oppositional clauses in the final quatrains and the presence of a colon clarify the issue, equating "beauty" with the "Dying Gaul" and "atrocity" with the "hooded victim." It is these two sides which are then weighed against one another.

With the intrusion of the "actual weight / of each hooded victim, / slashed and dumped"--that is, the victims of contemporary violence in Northern Ireland--the delicate balance sustained throughout the poem is endangered. In the privacy of his contemplation, the poet was able to balance "corpse" with "vivid cast," to explore the interaction of "cured wound" and "tanned." When the political reality intrudes, however, the oppositions with which he is dealing and which he is trying to keep in dialectical balance become openly conflictual. In the final quatrains, the oppositions become abstract and absolute: "beauty and atrocity"; the Dying Gaul and the hooded victim.

The dangers for art in the environment of Northern Ireland are manifold. One of these is that it might appear irrelevant, too circumscribed and stylized ("too strictly compassed // on his shield") to be of relevance to the horror of the actuality it is almost obliged to seek to encompass. If art is equated with "beauty," it might appear meaningless in the face of "atrociousness."

Heaney uses the phrase "actual weight" as well as the abrupt anonymity of "hooded victim," the harshness and finality of the past participles "slashed and dumped," and the position of finality to allow the side of "atrociousness" to exert the greater persuasive rhetoric and seemingly override the side of "beauty." It is the figure of the Grauballe Man with his complex heritage who prevents this happening.

The Man does not belong exclusively to the side of "beauty," nor to the side of "atrociousness": his violent birth is not forgotten but, appeased, "he lies / perfected in my memory"; he was a sacrificial victim, yet he also resembles an art-object. Because he belongs to neither side exclusively he functions as one of Heaney's "symbols" that are "adequate to our predicament" (Preoccupations 56). Rather than facilitating a choice between opposites by coming down heavily on one side of the scale, so to speak, the Man serves to keep both sides in the scale and in view. He is invested with the capacity to partake of and symbolize both "beauty" and "atrociousness," but in addition he also symbolizes the balance and conflict between them. He represents in disarmingly literal fashion the fact that the oppositions partake of the same reality. His symbolic being carves out a space for poetry in the hostile conditions of its production: it

is a space for a poetry that owes a duty of acknowledgement to both "beauty" and "atrociousness," and which seeks to represent a reality in which both partake.

Strands running through all the other bog poems come together in "Punishment." The desire to penetrate the land and body of a female victim in search of meaning appears here as it did in "Come to the Bower." An attempt to share the experience of the victim is made, as in "Bog Queen." The dangers facing a poetry which takes victims of violence or atrociousness as its subject are again present. The self-consciousness of the poet--seen in "The Grauballe Man," his ardent desire to find a role for poetry, his insecurity about his own motives: these features of other bog poems reappear in "Punishment."

The coexistence in the poet of contradictory emotions and impulses in his responses to the body of the bog girl is the initial focus of interest in the poem. The speaker's stance vis-a-vis the girl shifts dramatically in the opening stanzas, vacillating between the extremes of a total identification with her experience, as in the first stanza, and a total detachment from it, as in the third. As a result of this constant shifting, the most noticeable feature of the first half of the poem is the poet's imaginative freedom: his ability to move to and from the moment of death, his freedom to range over the girl's body and into her consciousness, his use of her body for the purposes of symbolization.

The rhythmic movements of his imagination require attention. In the second stanza, the poet begins symbolizing: the girl's nipples are "blown" to amber beads. This fits in with Heaney's

image-patterns throughout North: the ambiguity created by an image that simultaneously suggests petrification and arousal, the transformation of living flesh into treasure, the possible suggestion of organic growth in "blows"; such features are familiar yet still striking. What is unusual is that the poet does not really continue the progression. The "drowned/body," "weighing stone" and "floating rods and boughs" of the third stanza are relentlessly empirical. The imaginative surge is cut short.

In the fourth stanza it begins anew, and the form it takes is once again familiar. "[B]arked sapling," "oak-bone," and "brain-firkin" each have their place in those imagistic patterns of Heaney's which feature the human body: the body as something organic, young, growing; the body as indistinguishably fused with the landscape; and the body as a container. Images of the transformation of violence into its opposite follow in the next stanza. A "stubble of black corn" suggests regeneration as well as destruction; the blindfold can heal and appease as a "soiled bandage" after its use in the act of punishment; even the noose that kills is susceptible to transformation. The imagistic progression of these stanzas makes of the original "drowned/body" something portentous. But, for the second time, the imagistic thrust is cut short, and instead of pressing ahead in the direction in which his emergent symbol appears to be pointing, the poet turns his attention back to the ordinariness of the girl. This time he focuses on the girl prior to her death, and therefore prior to her several transformations: the one she undergoes as part of the punishment, the one in the bog and the one in the poet's creative consciousness.

The to-and-fro motion of the initial stanzas stresses two things, the poet's imaginative freedom to subject the empirical body of the girl to whatever symbolic transformations he desires, and the girl's absolute passivity. With the possible exception of the poem's first lines ("I can feel the tug / of the halter at the nape / of her neck"), which imply a measure of resistance, the girl never appears as an agent. Being passive, she is subject to the violence of her "punishment" and to the vagaries of both time and the artistic imagination.

The bog girl was punished for adultery. Heaney follows Glob in making this clear in the poem. Collective punishment for adultery is executed on the communal assumption that the woman's body is a possession. She is "punished" by being stripped, blindfolded, marked by the shaving off of her hair, and ritually killed. She is not merely punished; she is turned into a symbol of her "crime." Her body assumes an emblematic function.

There are similarities between this and what the poet does. By intruding further into her already violated body and subjecting it to symbolic transformations, he makes her part of his imaginative property. It is perhaps the shock of this realization that elicits from him the ambiguous line "My poor scapegoat." On the one hand, the girl might be thought to be the scapegoat of her community, bearing the brunt of accumulated violence redirected onto her in order to purify the tribe and preserve its coherence. On the other hand, the possessive pronoun suggests that the girl is a scapegoat for the poet.

He says, "My poor scapegoat, // I almost love you / but would have cast, I know, / the stones of silence." One could read the lines to mean that the poet would have kept silent and

thereby allowed the girl to be punished at the hands of others. By an omission rather than an act he would have sided with the tribe punishing her. There is, however, a complex biblical allusion (to John 8:3-11) in the lines which alters this interpretation. In the biblical episode the scribes and Pharisees did not stone an adulteress because Christ reminded them of their own sin. They also happen to have kept silent. Their silence was, as it were, a signal of their sin. In terms of the allusion, the poet's silence might be an acknowledgement of his own sin, the peculiar nature of which is revealed in the following stanza. He sins not in an act but in thought: his voyeurism suggests the existence of adulterous thoughts--of a prurient imagination. He is, in biblical terms, as culpable as the girl. In saying he would have cast "stones of silence" he implies that he would have sided with those doing the punishing whilst privately acknowledging the guilt he shares with the adulteress. She is his scapegoat because she suffers in public for his inner guilt.

The poet is not, however, primarily concerned with moral considerations. If the lines reveal his desire to belong to a community, rather than risk sharing the girl's fate, they also reveal a desire to be conscious of his ambiguous position. The remainder of the poem provides an aesthetic and political context to supplement this moral situation. The first stanza of this last part of the poem provides proof of the poet's "adulterous thoughts," but also give the lines about the scapegoating an artistic context: "I am the artful voyeur // of your brain's exposed / and darkened combs, / your muscles' webbing / and all your numbered bones. . . ." The speaker of the line "I am the

artful voyeur" recognizes that art can be used as a licence for the indulgence of the prurient imagination. Further, he recognizes the disturbing attractions atrocity exercises on art. He rebukes himself implicitly for making his art predatory on this particular atrocity.

In this light the girl appears as the poet's scapegoat in another sense. As was the case in other bog poems, the poet's earnest desire to penetrate the body simply reveals the empirical interior of the body: "brain's exposed/and darkened combs"; "muscles' webbing"; "numbered bones." What is truly revealed is not the meaning of the body but the feelings and situation of the poet. Thus the shift in attention away from the girl in the last quatrains. The poet reaches his final position only after passing through the girl, as it were. The heuristic function she fulfills is at her own expense: at the end, she lies exposed and violated, a scapegoat for the poet in the sense that she carries the destructive burden of his artistic self-exploration and self-definition.

The final three quatrains of the poem form part of one long sentence and should be read as such. Heaney's critics have too often concentrated on the last two quatrains in isolation and seen in them the crux and meaning of the poem. The lines read,

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.

Morrison, for example, neglects the earlier part of the sentence to produce a fairly representative interpretation of the end of the poem:

Heaney's feelings . . . are ambivalent: he pities the victims of such brutal treatment, but his pity is offset and finally outweighed by his understanding of the motives for judicial punishment. . . . the word "connive" decisively tips the balance, suggesting that Heaney's civilized outrage . . . is forced and artificial in comparison with his instinctive understanding of the laws and needs of the tribe. It is a courageous piece of self-analysis. (Seamus Heaney 63-64)

A reading of the final sentence of the poem as a whole results in a somewhat different interpretation. Before elaborating, a perplexing grammatical problem of the final stanza needs to be addressed. It concerns Morrison's key word "connive": "connive at..." rather than "connive in..." is the normal grammatical construction. Heaney's novel formulation leads to confusion. Does he intent it to communicate with the force that a word like "collude" might have done in this context, or does he want the lines to hold apart slightly, with "connive" meaning "to pretend ignorance" and the next line meaning "in a time (or style, or manner) of civilized outrage"? One cannot decide finally. Morrison's interpretation can stand, but he has founded it on a weak spot in the poem.

A reading which takes the final sentence of the poem as a unit places emphasis on its first utterance: "I am the artful voyeur. . . ." The final quatrains are then seen in the context of this initial substantive. The poet dramatizes himself as having been unable to act or speak when the "betraying sisters" of present-day Northern Ireland--Catholic girls shaved, tarred and feathered by the IRA for associating with British soldiers--"wept by the railings." It is through the strangely prophetic figure of the bog girl that he is able now to speak about them. He is also able to define his position in the last stanza in terms of an opposition: "civilized outrage" versus an understanding of "tribal revenge." Morrison's interpretation is based on what he sees as Heaney's choice between these two opposing and seductive characterisations of artistic response.

My interpretation differs from Morrison's because I do not think Heaney makes that choice. As far back as 1972, Heaney made it abundantly clear what type of thing he means by "civilized outrage":

It seems to me that there are satisfactory imaginative parallels between this [Iron Age] religion and time and our own time, and it is observed with amazement and a kind of civilized tut-tut by Tacitus in the first century A.D. and by leader-writers in the Daily Telegraph in the twentieth century.

(qtd. in Brown, Northern Voices 176)

One can agree with Morrison that Heaney sees "civilized outrage" as "forced and artificial." But the word "revenge" alerts us to a sensitive spot in the other term of the opposition. When

Heaney earlier calls the bog girl a "scapegoat" he reveals that he understand that her tribe went beyond punishment and into scapegoating in its treatment of her. In the same way that "punishment" is an inadequate word with which to understand what happened to the girl, "revenge" cannot fully elucidate the modern response to the "betraying sisters." At most, it may give the perception which the modern tribe has of its own actions.

It is when we realize that Heaney does not make a choice between the alternatives in the final stanza, but understands and stands apart from both, that the intitial statement of the final sentence becomes important. Through his understanding of his relation to the girl he comes to some understanding of the perpetrators of violence, since he too violated her body, used her as a scapegoat, made of her a symbol for his own ends, and derived voyeuristic pleasures from investigating her exposed body. He feels himself implicated in the violence of his surroundings, but cannot accept the fact as easily as Morrison's interpretation suggests. His acknowledgement of his own capacity for violence is tempered with a sense of outrage at his own acts, at their artistic implications. His is not the irrelevant outrage--the "civilized tut-tut"-- of the "impartial" observer; it is that of a participant, and directed firstly at himself.

A thirteen-line unit rather than an eight-line one forms the final movement of the poem. Consequently it is as an artistic statement rather than a statement of political affiliation that the poem succeeds. One of Ricks's expressions, "a principled distrust of the imagination," characterises the defining feature of "Punishment"; another of his statements captures its achievement: "One triumph of the imagination is that it can be

aware of the perils of the imagination, the aggrandisements, covert indulgences, and specious claims which it may incite" (Force of Poetry 285). It is for these reasons rather than because of any "instinctive understanding of the laws and needs of the tribe" that "Punishment" is an important poem, and for these reasons too that it is indeed "a courageous piece of self-analysis."

#### IX. "Kinship."

The poems in part I reveal Heaney writing with a multiplicity of motivations. I specified three of these earlier. The first is mythopoeic: it engenders poems which evidence a de-historicising reduction to mythic patterns. "Antaeus" and "Bog Queen," possibly "Funeral Rites," could fall into this category. The second moves in the opposite direction: a historicising impulse that seeks to reclaim from potentially mythic material a complex historical veracity. "Belderg" is one example. The third subjugates both myth and history to self-conscious introspection. This impulse produces poems like "North," "The Grauballe Man" and "Punishment," poems which centre on the poetic utility of mythic figures or histories and not on their truth.

Now whereas part I as a whole appears to conclude that the mythopoeic motivation is a failure--this being the thrust of "Hercules and Antaeus"--the progression to this point is by no

means linear. The move from "Antaeus" to "Hercules and Antaeus" is staggered and unpredictable, and the mythopoeic motivation finds expression at an advanced stage of part I in "Kinship."

"Kinship" appears at the end of the bog poems and brings their movement to a close. It seeks to gather up and bring into meaningful relation much that precedes it, from the bog poems as well as from the earlier work. It would have been impossible for Heaney to write "Kinship" had he not written his previous work: the density of his references rely absolutely on the pre-existence of a body of work capable of being imaginatively compressed and transferred from its original position to the sequence. The sequence form is used to broaden his scope beyond the confines of the circumscribed lyric to the extent that, in "Kinship," he pushes at the limits of what a poem can be made to contain.

In the first five sections of the sequence, the poet's purpose is to establish the nature of his relationship to his place. It is one of "Kinship." In the final section, the reason for this need becomes explicit: he is defining his position vis-a-vis that of Tacitus, Heaney's figure for the imperial reporter. The sequence is used to establish the poet's right, and his credentials, to speak from a position of interiority about a reality which generally finds its expression in the reportage of the cultural outsider.

The sequence opens with the poet immediately establishing contact with his mythic field. He asserts that the landscape forges an almost familial relationship between him and the "strangled victim," an intentionally ambiguous reference recalling both Iron Age and contemporary victims. This invokes

the mythic apparatus surrounding Nerthus and the immolated bog people, which is subtly enhanced by repetitions from previous poems ("love-nest in the bracken," "turf-face"). More important than this line of thought, which he will follow more methodically later, is his representation of landscape. The most significant feature of landscape in section I is that it requires divination, that it cannot easily be understood. It is "hieroglyphic peat"; it is "not to be sounded / by the naked eye." The eye that reads and that can look into "each open pool" is the most imperial of the senses, and is not quite adequate to the task. The poet suggests that one's whole being is necessary to sound the bog, that a special knowledge is required to read the text of the landscape.

It is with far more than the "naked eye" that Heaney "sounds" the bog in section II. After quoting the third, fourth and fifth quatrains, Graham Martin comments:

It is a remarkable salutation. As if modelled on an Anglo-Saxon riddle, the alliterative 'estranging' set of variations present the bog first biologically, then as the grave of prehistoric and more recent corpses, then as the mythic earth-mother ('insatiable bride'), then taking in the wit of 'sword-swallower', as the encompassing impersonal movement of history, the geological 'floe' (which is also 'flow') insisting on how far back this history reaches. Language here seems to evolve out of itself in a pondering associative movement of interlocking sound-patterns, each phrase

representing a further stage in the poet's deeper and deeper penetration of the bog's meanings, in the final verse to be suddenly internalized as 'nesting ground, / outback of my mind.' (391)

Associations from the whole of North, whether in the form of repetitions, extensions, compressions or allusions, give to the lines a sense of rich, pullulating fecundity which the poet has to strain to encompass. The poet does however come close to dissipating some of the force individual associations might have had with his welter of synonyms.

Carson argues that there are two distinct methods at work in section III of the sequence, the turf-spade episode:

The two methods are not compatible. One gains its poetry by embodiment of a specific, personal situation; the other has degenerated into a messy historical and religious surmise--a kind of Golden Bough activity, in which the real differences between our society and that of Jutland in some vague past are glossed over for the sake of the parallels of ritual. (184)

The attempt is, of course, to align a past, personal experience with the mythical machinery the poet carries over from Glob and some previous poems. He aims to communicate an intimation of the persistence and lived reality of the myth in the landscape of his youth. This is more clumsily executed in section III than it is in section V which has something like the same impulse at its root. In both sections the poet dispenses with temporal

distinctions in an attempt to make the experiences appear timeless. The act of following the turf-cart and the speaker's attitude to the driver in section V are meant to be attributable to both the poet's youth and to an archetypal memory of participation in ancient fertility rites. In these rites the victim rode on the sacrificial waggon.

In section IV the poet exchanges the stable permanencies of the mythic pattern for the stable permanency of the natural cycle, and the poetry profits thereby. His aim is still to define the nature of his relationship to the land. A section in which he has linked birth to death and decay to regeneration ends with lines that are both personal and unassuming:

a windfall composing  
the floor it rots into.

I grew out of all this  
like a weeping willow  
inclined to  
the appetites of gravity.

A sense of tender reciprocity saturates these lines. The feel of reciprocal process is realized in the self-inflected first two lines. A "windfall" (in which death is accidental and natural, as well as gentle) composes the ground out of which it grew. The perception is ordinary enough, though here it is given force by the tension set up by the preposition "into." The word pulls simultaneously in different directions. "[T]he floor it rots into" can be read to mean that in rotting the fruit is received

"into" a pre-existing "floor." but also that de-"composition" becomes composition when, by rotting, the fruit transforms itself "into" the "floor."

The final quatrain charts another involuted movement: the poet's "growing out of" yet turning back towards his primal ground. One reads "growing out of" to mean both "having been sustained and nourished by" and "leaving behind." Again, words pull two ways: "inclined" refers to the willow's sloping as well as to the poet's personal disposition, the "appetites" are those of both poet and place. The speaker "feeds" on the ground but is also fed upon by the ground which, tugging him back from his effort at transcendence, claims him for its own. One recalls the poet in "Viking Dublin," with his simultaneous aspiration and inability to transcend the circumstances of his place. The process is as unexceptional as the perfectly ordinary law of gravity. But the word "gravity," like "weeping," carries other connotations with which to alter the tone and mood of the lines.

Heaney's manner in the last lines is engaging. We are moved by the difficult process he undergoes to eventually accept being tied to his ground and to the cultural identity it implies.

By the end of section V the links established between poet and place are many and varied: he is emotionally connected to it, he possesses the native's ability to understand its entire being with his entire being, he has faced its goddess, he resembles the victims sacrificed to it, he is part of it despite himself, and his own relationships and experiences are infused with it.

It is significant that Healey ends a sequence which has been primarily concerned to establish his connectedness to his place with an attempt to define his position vis-a-vis that of the imperial reporter, Tacitus. It gives to the mythopoeic machinery of the rest of "Kinship" a political aspect: at the basis of section VI lies the colonised subject's continued need to declare his independence of the colonist's mode. This is familiar to us from earlier poems like "Bog Oak."

A passage from Tacitus's Germania has a bearing on the section :

In an island of the ocean is a holy grove  
and in it a consecrated chariot. . . .  
A single priest is permitted to touch it:  
he interprets the presence of the goddess  
in her shrine and follows with deep  
reverence as she rides away drawn by  
cows: then come days of rejoicing. . . .  
peace and quiet are then, and then  
alone, known and loved, until the  
same priest returns the goddess to her  
temple. . . . After this the chariot  
and the robes, and, if you will believe  
it, the goddess herself, are washed in a  
sequestered lake: slaves are the  
ministrants and straightaway swallowed by  
that same lake. Hence a mysterious  
terror and an ignorance full of piety  
as to what that may be which men only  
behold to die (qtd. in Glob 159-162).

As in "Bog Oak," Heaney is seen siding with those who are usually observed and remain voiceless in the discourse of the imperial reporter. His adoption of a communal voice in section VI is a departure from the rest of the sequence but in some ways its natural culmination. Even the "I" of the second line fulfils a communal function, since the speaker is seen to resemble the priest in Tacitus's passage.

The poet is concerned to differentiate between the experiences of the outside observer and that of the native. One of the ways he does this is to stress the importance of the imperial eye in the foreigner's perspective: "observe how I make my grove,"; "the legions stare /from the ramparts," "Read the inhumed faces." His previous assertion that, if used alone, the eye is inadequate as an organ with which to understand and decipher the landscape now obtains a belated force.

Edna Longley joins Conor Cruise O'Brien in pointing to one of the potential problems resulting from such an attitude:

[Heaney] excludes the inter-sectarian issue, warfare between tribes, by concentrating on the Catholic psyche as bound to immolation, and within that immolation to savage tribal loyalties. . . . 'Kinship' defines the battlefield in astonishingly introverted Catholic and Nationalist terms--O'Brien's point:

Our mother ground  
is sour with the blood  
of her faithful,

they lie gargling  
 in her sacred heart  
 as the legions stare  
 from the ramparts. ("North" 78)

Perhaps the greatest problem in "Kinship" is the number of ways in which it is reductive: as in these quatrains, Catholics are reduced to sacrificial victims and their antagonists to faceless, staring "legions." History is likewise reduced to mythic patterns. This tendency makes one's reading of the final quatrains problematic.

Heaney's response to Yeats's question in "Easter 1916," "O when may it [sacrifice] suffice?" is "nothing will suffice." Yeats's initial fatalistic response to his own question, "That is Heaven's part," is eventually replaced by his assertion that "A terrible beauty is born." This is not Heaney's view. He appears to see the present as part of the older, permanent and unchanging cycle of sacrifices.

In view of the rest of the poem Morrison's reading of the final lines of the section appears justified. "'Kinship,'" he says, "ends up speaking the language of the tribe, brutal though that language may be" (Seamus Heaney 68). An alternative reading is possible. Based on the idea that the final lines are an ironic adoption of Tacitus's perspective in order to undercut it, it would take phrases like "slaughter / for the common good" as examples of what an outsider who lacks understanding might see as the tribe's self-justification for its actions. I think, however, that Morrison is <sup>r</sup>correct when he says,

[I]f we cannot quite believe that Heaney really supposes slaughter . . . to be 'for the common good,' nor is there anything to suggest that the phrase is intended to be some kind of civilized irony--that would be to read into the poem a gap between the speaker and his subject which is simply not there. (Seamus Heaney 68)

One would like to think that the lines could sustain both resonances--the tribal perspective and the ironical comment on the external view--without implicating the poet too heavily in the dubious emotion of the former. But they do not. The mythopoeic thrust of the whole of "Kinship," with its concentration on the figure of the goddess, on immolation, and on the determining force of de-historicized mythic patterns, is powerful enough to overcome the ironic possibility, and disturbingly implicates the poet in that emotion.

As a result, the political aspect lent to section VI by the poet's stance against Tacitus remains implicit, while the mythopoeic motivation of the sequence as a whole establishes itself at the end as a supposedly serious comment on the nature of Irish political reality. If one were to try find antecedents for "Kinship," "Antaeus" would spring to mind. The revision which "Hercules and Antaeus" undertakes could thus be directed as much at "Kinship" as at that early poem.

## X. Part II.

The most striking feature of part II is that it appears to be written in an entirely different mode to that used in either part I or in any of Heaney's earlier volumes. Heaney himself explains:

The two halves of the book constitute two different types of utterance, each of which arose out of a necessity to shape and give palpable linguistic form to two kinds of urgency--one symbolic, one explicit ("Unhappy and at Home" 66).

This implies that the division between the two parts is a rigid one. The critical consequences have been negative insofar as disparities between poems in the same part have tended to be ignored in favour of the view that both parts are internally homogenous. Heaney's opposition of the "symbolic" and the "explicit" might have helped engender criticism suffused with coupled abstractions, criticism in which the two parts face each other as oppositions between private and public, past and present, instinct and rationality.

The division itself is most easily recognised in the differing characteristics of the poems of each part. In part II these include a long line, a greater variety of stanza forms, a more conversational tone, documentary explicitness, a looser syntactical arrangement and the wholesale admission into the verse of cliché, journalese and colloquial rhythms. There is no strictly linear progression in part I, but collectively the poems

do sustain a developing exploration: in part II the language of poetic "explicitness" appears more spontaneous, and is expressive rather than exploratory.

One of the notable features of part II is that Heaney is able to make poems of, rather than be silenced by, the obvious limitations imposed on poetry in contemporary Northern Ireland. The reason for this has to do with the context of part II, its place in the bipartite structure of North. In one way or another, a majority of the poems in part I set out antecedent determinants to present circumstances. Whether writing with what I have called a mythopoeic motivation or with a historicizing motivation, Heaney manages to allocate to contemporaneity a definable position in a historical pattern. It is against this backdrop of an antecedent history of determining force that part II unfolds. As a result of the existence of this political and historical backdrop, when he deals with his contemporary situation in part II, his concentration on the problematics of his own poetic art appears neither irresponsible nor irrelevant. He is able to make personal experiences resonate with the presence of a form of experience larger than the merely personal. In an interview Heaney answered Deane in the affirmative when asked whether in his writing of North, he was trying to achieve

a poetry that would be neither a matter of the day to day spontaneities alone, nor of a schematic mythologizing alone, but a matter of making the day to day a form embedded in the day to day from which it arises. ("Unhappy and at Home" 66)

His reply also applied to the question whether an "organic form" evolved in the writing of the two parts. An investigation of part II should contribute to an understanding of that "organic form."

#### XI. The Shorter Poems.

Part II consists of two short poems and two sequences. "The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream" and "Freedman," the shorter poems, show up different aspects of the relationship between the poet's experience of poetry and his political situation. Poetry appears as an ineffective political tool in the first poem and as an avenue of personal liberation from political subjugation in the second.

The first poem plays off Shelley's heroic conception of the role of the poet against this poet's recognition of his impotence. Heaney's style and his allusions are prosaic; they form part of his attack on the delusions fostered by a particular seductive conception of the poet and his role. In "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" a related point is made in the parenthetical lines "It's tempting here to rhyme on 'labour pangs' / And diagnose a rebirth in our plight // But that would be to ignore other symptoms." Heaney acknowledges the temptation to escape into a mode of poetry which generates its own logic in detachment from the empirical conditions of its production. But he does so only in order to exercise it.

The condition of slavery in ancient Rome provides the backdrop to Heaney's concern in "Freedman" with different types of subjection--religious, educational and political. By associating the instruments of subjugation with the liturgical and Latinate diction of the first quatrains of the poem, he is able to represent his liberation from the political constraints of his Anglicized education in terms of language. The allegorical Roman setting gives credibility to the notion of his escape from the master culture into the English language. Given the Northern Irish context, the short English words with which the poem ends provide a paradoxical and witty escape route for the poet.

## XII. "Whatever You Say Say Nothing."

"Whatever You Say Say Nothing" is Heaney's most acerbic and desperate statement concerning the pernicious pressure exerted by "the tight gag of place / And times" on the poet's attempt to write a poetry that is simultaneously responsive to the needs of the self and capable of producing effects in a wider community.

If viewed against the backdrop of part I, the sequence helps explain the poet's earlier use of a "symbolic" mode. This is because the language of poetic "explicitness" is shown to be vulnerable to forces depriving it of both efficacy and meaning. The motivation behind Heaney's indirect approach to his material through such avenues as allegory, myth, etymology or archaeology appears in this view to be retrospectively justified.

If "Freedman" ends with a liberation from Latinate diction the principle theme of "Whatever You Say" is far less optimistic: it concerns the difficulty of escaping, or effectively using, the dominant discourse. In the sequence Heaney attempts something both ambitious and dangerous: he opens a relatively tight rhymed stanzaic framework to the language of journalism and political cliché; he allows that language a relatively unmediated expression, and he dispenses with the distance between speaker and subject that usually characterises satire.

The sequence shows the vulnerability of language (including poetic discourse) to the pressure of cliché, but unfortunately does not contain resources with which to transform or adequately account for the resultant debased language. It appears that the most palpable criticism of the clichés is supposed to derive from their making some self-reflexive comment on themselves simply by virtue of their inclusion within a poetic framework.

Elsewhere in his work, Heaney renews clichés, animates them with a witty or sardonic reflexiveness. Even if he never quite achieves the sophistication of a Geoffrey Hill in this respect, he occasionally uses clichés responsibly and deliberately, in order to foster a degree of self-consciousness and insight that cliché is normally thought to preclude. This is not, however, Heaney's aim in the present sequence. He is not interested in showing how poetry can restore to cliché the function of responsible speech. He is concerned not with particular clichés but with cliché as a generalised representation of the pressures of deterioration acting on the possibilities of language in a given context. The determinants of place, time and national characteristics exacerbate the specifically linguistic

deterioration. Journalistic cliché is, for Heaney, the model of the offending language. The poem does, however, contain scraps of literary and philosophical discourse, now mere traces almost indistinguishable from what surrounds them: "The times are out of join," "little platoons," "this art and sedentary trade," "aere perennius," the "wooden horse" and "wily Greeks" of Troy.

The collocation of literary discourse and cliché is matched by the mingling of experiences and perceptions of different status. The occasional important perception stands alongside the spontaneous expression which reveals little more than frustration or anger.

In the first three sections the poet portrays himself as trapped in his isolation and impotence, in his culture, and in a practically irreversible process of linguistic deterioration. He reveals an anguished need to speak out. This meets with meagre success because the available discourse is structured in such a way that it only provides access to clichés, deceptions and ineffectual statements. His desperate and somewhat melodramatic response to the journalistic coverage of "the Irish thing," "Yet I live here too, I sing," can produce very little. What he and his antagonists share is a linguistic medium that reduces him to being "Expertly civil tongued," them to "civil neighbours" and what they might say to "sanctioned, old, elaborate retorts." These are not units of meaning but something to mouth: objects having a "fake taste" and "stony flavours."

In a reference to the six counties of Northern Ireland in the third section he says : "Of the 'wee six' I sing / Where to be saved you only must save face / And whatever you say, you say nothing." The title of the sequence acts in the North as advice

for political survival. Heaney's adaption of it registers his damning indictment of the culture that assigns to the people who would survive in this way their absolute incapacity.

The force of the poet's feelings in the first three sections is not only directed against journalists, his own Catholic community and his "Northern" culture respectively, but also against himself. The tone of self-castigation derives from a perception of how he too is implicated in the situation he deplores. He believes in the possibility of a useful function for poetry : "I believe any of us/ Could draw the line through bigotry and sham / Given the right line, aere perennius." (The allusion is to Horace's conception of the permanence of the monument of his verse [Odes 3.30], and the fact that it comes into the poet's language from the Latin serves as an ironic indication of the poverty of his linguistic resources). Despite his belief in the usefulness of poetry, he dramatizes himself in a state of inanition : "Yet for all this art and sedentary trade / I am incapable"; "I sit here with a pestering / Drouth for words at once both gaff and bait // To lure the tribal shoals to epigram / And order." Not only is poetry unforthcoming or ineffective, but certain temptations it offers could even lead to deceptions : "It's tempting here to rhyme on 'labour pangs' / And diagnose a rebirth in our plight." The logic here would be that of a poetry not in tune with reality.

The latter lines bring up two fairly important issues that might be dealt with parenthetically. Firstly, they provide an implicit comment on the temptation in part I to see in violence and "our plight" the potential source of future "rebirths." Secondly, the lines which immediately follow--"But that would be

to ignore other symptoms. / Last night you didn't need a stethoscope / To hear the eruption of Orange drums / Allergic equally to Pearse and Pope"--contain images of the body and bodily process that are very different to those employed in part I. The images in part I are of births, digestion, ingestion, rumination, of the cud and stomachs: images of nourishment usually; in part II these image-patterns are replaced by those of poisoning, of an inability to swallow, of the mouth rather than the stomach, of bad tastes, and of the body as a diseased organ. This shift provides one signal of the poet's darker conception of contemporary political reality in part II, and especially in "Whatever You Say."

The first three lines of section III counter specific clichés. Here there is none of the vibrancy that characterises Heaney's renewal of cliché elsewhere. He registers exhaustion as much as opposition. After enumerating the extent to which his place, his culture and the "times" reduce whatever he has to say to "nothing," he arrives at the final image of section III. His allusion to the Greeks at Troy--on the brink of political victory and whispering morse to one another--stresses restriction, constraint and the difficulty of communication rather than the anticipation of political consequences.

Section IV, which appears as the dedicatory poem to WO, and which was discussed in that context, is a subtle and successful investigation into the potential failures of both the poet and his language in attempting to deal with what has become of the Ulster landscape. In my previous discussion of the poem I drew attention to the poet's recognition of the dangers he faces.

These are the temptation to anaesthetise through language, or to turn reality into imagination, and the possibility that his language might degenerate into cliché.

The final lines of the sequence are marked by the suggestion of a stoic resignation to a communal fate. This modifies the poet's earlier isolated and embittered stance without negating it. Despite the success of the final section, the sequence as a whole lacks ironic control, and it fails to generate an effective counterpoint between a fairly rigid form and the problematic language and material it is made to contain. Personal desperation is communicated at the expense of real commentary a little too often. At the end we are still left with our hands full: too much unmediated and unassimilated bitterness and resentment in the one; the dead weight of cliché, journalese, and linguistic detritus in the other.

#### XIII. "Singing School."

Heaney contemplates his own poetic development in "Singing School." The context in which it is viewed is both political and literary. Vincent Buckley makes a number of important observations:

the basis of the sequence is a self-pondering, in which Heaney, however representative his background, is seen not as a representative but as an impotently solitary figure. . . . [His] highly intelligent self-focussing certainly concerns a political situation, but

it refracts that through the prism of a constantly turning self which, in the process, becomes the central subject. It also, of course, presents the political situation, to which the speaker is palpitatingly responsive. Part of his awareness, however, is that he is not, and never can be, politically committed; he is doomed to be an outsider to the agony and the disorder which engage his guilt, but not his action. In one sense it is political poetry, in that it exposes fragments of a political reality; and the viewpoint from which he does so is, I suppose, nationalist. In another sense, it is apolitical, anti-political poetry, because its centre of attention is a self whose own burden is that it finds political action impossible. (272-73)

The title of the sequence ironically recalls Yeats's notion in "Sailing to Byzantium" that artists learn not from instructors but from art: "Nor is there singing school but studying / Monuments of its own magnificence." Heaney plays off the title against the actual nature of his poetic upbringing, which was inseparable from politics. His "singing school" appears different to Yeats's: the importance of politics and fear, his unspectacular background and ordinary environment, the influences exerted on him by other people's comments, the vulnerability of his poetic impulses to sectarian pressures, his uncertainty as to whether he writes "For the ear? For the people? / For what is said behind-backs?": all these belie the pre-eminence of

"Monuments of unageing intellect" in the growth of the mind of the poet. And by a stroke of wit, Heaney adds as an epigraph to the sequence as passage from Yeats's Autobiographies to illustrate that the older poet too did a spell in that other "singing school."

The sequence, then, is partially Heaney's corrective to the Yeatsian notion. Even so, underlying that corrective impulse is the poet's barely acknowledged but still perceptible desire to have had access to a heritage of "Monuments" in Yeats's Byzantine mould.

The title, epigraphs and first poem all address the issue of poetic origins. Heaney's purpose is to define his own attitude to his art and to influences which acted on it. He invokes Yeats, Wordsworth and Kavanagh--three of his "singing masters"--but also his friend and fellow-poet Seamus Deane; he mixes literary allusions with schoolboy and adolescent memories; his tone modulates from an epistolary or conversational easiness to a grave seriousness. As a poet he seems intent on demonstrating the validity of the full range of his experience as material for poetry.

"The Ministry of Fear" combines straightforward narration with a web of allusive play to produce its powerful conclusion. Heaney is interested in the interrelationship of his received "monuments" of culture and the unremarkable stuff of his own early life. We have seen him establish a distance between himself and Yeats. With Wordsworth and Kavanagh, the situation is slightly different.

Wordsworth's presence is felt in the epigraph and in a parallel pointed by the sentence, "It was an act / Of stealth." Determinants of place are all-important in this poem. There is thus a difference between the constituting experiences of the two boys--the one who steals the boat and the one who throws his biscuits over the wall. Wordsworth's "beloved Vale" of lakes and mountains differs markedly from the ominous, almost underworldly, streets of Heaney's Derry. The modern poet was not as "much favoured" by his "transplantations" as was the old. Part of what he learned from Kavanagh, he says, has "to do with a confidence in the deprivations of our condition" ("Unhappy and at Home" 66). The poet of schoolboy homesickness, biscuits and "the Lecky Road" is exercising that confidence in the context of a related, if more grandiose, parallel.

Between the lines "Fair seedtime had my soul . . ." and "It was an act of stealth" in The Prelude (I.301-56), Wordsworth speaks of those things which affect the growth of a poet's mind. Talking of "the means which Nature deigned to employ" he mentions that "she may use / Severer interventions, ministry / More palpable, as best might suit her aim." When Heaney gives a name to Ulster at the end of the poem (the act of naming being an act of subversion and a reaction to those past demands on him to reveal his name) he calls it "the ministry of fear." Not only religious, governmental and institutional connotations inhere in the word "ministry": through the agency of the Wordsworthian presence, Heaney re-specifies fear as the primary "means which Nature deigned to employ" in her making him a poet. A case of "no rights on / The English lyric" indeed.

The role Kavanagh plays for Heaney is an enabling one. "Well, as Kavanagh said, we have lived / In important places." This is from "Epic," the sonnet in which Kavanagh moves to an acceptance of "the deprivations of our condition" as legitimate substance for poetry.<sup>20</sup> Heaney inherits from the poem an attitude as much as a phrase. The sentiment in Kavanagh's other--more cover<sup>t</sup>--appearance is also given unhesitating assent. The tone of "Dabbling in verses till they have become / A life" is exactly that which Heaney is concerned to express in the central section of "The Ministry of Fear."

The allusive play is, however, subordinate to the experiences narrated in the poem. The poet gradually moves toward the recognition that education and political authority are linked, and that the "Inferiority/Complexes," "dreams" and insecurity fostered at school were ultimately responses to the "ministry of fear." The thrill behind the lines "Those hobnailed boots from beyond the mountain / Were walking, by God, all over the fine / Lawns of elocution" is the thrill of impropriety, of overstepping the bounds of the licit. The thrill becomes an imaginative burden when, later, its political implications are understood. For the poet comes to understand two things: that in Ireland the birth of the poetic impulse takes place on a field mapped out in sectarian terms, but also that a measure of freedom, with its concomitant responsibility, is promised by the fact that "Ulster was British, but with no rights on / The English lyric."

Heaney portrays many of the figures who populate the sequence in a problematically consistent way. The police who resemble "black cattle," the "slightly sweating" policeman and

caricature drummer (from "A Constable Calls" and "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966"), and "the patent leather of the Guardia Civil" are of the same ancestral stock as the "legions" who "stare / from the ramparts" ("Kinship"), the "groomed optimi" ("Freedman") and the elusive owner of the ominous eyes at the end of "The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream." This may evidence a grudging political alignment, but one regrets the absence of poems where Protestants are also people (as in "The Other Side," "An Ulster Twilight" from Station Island, and even "Dock").

The poet's guilt at his state of estrangement and separation from "the real thing" in "Summer 1969" provides the impetus for the presentation of an alternative perspective on art. The poet applies military terminology to himself at unexpected points in part II ("I'm back in winter / Quarters," "The lonely scarp / Of St Columb's College, where I billeted"), and his line "I retreated to the cool of the Prado" narrates an interestingly strategic retreat from both the partially symbolic heat outside the art museum and from a particular type of artistic advice ("try to touch the people"). The military terminology makes clear his role--albeit unwilling-- as a participant rather than a commentator. He would, it appears, take inspiration from Goya, whose intense concentration on his own demonic self produced, in Heaney's view, an art simultaneously attuned to the darkest recesses of the self ("His nightmares," so intensely alive as to be "grafted to the palace wall") and to the historical moment. The latter, it would seem from the final couplet, being a result of the former. Like Yeats, whom he only faintly resembles, Heaney finds the heroic and expansive gesture attractive. Unfortunately, he is carried away by his desire to give it verbal

realization in the final lines. The lines which should have provided a powerful indication of his "retreat" verge, as a result, on melodrama.

"Fosterage" draws us closer to the core of Heaney's own art, to be addressed in "Exposure." In the gentle modulations of this poem the poet is advised to concentrate on his own life, value exile, trust in the minutiae of his experience and, through patience and simple, unheroic recording and description, to allow his life to reveal itself richly. "But to hell with overstating it: / 'Don't have the veins bulging in your biro'" is good advice for the poet who wrote the final lines on Goya. After such advice, his last line looks exotic: "words / Imposing on my tongue like obols."

The first five pieces in "Singing School" can be read as self-sufficient poems. Nevertheless, they work cumulatively to establish a notion of the inseparability of poetry and politics. A submerged dialogue between them addresses different possible poetic responses to politics, most obviously in the conflicting pieces of advice the poet receives in silence: "try to touch the people" and "Go your own way. / Do your own work." The poems share a concern with the theme of poetic development. Together, they lead the reader to certain expectations. We expect to find at the end of the sequence speech in the present by a poet in full possession of his powers. We expect a resolution of the tension between the possibilities of engagement and disengagement. The logic of chronological progression in the sequence gives rise to such expectations. They are one form of the pressure Heaney feels himself subject to: the pressure to choose, take sides, declare one's allegiances and to finally

resolve one's contradictory urgings. Nor does it end there: he is ultimately confronted with the pressure to do something. We see the results of these pressures throughout North and even earlier: they leave their traces in Heaney's deferral of speech, his elaboration of the machinery of historical myth, his occasional attempt to force a poem to an artificial resolution, and his setting against one another of the different types of utterance in parts I and II.

i. "Exposure."

Rather than fulfil these expectations at the end of "Singing School" the poet questions them and resists their temptations. In "Exposure," the focal point of the sequence, Heaney undertakes a dynamic scrutiny of the self and of the value of his poetic enterprise. He makes of the ambiguous space between alternative possibilities a locus for poetic meditation. The poem develops in a consistently indeterminate area conceived always as the interstice between formulable opposites. The opening lines take as their setting the juncture of night and day (light and darkness, warmth and cold), autumn and winter, of one year and the next. Throughout the poem the poet is curiously stretched between separable realms: between his physical location in Wicklow in the South and his continued mental and emotional residence in the North; between the elemental realm of fire and air (where his comet, shooting star and meteorite are located) and that of earth and water ("I walk through damp leaves";

"muddy compound"); between the reality of his isolation and inanition and his fantasy-world of commonalty and political action. The list of oppositions goes on and on: "my friends' / Beautiful prismatic counselling" set against "the anvil brains of some who hate me"; "let-downs and erosions" against "diamond absolutes"; "internee" against "informer"; the inner against the outer; "these sparks" against "The once-in-a-lifetime portent."

The poem is not, however, simply a series of rigid oppositions. The tensions operating between any one pair of opposites generates a dynamic poetic exploration, rather than anything static. Thus the mood of the opening lines, which see light, life and vitality draining from the landscape, accords with the viewer's own state of desolation, yet the distance which separates him from the landscape is as much a feature of these lines as is his familiarity and intimacy with it. The line "The ash tree cold to look at" bespeaks the dissolution of vitality ("ash" and "cold" interact) and, by its concentration on visual apprehension, sets the speaker apart from the land. He can compare the light of the unattainably distant comet to the familiar "glimmer of haws and rose-hips" and thereby establish a sense of his yearning for transcendence at the same time as he communicates his fidelity to and intimacy with his immediate surroundings.

The comet accrues symbolic import as the poem proceeds. Starting as an anticipated literal occurrence, it rapidly moves from the "haws and rose-hips" comparison through the mediation of the image of the falling star, to signify something very different in the line, "If I could come on meteorite!" The

transformation from comet into meteorite mirrors a change in the nature of the poet's aspiration. The difficulty and potential failure of the aspiration to transcend ("glimmer" and "falling") is transformed into a slightly self-ironic aspiration to be highly visible, brilliant and momentous. The movement is towards the grandiose gesture Heaney has succumbed to before. Yet here he has sufficient self-possession to view ironically both the aspiration and the gesture. They form part of a fantasy he nurtures of poetry as a socially efficacious tool, with the poet as the hero-liberator. The ironic point is effectively made by the contrast between the poet's walking "through damp leaves, / Husks, the spent flukes of autumn" and the imaginary hero "On some muddy compound, / His gift like a slingstone / Whirled for the desperate."

The stone released from the sling in this political action might be thought to resemble the comet visually. This complicates one's reading of other lines--"my friends' / Beautiful prismatic counselling" and "each drop recalls // The diamond absolutes"--which establish submerged connections between the comet as a distant, almost unattainable object of aspiration and the crystalline purity of the perfectly achieved and permanently impressive artifact. The comet can symbolize the meaningful political act as well as the artifact. These different strands contribute to the density of the poem's final lines.

Yet, however attractive the poet finds the idea of an art work which transcends the mundane conditions of its production, or the idea that poetry can be a force for political liberation, he is dogged in the act of composition by questions which render these latent idealisms problematic:

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

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

Rather than providing an answer to the initial question, these lines illustrate the tormented state of the questioner. The genuine self-scrutiny that is sometimes absent from Heaney's work here forces him once again to confront a highly problematic conception of his art. His use of repetition allows him to capture the weariness, doubt and inability to progress that must beset a poet with motivations as contradictory and sometimes dubious as his own. He admits to these contradictory urgings and recognises the price he personally pays for creating such art. When the falling rain distracts him from his meditations, he projects "let-downs and erosions" onto its "voices" as well as having it recall "The diamond absolutes."

This is a crucial point in the poem. It signals the moment of greatest discrepancy between the perfection of the art work and the imperfection of the life ("diamond absolutes" versus

"let-downs and erosions"); at this moment a single phenomenon--rain--is seen to contain both terms of the discrepancy and thus be divided against itself; by this point the previous distance between subject and object has been drastically reduced: the drops rather than the poet are said to recall the "diamond absolutes." It is perhaps not surprising that at this moment the impetus of the poem should lead the poet to an act of self-definition:

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.

The desire for definition and clarity, so strong in this poem, does not alleviate the tension of the poet's predicament. In each of the important self-descriptions in these lines there are traces of ambiguity, of contradiction or of irresolution. The poem succeeds on the basis of the complex feeling which unfolds in the lines and not on any final resolution.

Differentiating himself from possible roles he might play at opposite poles of the political spectrum, the poet describes himself as "An inner émigré." This description is ambiguous; it both hides and reveals a divided self. Literally an exile from the North, the poet is primarily concerned with his emigration inwards from a "gelignite and sten" reality "outside." But he is also an exile from himself: the ironic "outside view" of himself--"grown long-haired / And thoughtful"--makes this point.

Morrison writes that "the word 'wood-kerne' has quite definite political overtones: wood-kernes were the shadowy Catholic outlaws who put up resistance to the Protestant colonization of Ireland. . ." (Seamus Heaney 57). As with his use of military imagery elsewhere in the sequence, the poet implicates himself in the politics as a participant by calling himself a "wood-kerne." This alters our perception of him as an "inner émigré." But there are further complications: we notice that the wood-kerne has "Escaped from the massacre" and is "Taking protective colouring / From bole and bark." The poet, situated at an indeterminate point between politics and nature, still treads the line between engagement and detachment. His statements are open to alternative readings: perhaps he has escaped politics and massacre altogether, but then perhaps this particular escape is just one more "shadowy Catholic" tactic from the "wood-kerne" poet. Similarly, taking protective colouring could be a means of absolute escape--a dissolution of the self and transcendence of politics through immersion in nature--or it could be part of an explicitly political strategy.

Ambiguous possibilities play about these lines, which are given a note of poignancy at the close of the penultimate stanza. The words "feeling / Every wind that blows" combine a sense of the acute sensitivity and vulnerability of a body exposed to the open winds with a statement concerning the susceptibility of the poet to contradictory influences. Heaney's remark in an essay on his Irish contemporaries is strikingly apt: "The poet is stretched between politics and transcendence, and is often displaced from a confidence in a single position by his disposition to be affected by all positions, negatively rather than positively capable" ("Place and Displacement" 50).

Throughout the poem the poet has attempted to balance conflicting needs. He feels the tension of desiring engagement and detachment at the same time. Whilst desiring it, he feels that political commitment would be a limitation: witness the self-irony in the lines, "Imagining a hero / On some muddy compound . . ." and "My responsible tristia." Heaney is accustomed to turning to poetry and to the area of personal sensitivity with which it deals as the means by which to escape such limitations. Consequently, his communication of his own sense of failure and of the limitations of his commitment to poetry itself in the last quatrain is all the more forceful.

The poet feels he has misdirected his energies. He has concentrated on "blowing up these sparks." Though ambiguous, I take this to be a reference to his own poetry, especially to those preoccupations in it with which he has busied himself in the attempt to obtain warmth and comfort against the biting cold of "Every wind that blows." These would include his self-conscious fantasies of political action, his guilt at having

left the North, his concern with his poetic role, and his need to define himself in a political context. These have provided him with "meagre heat." But worse, they have distracted him from seeing "The comet's pulsing rose." In this line we hear echoes from earlier lines in the poem: one recalls the unattainably distant object of aspiration, the living plants and pulse of nature, the "diamond absolutes" and the stone flung from the sling. Despite these echoes, however, the comet's composite nature remains mysterious. Some personal or poetic revelation, figured in this alluring yet elusive metaphor, is denied the poet.

Almost all of the major terms in the final section of the poem are ambiguous: "inner émigré," "wood-kerne," "protective colouring," "these sparks," "The comet's pulsing rose." The attempt to finally pin down meanings, to adjudicate between possible readings, is not productive. The complexities generated by the poet's mode of ambiguous utterance accord with his mixed and complicated responses to the Ulster tragedy and his part in it. In a sense, the poet comes to rest with a recognition of his own sense of failure. The finality of this is disturbing, and it casts its shadow not only over the sequence or the second part of the volume, but over North as a whole.

## Conclusion

In terms of Heaney's poetic development, "Exposure" performs a crucial function because it simultaneously signifies the end of one stage of his development and inaugurates another. The state it brings to an end is the one with which I have been concerned. The slow, long haul that begins in DN is Heaney's attempt to find a poetic voice which can justify itself in the historical conditions of its production. The multiple transformations which the poetry undergoes in Heaney's attempt to turn it out from the private interiority of the self to make it encompass a public and historical perspective never quite result in that elusive moment of significant poetic speech which is always pursued but always elusive in his poetry.

In "Exposure" Heaney accepts his failure to make his personal voice carry the resonances of the tribe in an unmediated way. The tone of his acceptance of the self as his subject signals the inauguration of a new stage of development. It reveals his desire "to be able to use the first person singular to mean me and my lifetime." In his subsequent poetry, the self with which he is concerned is still viewed as inevitably the product of a situation and a history, and it is constantly affected by these ("feeling / Every wind that blows"). The difference is that the poet no longer strains to become them, to write their reality as if it were his own.

Heaney accepts that his failure and his awareness of certain limitations (those imposed on his poetry from without, and those generated from within) need not be debilitating; by making these his subject he is able to achieve a degree of confidence and trust in his poetic abilities that becomes

a feature of his subsequent poetry. Thus, while in Field Work and Station Island Heaney remains responsive to the political situation in Ulster, it is his personal responses--to specific people and events--rather than a wider political motivation that finds expression in poems which draw on that situation.

One distinguishes between Heaney's early work and the later on the basis of features like the above. One notices, in addition, a reduction in the tension generated by the poet's conflicting needs to respond to a specific historical situation in a politically and culturally relevant manner on the one hand, and to escape any such obligation on the other. Heaney also undergoes--to use Kieran Quinlan's suggestive phrase--a conversion to Dante. He displays a greater trust in art, one manifestation of which is his renewed use of traditional forms, the previous abandonment of which was not unrelated to the strength of his need to evidence some political alignment even at a formal level in his verse. Heaney's move to the South was as much a move away from the North; his continued mental and emotional residence in the North--evidenced in the poems in North written in Wicklow--is less and less pronounced in his subsequent volumes.

Links of continuity with the first four volumes obviously exist: landscape, violence, the need to appease; these remain his persistent subjects and concerns, but his tone, his attitude, and what he hopes to achieve are different. The story of Heaney's poetic maturity is a different one to the one I have been tracing. It is, nevertheless, an extension of that earlier stage of development. One's reading of Field Work and Station Island, volumes in which Heaney is writing

at the height of his powers, is deepened by an appreciation of the journey he travels towards the achievement of a hard-won maturity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a sample of these views, see Mary P. Brown 289; Terence Brown, Northern Voices 175; Mathias 14-15; Parini, "Ground Possessed" 101; Ricks, "Growing Up"; Schirmer 139-40.

<sup>2</sup> These quotes are taken from the following poems: "Night-Piece"; "The Peninsula"; "Vision"; "Girls Bathing, Galway 1965"; "Lifting"; "Shoreline."

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: "A catherine wheel of arm and hand" ("Girls Bathing, Galway 1965"); "They lay in a ring of their own crusts and dregs" ("The Wife's Tale"); "the bone-hooped womb" ("Cana Revisited"); "an empty creel" ("Elegy"); "whorling their mud coronas" and "a garland" ("Bait"); "a bouquet," "oars in <sup>their</sup> locks go round and round," "arcs," "umbrella" and "gulls encompass them" ("Setting").

<sup>4</sup> The quotations are taken from the following poems: "The Tollund Man"; "Land"; "A New Song"; "Navvy"; "May."

<sup>5</sup> From: "Gifts of Rain"; "The Tollund Man"; "Nerthus."

<sup>6</sup> From: "Traditions"; "A New Song" and "The Other Side."

<sup>7</sup> For my discussion of Heaney's conception of history and landscape I have drawn extensively on Terence Brown's analysis of these areas in his Northern Voices 173-83. I have gone so far as to use his terminology where this seemed appropriate.

<sup>8</sup> From: "The Last Mummer"; "Toome"; "A New Song"; "The Other Side"; "The Wool Trade"; "Linen Town"; "Midnight."

<sup>9</sup> From: "Land"; "Gifts of Rain"; "Oracle"; "The Other Side"; "Roots."

<sup>10</sup> These include "loam, flints, musket-balls, / fragmented ware, / torcs and fish-bones" ("Toome"); "flint and iron, / Cast-offs, scraps, nail, canine" ("Tinder"); "pike-shafts,

axe-heads, bone pins" ("Navy").

<sup>11</sup> See Deane, "Irish Poetry and Irish Nationalism" 23 for a reference to this act committed by the Ulster Special Constabulary, an auxiliary para-military force raised in 1920 by the British Administration.

<sup>12</sup> For examples we may look to the following: "swathes of grass / and meadowsweet // multiple as loaves / and fishes" ("Fodder");  
 "resentful / and impenitent, / carrying the warm eggs" ("Servant Boy");  
 "The moon's host elevated // in a monstrance of holly trees" ("The Last Mummer");  
 "A smooth libation of the past / Poured by this chance vestal daughter" ("A New Song");  
 "I could risk blasphemy, / Consecrate the cauldron bog / Our holy ground and pray / Him to make germinate . . ." ("The Tollund Man");  
 "The loosened flowers between us / gather in, compose / for a May altar of sorts. / These frail and falling blooms / soon taint to a sweet chrism. // Attend. Anoint the wound. / . . . water lives down the tilting stoups of your <sup>S</sup>breasts. / . . ." ("Summer Home");  
 "Vigils, solitudes, fasts, / Unchristened tears, / A puzzled love of the light" ("Bye-Child");  
 "The cobbles of the yard / Lit pale as eggs. // . . . Good Friday // We had started out . . . / . . . As clappers smacked / On a bare altar // **A**nd congregations bent/**T**o the studded crucifix" ("Westering").

<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to Ricks's discussion of line-endings and punctuation in his essay "William Wordsworth I: 'A Pure

Organic Pleasure from the Lines'" in his Force of Poetry 89-116.

<sup>14</sup> Hicks is useful again, this time on reflexive images. The essay is "Andrew Marvell: 'Its own resemblance'" in Force of Poetry 34-59.

<sup>15</sup> The poems concerned are "Funeral Rites" and "Viking Dublin, V."

<sup>16</sup> In "Bog Queen," "Punishment" and "Kinship, II."

<sup>17</sup> The first two references are from "Bone Dreams" and "Bog Queen."

<sup>18</sup> From: "Belderg", "Funeral Rites" and "North."

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Bulfinch writes of the "Strange flickering light" in the northern skies caused by the armour of the Valkyrie, the "warlike virgins" whom Odin sends to every battlefield to collect slain heroes (331).

<sup>20</sup> The poem reads:

#### Epic

I have lived in important places, times  
 When great events were decided, who owned  
 That half a rood of rock, a no-man's land  
 Surrounded by our pitchfork-armed claims.  
 I hear the Duffys shouting 'Damn your soul'  
 And old McCabe stripped to the waist, seen  
 Step the plot defying blue cast-steel--  
 'Here is the march along these iron stones'  
 That was the year of the Munich bother.. Which  
 Was more important? I inclined  
 To lose my faith in Ballyrush and Gortin  
 Till Homer's ghost came whispering to my mind  
 He said: I made the Iliad from such

A local row. Gods make their own importance.

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