# THE POETRY OF SEAMUS HEANEY

## FROM 1966-1979

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By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

September 1981

MASTER OF ARTS (1981)
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Poetry of Seamus Heaney from 1966-1979

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NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 128

## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I attempt to follow the development of Seamus Heaney's poetry from *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) to *Field Work* (1979). Particular attention is given to Heaney's search for a language and a mythology adequate to the Ulster experience in general and his own in particular, and the kind of poetry that can embody it. Emphasis is also placed on Heaney's preoccupation with the role of the poet undertaking such an enterprise.

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# INTRODUCTION

The poem "In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge"[1] describes a life whose emblematic potential prompts Seamus Heaney to consider some of the perennial problems confronting the contemporary Irish writer. Ledwidge's career points up the various forces and tensions liable to be in operation, alternately infusing and interfering with the life and work of the writer. Social circumstance dictates that a complex of necessarily conflicting influences inclines him towards, or at least involves him with, contradiction, division and, at worst, the duplicity afforded by irresolution. These difficulties reflect the adverse conditions symptomatic of, and generated by, a divided culture and the contingent pressures exerted on the writer. They highlight the need to establish a firm foundation, to formulate a positive and distinct identity both for the individual and his community whose roles are interdependent and mutually supportive. The writer is faced with the task of dissociating and distinguishing key elements. He must be able to discover and recognize major issues in order to evolve a context within which reconciliation and stability can be achieved.

In his review of recent biographies of Ledwidge and his patron Lord Dunsany Heaney draws attention to "the pieties and strains at work in Ledwidge's imagination", emphasizing the dualities present in his existence:

> His tensions might be represented in his sporting interests--he played Gaelic football for the local team but liked to be in on the cricket which Dunsary arranged each summer; or in his literary affiliations--he was friendly with Thomas MacDonagh, executed in 1916, and wrote his best-known poem to his memory, yet his first volume was introduced to the world by a Unionist peer and published while he was serving with the British Army.

> He was actively involved in the labour movement and a passionate supporter of the Irish Volunteers... Yet despite his manifest Sinn Fein sympathies, Ledwidge himself eventually joined up (SP, p. 203).

Ledwidge was later killed in France in 1918 "having survived two fronts in Gallipoli and Salonica, and a deep wound in his emotions when the Easter Rising occurred in his absence" (SP, p. 202).

Against this international panorama Heaney stresses Ledwidge's fundamental "sense of kinship with the feminine slopes and levels of the Boyne valley" and his concern, as a prominent poet of the Celtic Revival, with "the shaping of Ireland's future" (SP, p. 202). To complement this, the exigencies of his peasant background are affirmed in the contrasts offered by his relationship with Lord Dunsany: socially, "between the cottage and the castle, the ganger of the roadworks team playing grateful poet to the noble lord's undoubtedly generous patronage", and, in a specifically literary context, "Ledwidge's muse was the hearth guardian of a labourer's cottage, Dunsany's a Gothic beldame in the corridors of Dunsany castle" (SP, p. 202).

If Ledwidge did not respond altogether positively to the internal disparities and ambiguities within this situation Lord Dunsany apparently did, seeing them as significant, necessitating expression and resolution. Heaney's plot summary of Dunsany's play The Curse of the Wise Woman is an adequate testimonial:

> Its hero is abroad, engaged on some diplomatic business for the new Irish Free State, and the book is a nostalgic evocation of an adolescence during the Troubles. The emotional division in the heart of a Unionist landlord, living in a newly independent Ireland, is emblematically realized in the setting. The boy hovers between the privileged structures of Eton and his walled estate, and the mysterious lure of the bog and its denizens. The hero's world is masculine and feudal, its spirit the gun and the dog; the primeval landscape beyond the wall is feminine, its spirit is the wise woman. Both are threatened by the

> impersonal enterprise of the Peat Development (Ireland) Syndicate (SP, p. 205).

For Heaney those represent "the constituents of what might be a myth for the shaping of Modern Ireland" (SP, p. 205) in a setting not unlike that he favours himself, particularly in the evocations of the "mythopoeic bog" (SP, p. 206), Dunsany's "peaty obsessions" (SP, p. 206) being somewhat similar to his own. Indeed, the kind of equations made in this instance are common in Heaney's poetry. One cultural continuum is depicted in the series masculine--colonial/feudal--walled estate--privilege--gun and dog, the other in the series feminine--primeval landscape--mystery--bog--wise woman. Those form the basis for his own mythology, recurrent oppositions within the dialectic he has identified as being integral to his own experience and to the Irish experience in general. His poetry, frequently argumentative, often acknowledges and employs these contrasts. Here they are characteristic of the actual and symbolic differences existing between Dunsany and Ledwidge, intimating lifestyles and their implications.

So, Heaney posits a background for Ledwidge caught between conflicting elements, a victim of uncertainty and indecision in a situation that requires initiative and a definite sense of direction. Furthermore, these elements are significant in that they are also representative of much larger forces, and more important issues, that are both firmly rooted in, yet ultimately transcend their local origins. He firmly relates the particulars of a personal struggle with matters of national importance, seeing the one as a possible correlative of the other, blending autobiography with national history giving it wider resonance and significance.

In both the poem and the review we find Ledwidge faced with the confusion of political affiliation and allegiance at a crucial stage in the country's development and the distressing complexity both of recognizing

and making choices. The unquestioning and easy interaction of poetry and party politics at a time when cultural and political imperatives are not easily separated further complicates the issue. When poetry goes public and to a certain extent adjudicates in an attempt to establish the framework for a new cultural identity, questions of commitment are paramount, questions about the nature and extent of the poetic vocation inevitable. Heaney suggests a strategy that accentuates the importance of maintaining spiritual and cultural contact with one's birthplace. The sense of a particular environment to which one belongs is indispensable. The writer must determine his relation and obligation to it before attempting to expand his world view. The fact that Ledwidge discovered this while fighting for the British Army in Flanders is therefore poignant and pertinent.

"In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge" (FW, pp. 59-60) works through significant time shifts and the astute juxtaposition of scenarios drawn from Heaney's own reminiscences and from Ledwidge's biography. The former offer a paradigm of possible priorities for poetic practice (based largely on Heaney's reading of the situation in terms of his own work), the latter convey a sense of the confusion generated by Ledwidge's hesitation and uncertainty in dealing with them. It is possible to read the poem as being prescriptive, with something of the force of a manifesto, as Heaney tries to formulate the right argument and to offer terms for its resolution. The poem frequently suggests interests beyond its immediate subject matter relating to the nature, extent and value of the commitment that may have solved the dilemma faced by Ledwidge, positing a context within which his talents would have flourished. A tone of gentle admonition is tinged with pathos by the suggestion that Ledwidge did in fact achieve a tardy recognition of the contradiction present in his situation. Heaney offers the consolation that even if this was slow in coming it still attained

something of the status of an epiphany for him. So, it is part elegy, part evocation and celebration, restoring reputation in hindsight.

In the poem, Heaney's own childhood recollections assert the primacy of place, of attachment to the local and immediate, and this is reflected in the language and imagery used to describe them. He recalls "the Portstewart prom...the crescent/...the Castle Walk...the strand./The pilot from Coleraine [who] sailed to the coal-boat": definite and definitive, these scenes retain some enduring mystique, spoken of with an affection that is itself a sign of their real value. "Courting couples rose out of the scooped dunes./A farmer stripped to his studs and shiny waistcoat/Rolled the trousers down on his timid shins": the anonymity is balanced by a certainty, a genuine fascination that excludes mere sentimentality, that hints at something substantial, an essential component, however small, of Heaney's consciousness. Just as Heaney's past pervades the poem, these country people are in constant contact with their own hinterland:

> At night when coloured bulbs strung out the sea-front
> Country voices rose from a cliff-top shelter
> With news of a great litter--'We'll pet the runt!'--
> And barbed wire that had torn a friesan's elder.

These are the country concerns, intimate and cherished, whose importance even the exotic grandeur of seaside resorts cannot diminish (the submerged images of conflict here, "sea-front", "shelter", and "barbed wire" dispel any tendency to see these as lesser matters). Ledwidge himself was to experience the insistence and persistence of this "spirit of place". Even the monument, which is being displaced as a memorial by the poem, is "forever craned/Over Flanders" signifying a culture bound up with its own history, sharing an essentially similar concern, albeit in a different context.

Ledwidge's locale, his cultural background and its effect on him are beautifully evoked:

Francis Ledwidge, you courted at the seaside
Beyond Drogheda one Sunday afternoon.
Literary, sweet-talking, countrified,
You pedalled out the leafy road from Slane

Where you belonged, among the dolorous
And lovely: the May altar of wild flowers,
Easter water sprinkled in outhouses,
Mass-rocks and hill-top raths and raftered byres.

The last line here manages, very effectively, to telescope and condense the pagan, Christian and rural features of his existence, aspects of an environment to which he "belonged". The connotations of "belonging", of the nurture and sustenance provided by this place, are extremely important, the efficacy of its traditions unquestionable. This makes his presence in the Balkans all the more incongruous and inappropriate as the stanzas that follow make increasingly clear:

It's summer, nineteen-fifteen. I see the girl
My aunt was then, herding on the long acre.
Behind a low bush in the Dardanelles
You suck stones to make your dry mouth water.

It's nineteen-seventeen. She still herds cows
But a bit strafe puts the candles out in Ypres:

But despite his "Tommy's uniform" and his being nominally a British soldier, priorities prevail, exerting an almost gravitational pull, similar to that indicated in other poems by Heaney such as "Gravities" (DN, p. 43) and "Westering" (WO, pp. 79-80): "My soul is by the Boyne, cutting new meadows.../My country wears her confirmation dress." This realization reaches tragic proportions under the circumstances. The renewal and growth of his country, its independence and all that it stands for, occurs in his absence. The life he knew, close to the earth, one of simple pieties, now dissolves to political squabbling, resulting in a feeling of guilt at dislocation and displacement, reproach for not having remained and participated. This leads Heaney to conclude:

> In you, our dead enigma, all the strains
> Criss-cross in useless equilibrium
> And as the wind tunes through this vigilant bronze
> I hear again the sure confusing drum
>
> You followed from Boyne water to the Balkans
> But miss the twilit note your flute should sound.
> You were not keyed or pitched like these true-blue ones
> Though all of you consort now underground.

Heaney's observations here are crucial to an understanding both of Ledwidge's and his own predicament. In Ledwidge's case, all the strains, all the aspects of Irish culture and its antagonistic colonial overlay are in "a useless equilibrium". This is, as it were, the nadir of the Irish experience, the totally negative outcome of what Conor Cruise O'Brien has called the "common culture of ancient antagonism".[2] It draws attention to the potentially debilitating nature of pluralism and asserts the need to go back and establish native Irish traditions, both for one's own good and the good of the community. For Ledwidge no dynamic synthesis was possible: he found only a clash of identities, a cultural collision. Heaney appears to suggest that the poet should relate to his original environment, to his society and its history, all of which exist in a close relationship to one another and to him. It is in these surroundings that his consciousness has evolved, it is they that offer him a definition of his true identity, a knowledge which Heaney sees as fundamental and indispensable to the individual.

If this is also sound advice from Heaney to himself (the poem marks pitfalls from which he himself is not exempt) it is not without precedent. William Carlos Willians says of local culture and the need for composite and continuous identity:

> The burning need of a culture is not a choice to be made or not made, voluntarily, any more than it can be satisfied by loans. It has to be where it arises, or everything related to life

> there ceases. It isn't a thing: it's an act. If it stands still, it is dead. It is the realization of the qualities of a place in relation to the life which occupies it; embracing everything involved, climate, geographic position, relative size, history, other cultures--as well as the character of its sands, flowers, minerals and the condition of knowledge within its borders. It is the act of lifting those things into an ordered and utilized whole which is culture. It isn't something left over afterward. That is the record only. The act is the thing. It can't be escaped or avoided if life is to go on. It is in the fullest sense that which is fit.[3]

Straightforward as this directive is, its application is Ireland, particularly in Ulster, is fraught with additional difficulties. These mainly concern the "other culture", that of the English colonists whose individuality and integrity cannot be denied and yet whose incorporation is no easy matter. In order to achieve a compatibility which avoids any stagnant isolationism, reconciliation must begin in restoration. The writer living in this enervating cultural situation is obliged to construct a working mythology preferably both personal and public, which he can live off and which is comprehensive and flexible enough to accommodate all parties, against all the odds.

Heaney's autobiographical sketches of his childhood in Mossbawn and his academic life in Belfast outline experiences similar to those of Ledwidge, although his approach to them offers a useful correlative. Heaney comes to terms with his surroundings, developing a sense of what they give and what they demand, of their importance in the growth of his own consciousness, and of the degree of reciprocity existing in his relationship with them. "Mossbawn" (SP, pp. 17-27) and "Belfast" (SP, pp. 28-40) are full of references to places, each attributed the initiation of some emotional response. At first, these responses are simple, uncomplicated. Lost in the pea-drills behind his house, he finds himself in a womb-like ambience, comforting and reassuring. He remembers "a green web, a caul of veined

light, a tangle of rods and pods, stalks and tendrils, full of assuaging earth and leaf smell, a sunlit lair" (SP, p. 17). Then

> The world grew. Mossbawn, the first place, widened. There was what we called the Sandy Loaming, a sanded pathway between old hedges leading in off the road, first among fields and then through a small bog, to a remote farmhouse. It was a silky fragrant world there, and for the first few hundred yards you were safe enough. Behind the broom in the rich grass, cattle munched reassuringly... But, gradually, those lush and definite fields gave way to scraggy marshland...The ferns thickened above you. Scuffles in old leaves made you nervous and you dared yourself always to pass the badger's set...Around that badger's hole, there hung a field of dangerous force. This was the realm of bogeys...we talked about mankeepers and mosscheepers, creatures uncatalogued by any naturalist, but none the less real for that. What was a mosscheeper, anyway, if not the soft, malicious sound that word itself made, a siren of collapsing sibilants coaxing you out towards bog pools lidded with innocent grass, quicksands and quagmires? (SP, p. 18)

While these experiences contribute to the initial growth of the child's awareness of the world and of himself (are notices also in the last line, the casual allusion to the mysterious dimensions of sound which constitute a kind of poetic initiation) his responses gradually acquire a superstructure of inherited ideas. As well as being endowed with particular, personal associations, each place assumes a more concrete significance. Intuitive responses to numinous elements in the landscape are complicated by political and religious considerations. His emotional reactions and rejections tend to be subjected to a received pattern. Typically, locations are inclined to define character in terms of political and religious persuasion. The result is to instigate a complex of personal and communal mythologies that will eventually shape the poetic self.

Describing Lough Beg, hearsay and local gossip are replaced by a more historical sense and the landscape begins to mingle personal response with historical accretion. Spontaneous reaction (although still maintained in

instinctive piety towards the place) tends to coalesce with a learned, impersonal one. He observes the stratifications of history, speculates on past lives and grants the area a religious significance before which a combination of humility and fear seem appropriate:

> Beyond the moss spread the narrow reaches of Lough Beg, and in the centre of Lough Beg lay Church Island, a spire rising out of its yew trees, a local mecca. St. Patrick, they said, had fasted and prayed there fifteen hundred years before ...[the] yews fetched me away to Agincourt and Crecy, where the English archers' bows, I knew, were made of yew also...but even so, to have cut a bough from that silent compound on Church Island would have been a violation too treacherous to contemplate (SP, p. 19).

As the sketches develop, they provide us with a substantial account of the growth of Heaney's own ideology, its mixture of territorial pieties and concern for historical development. Tensions and pressures become evident: between the native and the English influences, between the world of the subculture and the world of the official culture:

> If Lough Beg marked one limit of the imagination's nesting ground, Slieve Gallon marked another...This side of the country was the peopled, communal side...[but] if this was the country of community, it was also the realm of division...the lines of sectarian antagonism and affiliation followed the boundaries of the land. In the names of its fields and townlands, in their mixture of Scots and Irish and English etymologies, this side of the country was redolent of the histories of its owners (SP, pp. 19-20).

The etymology of Mossbawn itself reiterates this:

> Our farm was called Mossbawn. Moss, a Scots word probably carried to Ulster by the Planters, and bawn, the name the English colonists gave to their fortified farmhouses. Yet in spite of this Ordnance Survey spelling, we pronounced it Moss bann and ban is the Gaelic word for white. So might not the thing mean the white moss, the moss of bog cotton? In the syllables of my home I see a metaphor for the split culture of Ulster (SP, p. 35).

Furthermore, Heaney draws our attention to the fact that

> Mossbawn lies between the villages of Castledawson and Toome. I was symbolically placed between the marks of English influence and the lure of the native experience. Between 'the demesne' and 'the bog'. The demesne was Moyola Park, an estate

> now occupied by Lord Moyola, formerly Major James Chichester-Clark, ex-Unionist Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. The bog was a wide low apron of swamp on the west bank of the River Bann, where hoards of flints and fishbones have been found, reminding me that the Bann valley is one of the oldest inhabited areas in the country...Mossbawn was bordered by the townlands of Broagh and Anahorish, townlands that are forgotten Gaelic music in the throat, bruach and anach fhior uisce, the riverbank and the place of clear water. The names lead past the literary mists of the celtic twilight into that civilization whole demise was effected by soldiers and administrators like Spenser and Davies, whose lifeline was bitten through when the squared-off walls of bawn and demesne dropped on the country like a man-trap (SP, pp. 35-36).

These sketches allow us to observe the matter of cultural, historical, and political divisions in Ulster and the intricate and various dilemmas that frame the inhabitants' perspectives and outlook. In spite of any unpleasantness Heaney insists on the priority this place should assume in his work: he inhabits it, it inhabits him. Its problems are his concerns. Tensions, latent and implicit, in Ulster figure prominently in his poetry both as subject matter in an objective sense and as a potential source of material for self-definition, both his and the community's identity existing in close proximity.

For Heaney, as a poet, living in Ulster poses particular literary problems. His initial encounters with literature were decidedly unsatisfactory: "the literary language, the civilized utterance from the classic canon of English poetry, was a kind of force-feeding. It did not delight us by reflecting our experience; it did not re-echo our own speech in formal and surprising arrangements" (SP, p. 26). He recalls "the solemn incomprehensibility of Byron and Keats" (SP, p. 27) and "the imperial realms of Biggles or the baloney of the William stories" (SP, p. 23). In contrast to these, he sets a more local, and of course, more relevant and revealing literature: Irish patriotic ballads (SP, p. 27), "scurrilous and sectarian" chants (SP, p. 25) and a tentative leaning towards Irish myths and legends

(SP, p. 23). Ultimately, these early but significant "cultural debilitations" were overcome on reading James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Patrick Kavanagh's "The Great Hunger" (SP, p. 23). These satisfied both his awe for "the dimensions of sound" (SP, p. 26) and described aspects of his own existence in terms he was familiar with. As a consequence, they appear to have set something of a precedent for his own work.

Bearing these aspects of Heaney's background in mind, his comments on other Ulster poets take on some relevance when considering his own poetry. Of MacNeice, Rodgers, and Hewitt he says: "All three were born to a sense of 'two nations' and part of their imaginative effort was a solving of their feelings towards Ireland, a new answer to the question that Macmorris asked Fluellen in the Globe Theatre almost four hundred years ago: 'What is my nation?'" (SP, p. 32). Heaney himself shares this interest. He lives "in a region where the culture and language are at variance with standard English utterance and attitudes" (SP, p. 196) and admits: "I speak and write in English, but do not altogether share the preoccupations and perspectives of an Englishman. I teach English literature, I publish in London but the English tradition is not ultimately home. I live off another hump as well" (SP, p. 34). Consequently, he feels that "the social and political exacerbations of [his] place should disrupt the decorums of literature" (SP, p. 29). In this way the Irish writer can evolve a native mode in which to assert individual identity: to incorporate Irish intonation and irony. Reviewing the poetry of Paul Muldoon he remarks: "It is as if the imagination is fathered by the local subculture on the mothering literate culture of the schools" (SP, p. 212). It is a matter of getting the feel of the country and of the self into language, words making contact with the territory they describe: language at a distance distorts and corrodes, in

spite of any superficial aesthetic appeal it may possess, as Heaney's criticism of Spenser's A View of the Present State of Ireland indicates (SP, pp. 34-35).

Because a good deal of Heaney's writing handles themes of general interest to the community (his use of history, anthropology, and archaeology, although highly personalized, makes his poetry relatively accessible to most Irish readers) it becomes, for lack of a better word, "public". It goes without saying that personal integrity and public demand can prove to be a hazardous combination: the skills and responsibilities of public statement are manifold and difficult to adapt to without resorting to partisan rhetoric. In Ulster it appears that not only do the people want to be spoken to, they also know exactly what they would like to hear. Derek Mahon finds them

> Demanding that I inhabit,
> Like them, a world of
> Sirens, bin-lids
> And bricked-up windows--
>
> Not to release them
> From the ancient curse
> But to die their creature and be thankful.[4]

John Montague gives us a good indication to the depth of sentiment involved, the intransigence of the participants, and the extent and persistence of the enmity between the two cultures in Ulster:

> This bitterness
> I inherit from my father, the
> Swarm of blood
> To the brain, the vomit surge
> Of race hatred,
> The victim seeing the oppressor,
> Bold Jacobean
> Planter, or gadget laden marine,
> Who has scattered
> His household gods, used
> His people
> As servants, flushed his women
> Like game.[5]

This vehemence, vicious and visceral, makes Heaney's quest all the more pressing, all the more urgent. If the poet is intrinsically involved with the historical process (and it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between "poetry as revelation of the self to the self" and poetry as "restoration of the culture to itself" (SP, p. 41) in Heaney's case) then just as it changes him, presumably he can change it, or, at least, clarify it, in his attempt to attain what Yeats called "unity of being" and "unity of culture".

As the prospect broadens, the onus on the poet increases and both goals and strategies must be articulated. The starting point for Heaney can be found in his lecture "Englands of the Mind". Of Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill and Philip Larkin he says:

> [they] are now possessed of that defensive love of their territory which was once shared only by those poets whom we might call colonial--Yeats, MacDairmid, Carlos Williams. They are aware of the literary and historical past. Their very terrain is becoming consciously precious. A desire to preserve indigenous traditions, to keep open the imagination's supply lines to the past, to receive from the stations of Anglo-Saxon confirmations of ancestry, to perceive in the rituals of show Saturdays and race-meetings and seaside outings, of church-going and marriage at Whitsun, and in the necessities that crave expression after the ritual of church-going has passed away, to perceive in these a continuity of communal ways, and a confirmation of an identity which is threatened (SP, p. 151).

This programme is closely aligned with his own. His concern with the preservation of "indigenous traditions", with the support provided by "ancestry" and with locating "the necessities that crave expression" is omnipresent. The formulation of a distinct and distinguishing identity for himself and his community provides a basis for his exploration of life in Ulster and ensures that he will not succumb to "a useless equilibrium" as Ledwidge did. Instead, he instigates a synthesis within which the "strains" evident in his existence become positive and productive rather than

antagonistic and incapacitating.

And, surely, what he admires in Yeats is something to which he aspires to himself: "as a young poet, he sought a badge of identity for his own culture, something that would mark it off from the rest of the English speaking world...It was a conscious counter-culture act" (SP, p. 101). This could result in "a successful awakening of the people's imagination [which] would allow them to repossess their territory with a new conviction" (SP, p. 104). Patrick Kavanagh, although writing in a completely opposing vein to Yeats, displacing myth and legend in favour of the harsh actualities of Monaghan farm life, was doing much the same thing. In Heaney's opinion, "if 'The Great Hunger' did not exist, a greater hunger would, the hunger of a culture for its own image and expression" (SP, p. 126).

These then are the priorities for Heaney. A culture not only in danger of diminishing, but also of disappearing needs to be provided with a matrix within which its experience can be intelligible to it, and which can subsequently function as a model for further development. Heaney attempts to try and organize myth and history into some comprehensive and coherent system which both he and the people of Ulster can work from. He attempts to define and substantiate common cultural continuities that will "place" both him and them, an act of rediscovery that is an act of salvation. Having reconciled both himself and the community with past and present he will have achieved his aim. As he says himself:

> If you like, I began as a poet when my roots were crossed with my reading. I think of the personal and Irish pieties as vowels, and the literary awareness nourished on consonants. My hope is that my poems will be vocables adequate to my whole experience (SP, p. 37).

And, in a larger context, again applying his assessment of Yeats to his own enterprise:

> It is easy to admire this young Yeats: his artistic ambitions, his national fervour, his great desire to attach himself to a tradition and corpus of belief that was communal. For all the activity and push of the enterprise, the aim of the poet and the poetry is finally to be of service, to ply the effort of the individual work into the larger work of the community as a whole (SP, p. 106).

In the chapters that follow I intend to plot the progress of Heaney's poetry as he discovers his relationship to "his own voice, his own place, his literary heritage and his contemporary world" (SP, p. 13): as he constructs an anatomy of the culture to which he belongs, revealing an increasing correlation between "poetry as divination, poetry as revelation of the self to the self, as restoration of the culture to itself" (SP, p. 41). The nature of this quest is perhaps most succinctly characterized in the following lines from the second of the "Glanmore Sonnets" which seem to me to apply to his work in general:

> Then I landed in the hedge-school of Glanmore
> And from the backs of ditches hoped to raise
> A voice caught back off slug-horn and slow chanter
> That might continue, hold, dispel, appease (FW, p. 34).

In the final chapter, attention will be given to the assessment and revaluation of his career up to, and including, North that is one of Heaney's major concerns in the poetry of Field Work.

## CHAPTER ONE

Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark are largely evocations and celebrations of simple, ascetic, rural lifestyles. Taken together, these collections form a unity in their integration of thoughts and memories, personal, familial, and communal into a vision of a whole area (about ten miles square) which tentatively suggests a microcosm of human activity in general. This reaches its maximum articulation in the poems that comprise "A Lough Neagh Sequence" (DD, pp. 38-45) which successfully interweave the characters, customs, rituals, and superstitions of this particular district.

The lives outlined in these early poems are all in contact with cultivation and growth, the rhythms and cycles of this year's round. In the responses of the inhabitants to these conditions Heaney observes the perseverance of some crucial activities. "Churning Day" (DN, pp. 21-22) conveys a kind of contentment that eludes many of the other poems in Death of a Naturalist, and offers an interesting counterpoint to them. The actual description of the butter making is full of imitative techniques that recreate the rhythm and the sensuous texture of the original experience, relying heavily on the pace and the taste generated by the interplay of vowels and consonants:

> A thick crust, coarse-grained as limestone rough-cast
> hardened gradually on top of the four crocks
> that stood, large pottery bombs, in the small pantry...
>
> Their short stroke quickened, suddenly
> a yellow curd was weighting the churned up white,
> heavy and rich, coagulated sunlight
> that they fished, dripping, in a wide-tin strainer,
> heaped up like gilded gravel in the bowl.

Yet the theme of the poem, while it incorporates these sense impressions, also transcends them. The close description of the work, intensified, lends a ritual intensity to it. The ceremony that surrounds the fermentation and purification of the buttermilk is part of an almost mystical process for the child observing it. It is as if the butter makers are alchemists, extracting an essence, effecting the miraculous transformation from "flabby milk" to "gold flecks" and "gilded gravel". Their work ultimately realizes the full potential of the natural resource they began with. Each stage in the proceedings is accompanied by an analogous mental and spiritual progression towards the "gravid ease" with which they moved around the house after churning day.

One senses that in the poem "Churning Day" Heaney is alluding to the conviction that both his own and his family's cultivation is somehow reliant upon and derived from their cultivation of the land and its produce. It seems that the relationship that develops between man and this rural environment stimulates human potential, not only in the physicality of the work, but in its moral and philosophical aspects too. One can even see the evolution of a kind of normative theology in some of the early poems: a religion founded on "fear and homage to the famine god" (DN, p. 31), a growing awareness of larger, unmanageable forces that encourage piety and humility (ramified in his essentially conservative morality and perhaps in his frequently passive response to events). In his lecture "Yeats as an Example", Heaney quotes Yeats: "Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill?" (SP, p. 105): both these collections test the validity of this proposition, locating it within particular circumstances.

Heaney is quick to acknowledge that a rural existence is far from

ideal, fraught with hardship and deprivation. To a certain extent, he follows the themes and patterns laid down in the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh. He is disinclined to mystify economic and social realities and is reluctant and resolved not to oversimplify the implications of his early years spent on a County Derry farm. Death and decay are balanced against annual renewal and feelings of fear and revulsion at the random and severe forces that have shaped him vie with perceptions of beauty. From childhood fears, through adolescent confusion to adult choice, the strains of this type of life are compounded in the dramatic scenarios and encounters that highlight moments when confrontation becomes inevitable and unavoidable. A selection of crisis points, particularly in Death of a Naturalist, concern themselves with a period of transition, as Heaney moves from "innocence" to "experience", exposing the development of his consciousness, allowing us to participate in its formulation. And one can't help noticing how much anxiety accompanies these experiences, either overt or incipient. There is a definite dark side to his existence, defying rational analysis, agitating and intruding, unsettling him. In a poem like "Death of a Naturalist" (DN, pp. 15-16) it is associated with the onset of the child's awareness of sexuality. Overwhelming feelings of anguish and guilt which threaten to engulf him are conveyed in a mixture of sounds and images with militaristic, scatalogical and sexual overtones which the poem can barely contain:

> Then one hot day when fields were rank
> With cowdung in the grass the angry frogs
> Invaded the flax-dam; I ducked through hedges
> To a coarse croaking that I had not heard
> Before. The air was thick with a bass chorus.
> Right down the dam gross-bellied frogs were cocked
> On sods: their loose necks pulsed like sails. Some hopped:
> The slap and plop were obscene threats. Some sat
> Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting.
> I sickened, turned, and ran. The great slime kings
> Were gathered there for vengeance and I knew
> That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it.

In a poem like "The Barn" (DN, p. 17), however, the cause of this uneasiness is not so explicit, although its effects are, as the nightmare shows:

> And into nights when bats were on the wing
> Over the rafters of sleep, where bright eyes stared
> From piles of grain in corners, fierce, unblinking.
>
> The dark gulfed like a roof-space. I was chaff
> To be pecked up when birds shot through the air-slits.
> I lay face-down to shun the fear above.
> The two-lugged sacks moved in like great blind rats.

This fear he experiences, also alluded to in "An Advancement of Learning" (DN, pp. 18-19) and "The Early Purges" (DN, p. 23) where it is again accompanied by a "sickening" feeling, is not peculiar to him. The protagonists in "Storm on the Island" (DN, p. 51) admit that "it is a huge nothing that [they] fear", while the labourers in "At a Potato Digging" (DN, pp. 31-33) have known "... Centuries/Of fear and homage to the famine god". So these autobiographical poems appear to mark his introduction to some communal emotion that recognizes a darkness within and without. This finds a symbol in the rat whose recurring appearances in his subsequent poems are a curt reminder of elements beyond his control, about which he is uncertain, and which are inevitably a cause for alarm. One is inclined to feel that these emotions lure Heaney, maybe morbidly, who seems to find them simultaneously repulsive and compulsive, apparently disruptive, but, in fact, generating a tension on which a lot of the poems thrive. A proliferation of images to do with war accentuates a sometimes violent and antagonist ambience, as is the case in "Dawn Shoot" (DN, p. 29), "Trout" (DN, p. 39) and "Cow in Calf" (DN, p. 38). This lingering, protean malevolence is an integral part of country life as depicted in Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark but perhaps finds more easily identifiable forms when it appears to pass effortlessly into a larger social context. In "Summer 1969" (N, pp. 69-70) Heaney uses a telling image to describe the Spanish military and his response to them:

> We talked our way home over starlit plains
> Where patent leather of the Guardia Civil
> Gleamed like fish-bellies in flax-poisoned waters.

Read in conjunction with "Death of a Naturalist" (DN, pp. 15-16) this indicates just how pervasive Heaney believes this strain to be. A good deal of his work written between these two poems is characterized by an attempt to come to terms with this fear, not to exclude it but to know it, to convert it into a positive rather than a negative force. Just as the rites and rituals of the country people seek to acknowledge and accommodate it, so does much of his poetry. "An Advancement of Learning" (DN, pp. 18-19) exposes and exorcises this fear, revealing and relieving it. His aesthetic response to the rat diminishes his initial panic. The resources of poetic language and imagery offer a perspective which restores the experience in a context in which, in a spirit of comic self-depreciation, Heaney grudgingly recognizes the beauty of the rat: "...snubbed rodent,/...back bunched and glistening,/Ears plastered down on his knobbed skull,/...The tapered tail that followed him,/The raindrop eye, the old snout:/ ...This terror, cold, wet-furred, small-clawed,/Retreated up a pipe for sewage." "Turkeys Observed" (DN, p. 37) does much the same thing, using language that is perilously close to self-parody, as it deals, somewhat irreverently, with the theme of death:

> The red sides of beef retain
> Some of the smelly majesty of living:
> A half-cow slung from a hood maintains
> That blood and flesh are not ignored.
>
> But a turkey cowers in death.
> Pull his neck, pluck him, and look--
> He is just another poor forked thing,
> A skin bag plumped with inky putty.

The language of the poetry in Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark is often rough and rhetorical, sensuous, frequently onomatapoeic and gives the impression of a "natural world [which] must be accepted for what it is--heavy, palpable in its irrefutable bulk, in its almost intractable

forms".[1] It has a powerful physical presence, the pressure and tightness of one word against another weighty on the lips and tongue, conveying a sense of immediacy and of an almost hedonistic pleasure in the use of language. The hunk and flavour of country life are omnipresent as Heaney luxuriates in the rituals of land and language, the poems carrying with them the feel and quality of the surfaces and textures they describe. As Terence Brown observes, Heaney "paints in thick oils".[2] Yet these dense dimensions are neither turgid nor sluggish. Heaney relies a lot on verbs and adverbs of process and motion to signify a world animate and productive, as a reading of poems such as "Churning Day" (DN, pp. 21-22) makes clear. Or, in a poem like "Digging" (DN, pp. 13-14), the rhythm and the feel of the action is emphasized by counterpointing the versification with all iteration and assonance as Heaney attempts to personalize the traditional form.

Although the implication here is that much of the poetry is simply descriptive, mimetic (one cannot deny his insistence on precision and exactitude in recording particular scenes, the accuracy to which he aspires) the immediate life of sensations is continually being recreated, though not excluded, by some larger more comprehensive system. Part of the achievement of these collections is due to his ability to describe the feeling of an original and unique experience, while being able to see it as possessing greater significance in the world of "ideas". He sees things in an unreflective light, and then, gradually, through an accumulation of words, whose force lies in their suggesting presences outside the immediate realm of the poem, links them with larger concepts. This shift from the literal to the figurative mode, without compromising either on the way, is in evidence in a poem like "Blackberry Picking" (DN, p. 20):

> Late August, given heavy rain and sun
> For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.
> At first, just one, glossy purple clot
> Among others, red, green, hard as a knot.
> You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet
> Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it
> Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for
> Picking.

As well as being erotic, intoxicating, sacremental, this experience almost intimates the Fall, which is entirely appropriate when related to the poem's theme of transience and decay. Even the thick-tongued, mucky metaphysics of "Personal Helicon" (DN, p. 57) are initially deceptive, since the poem goes on to establish a relatively clear definition of Heaney's poetics. Other poems such as "Digging" (DN, pp. 13-14) and "Bogland" (DD, pp. 55-56) give rise to a knowledge of processes that are potential analogues for the act and aims of writing poetry itself. Incidents in his rural existence provide both material and a kind of metaphoric paradigm for his own creative activities since both deal with growth and production of a necessary and sustaining nature: he looks to other craftsmen to verify this and to align himself with a particular, already established, section of the community.

However, underlying many of these poems, and fundamental to an understanding of these two collections, is the feeling that we are witnessing the passing away of a worthwhile lifestyle. While the poems are often celebrations, they are also elegies, dealing not only with personal loss but with communal loss as well. Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark present a series of intrusions that threaten to impede and displace this way of life. Cars, combine harvesters, chemicals and mechanical diggers are in danger of upsetting the equilibrium established between the land and the people who live on it, one that has evolved over a considerable period of time, and each mention of these is tinged with anger and regret. These factors and the interests they represent have the potential to exile the

people from their natural way of life, dismissing all important contact, uprooting them. What is interesting in Heaney's case is that while he bemoans this fact, strictly speaking, he too, is part of this exodus off the land. And, ironically, his poetic vocation and literary consciousness are potentially liable to be as much a barrier as a link in his relationship with the community. As a result, a lot of effort in these two collections goes into establishing his exact status in the community, trying to discover the kind of function he and his poetry should fulfill. His poetic repossession of his home ground is born out of a genuine affection for it, but also out of a personal desire to become and remain a part of it, something he makes clear in "Digging" (DN, pp. 13-14), which attempts to reconcile the difference between calling a spade a spade and calling a pen a spade. Even the language he uses indicates his sense of separation from the community, whose lifestyle is, and always has been, predominantly physical. The heavy reliance on onomatapoeic phraseology signifies a desire for close involvement with his subject matter (curbing the "poetic" tendency to see things philosophically or as abstractions, accentuating the primacy of sensuous perception in country life--this is paralleled in the extent to which the emotions in several of these poems derive more from earthy common sense or intuition than from literary "wit", another attempt at the fidelity to this lifestyle that will ensure his inclusion in the community). Yet, in the literary sense, these are age-old devices, rhetorical, part of the trickery of the art. The result is, that while Heaney recognizes and reduces the distance between himself and his subject matter in this way, we are also made more aware of this distance in his sometimes self-conscious overuse of these techniques. Even as recent a poem as "Casualty" (FW, pp. 21-24) provides an example of this feeling of distance. Of the fisherman, who is

the subject of the elegy, Heaney says simply: "Incomprehensible/To him, my other life [as a poet]." It must be said, however, that Heaney does evolve a dialect of compromise, reducing the effect of the paradoxes implied in his position as poet in a declining rural society.

Rightly, Heaney insists on making poetry "one of the ordinary rituals of life" (SP, p. 27). In Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark he writes poems about country life: the two can become interdependent, of equal importance, each implicated in the fabric of the other. The poems function as agents of restoration and continuity, retaining and preserving the more important aspects of this existence, acknowledging and celebrating its roots, affirming its validity. We witness Heaney gradually reconcile himself with and integrate himself into the community, substantiating the importance of his poetry to it. As he reveals to the community its identity, we find him playing far more than just a supportive role. His speculations become a handbook of sorts, utilitarian and enlightening.

Firstly, the lineage and filial duty stated in "Digging" (DN, p. 13):

> By God, the old man could handle a spade.
> Just like his old man.
>
> My grandfather cut more turf in a day
> Than any other man on Toner's bog.
> Once I carried him milk in a bottle
> Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
> To drink it, then fell to right away
> Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
> Over his shoulder, going down and down
> For the good turf. Digging.

He establishes a family history associated with skill, perseverance, and renown. He pictures himself as a child, a menial, an observer half apprehending the value of the scene he is witnessing, appreciative and impressed. The digger in the poem is silent (as are several of the other characters in these poems, limiting their communication to a "whoop" or a

"grunt", drawing attention to the fact that they express themselves in mediums different from Heaney's). He is self-absorbed, engrossed in his task, worked by the rhythm he initiates, quiet but insistent. And Heaney is drawn into it himself. The rhythm of the activity entices and entrances, stimulates his earthy meditations. "Digging": the verb recurs in the poem, draws attention to itself, pervades the atmosphere, seeks significance. The close, detailed description of his father at work creates an aura of ritual, an essential activity in an essential element, noble and indispensable. The fruits of his labour are palpable and enduring:

> He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
> To scatter new potatoes that we picked
> Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

Heaney takes pleasure in recalling the sensuous nature of the enterprise, in a language that will become an integral feature of his poetry, attentive to the physical aspects of his experiences:

> 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.

Then, with something of the air of a valediction:

> But I've no spade to follow men like them.

However, the poem's movement is from uncertainty to certainty, from unease to resolution, finding reassurance in its own progression: it works up a rhythm that convinces, gives conviction and direction, culminating in the quiet resolve:

> Between my finger and my thumb
> The squat pen rests.
> I'll dig with it.

Digging has provided him with a model for his own aims and the kind of techniques involved (indeed, if the stress in the last line is allowed to fall on "it", the question of the value of "digging" does not even arise: how to do

it is the real problem, its actual worth being taken for granted). The pen/spade analogy offers him an awareness of his own poetic process and practice: "digging" down and down into the self, towards "the living roots" that proffer nourishment and sustenance, towards the "good turf", and all this in a clean, precise and exact fashion. A valediction that is a homecoming.

"Follower" (DN, pp. 24-25) replaces digging with ploughing, but again indicates displacement: "I wanted to grow up and plough,/...All I ever did was follow/In his broad shadow round the farm." It does, however, evoke the notion of a necessary cycle being completed by reversing the positions of its protagonists in the final stanza:

> I was a nuisance, tripping, falling,
> Yapping always. But today
> It is my father who keeps stumbling
> Behind me, and will not go away.

This appears to affirm Heaney's duties as a poet, an obligation both to fly the flag and carry the can.

Once more, contact with the land provides both subject matter and an image of technique for Heaney:

> ...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 seating team turned round
> And back into the land. His eye
> Narrowed and angled at the ground,
> Mapping the furrow exactly.

One also notes, in this poem, the way in which the dedication and the commitment of his father are evinced: he is "An expert." Although he works in a dense element, Heaney seems to see him sailing through it ("sail", "furrow", the ground "rolling", the "dipping and rising" movements: all these call up a more fluid, watery art). So, the standards are set.

"Ancestral Photograph" (DN, pp. 26-27) shows this kind of lifestyle

coming to an end. No more fairs, no more of the elaborate street rituals that accompanied them. When they stopped there was "No room for dealers if the farmers shopped/Like housewives at an auction ring." Your [Heaney's father's] stick/Was parked behind the door and stands there still." Heaney finds himself "Closing this chapter in our chronicle", marking the "house's rise and fall". When he finishes the poem with "I take your uncle's portrait to the attic", one inevitably wonders what happens next. Heaney's affection for the old ways, the customs and rituals that have evolved from contact with the land is unquestionable. How to discover his position in relation to a family heritage that is not primarily literary, to justify his inclusion in it, to negate his sense of alienation and discontinuity, to be of use to a society which obviously prefers that its values be upheld either in fact or in fiction before they disappear--these are the questions that subsequently preoccupy him.

If "Digging" (DN, pp. 13-14) offers a starting point, "Personal Helicon" (DN, p. 57) consolidates it. Like "Digging" it continues this "hankering for the underground side of things" (SP, p. 21). It reiterates this downward motion towards the darker recesses of earth, the descent which is fundamental to Heaney's poetic. Through layers, through strata towards some resiliant and resistant core, through roots to the heart of the land. This has its equivalent in a Jungian conception of the self: this movement is towards archetypes buried in Heaney's consciousness, which relate both to his own inner life, and, by implication, extend to that of the community in general. These knowable, solid forms ("things founded clean on their own shapes,/Water and ground in their extremity" as they appear in "The Peninsula" (DD, p. 21) afford a resistance whereby he can come to know himself, and to know others, and can realize his connection with those who live around him,

those who share the same cultural foundation. Typically, we find him amidst lush flora and fauna, "the smells/Of waterweed fungus and dank moss". His fascination with wells, their "dark drop" and the kind of reflections of himself they offer him, the way they "gave back your own call/With a clean new music in it", leads him to conclude with a mixture of nostalgia and determination:

> Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime,
> To stare big-eyed Narcissus into some spring
> Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
> To see myself, to set the darkness echoing.

It might be appropriate at this stage to refer to Heaney's gloss on this "darkness":

> I think this notion of the dark centre, the blurred and irrational storehouse of insight and instincts, the hidden core of the self--this notion is the foundation of that viewpoint I might articulate for myself as a poet.[3]

In his poetry he appears to follow echoes and invitations, mesmerized by them, as his conscious self resonates with his unconscious self, that "hidden core" ("I rhyme/To see my/self"). That he values these "profound" intimations is attested to by his frequently provocative use of the word "real", as in phrases that describe poetry as "letting down a shaft into real life" (SP, p. 41).

"Personal Helicon" also accounts for some of the features that accompany these incursions. In one of the wells, "A white face hovered over the bottom". "A white face" implies that it is not immediately recognizable as his own, so great is the difference between these two "selves" (when they confront each other in North this becomes quite evident, and is the cause of much of the discord that prevails in that collection). "Hovering" introduces a spiritual perspective, a trance-like intensity, while "big-eyed Narcissus" neatly blends vanity with a compensatory innocence and receptiveness. As a whole, the poem

is marked by a sense of chance and mystery, an atmosphere with which Heaney seeks to make us familiar at this stage. For him it provides both a source and a subject for poetry.

"The Diviner" (DN, p. 36) puts these activities into a wider context. In this instance, it is helpful to turn to the Selected Prose for Heaney's observations on the poem's construction. He uses this occasion to draw the distinction between "craft" and "technique" in poetry, a distinction whose relevance to his quest becomes clear, signifying the kind of poetry he considers his to be, and the value of the role it can play:

> Craft is what you can learn from other verse. Craft is the skill of making. It wins competitions in the "Irish Times" or the "New Statesman". It can be deployed without reference to the feelings or the self. It knows how to keep up a capable verbal athletic display; it can be content to be...all voice and nothing else (SP, p. 47).

This "craft" is, however, prior and subservient to "technique" which

> ...involves not only a poet's way with words, his management of metre, rhythm and verbal texture; it involves also a definition of his stance towards life, a definition of how own reality. It involves the discovery of ways to go out of his normal cognitive bounds and raid the inarticulate: a dynamic alertness that mediates between the origins of feeling in memory and experience and the formal ploys that express these in a work of art. Technique entails the watermarking of your essential patterns of perception, voice and thought into the touch and texture of your lines; it is that whole creative effort of the mind's and body's resources to bring the meaning of experience within the jurisdiction of form...Technique is what allows that first stirring of the mind round a word or an image or a memory to grow towards articulation (SP, pp. 47-48).

Heaney concludes this analysis of his response to his own creativity:

> The crucial action is pre-verbal, to be able to allow the first alertness or come-higher, sensed in a blurred or incomplete way, to dilate and approach as a thought or a theme or a phrase. Robert Frost put it this way: 'a poem begins as a lump in the throat, a homesickness, a lovesickness. It finds the thought and the thought finds the words'. As far as I am concerned, technique is more vitally and sensitively connected with that first activity where the 'lump in the throat' finds 'the thought' finding 'the words'. That first emergence involves the divining, vatic, oracular function; the second the making function (SP, p. 49).

The final section here offers a bridge between the individual pursuit of "technique" depicted in "Personal Helicon" and its social application evidenced in "The Diviner" (DN, p. 36). The two are compounded in the figure of the water diviner

> who represents pure technique...You can't learn the craft of dowsing or divining--it is a gift for being in touch with what is there, hidden and real [sic], a gift for mediating between the latent resource and the community that wants it current and released. As Sir Philip Sidney notes in his Apologie for Poetry: 'Among the Romans a poet was valled Vates, which is as much as a Diviner...' (SP, pp. 47-48).

For Heaney then "the diviner resembles the poet in his function of making contact with what lies hidden, and in his ability to make palpable what was sensed or raised" (SP, p. 48). If Heaney identifies himself with the diviner in the poem, we notice how he has moved from the periphery of the community (as is the case in "Digging") to the centre of it, how his dependence diminishes as his status increases with the discovery of his "gift", of his "technique". Although this "gift" sets him off from the "expectant" "bystanders", both he and they rely on it. He can communicate vital information to them. And only he can do it. Indeed, one senses the poem modulating to a testimonial of poetic election. Most important of all, the poem links his personal quest with that of the community's, indicating shared concerns, relating personal ability to a kind of impersonal necessity.

Having tentatively estimated his role and status in his community, Heaney turns to its craftsmen (using craft in its ordinary sense rather than in the specialized one created by Heaney to explain the poetic process) and occupations for images that offer analogies for his own vocation, that will elucidate further the nature of his creativity. "The Forge" (DD, p. 19), relying on a hoard of rich sense impressions, ostensibly describes the work of a blacksmith. Yet, like Heaney, he too works in the symbolic "dark"

and sets it "echoing". His work is seen in both a magical and religious context: the anvil is "Horned as a unicorn" and is like "an altar". It is also seen as an aesthetic activity: "he expends himself in shape and music". He is magician, priest, sculptor, and composer. In fact, he becomes a kind of dramatic persona for the poet, for Heaney himself. So much so, that in viewing the work of the blacksmith, we find Heaney a viewer of his own poetic processes, looking into the "dark" of his imagination as it functions, as it generates the very poem itself, forging definitions, working against the anvil's positive resistance:

> Inside, the hammered anvil's short-pitched ring,
> The unpredictable fantail of sparks
> Or hiss when a new shoe toughens in water.
> The anvil must be somewhere in the centre,
> Horned as a unicorn, at one end square,
> Set there immoveable:

The poem's effect is increased here by the slight ambiguity introduced in the line: "The anvil must be somewhere in the centre." That it "must be somewhere in the centre" offers itself simultaneously as an actual speculative observation in the original scene, and as an absolute necessity within the poetics symbolically derived from it. This transition from an initially vague perception to an almost definite certainty about its poetic implication indicates the value such scenes have for Heaney.

The suggestion that both Heaney and the Blacksmith are involved in congruent activities, compelled and propelled by the same forces, is accentuated by the apparent ease with which the description of the work becomes an exact description of the making of the poem. The process of "shaping" is common to both, the same rhythms and sounds that go into the forging of horseshoes animate and pervade the poem. And, when Heaney says of the blacksmith: "he expends himself in shape and music", considering the Victorian connotations of "spending", the implicit sexual context suggested

by the (accurate) description of the anvil as "Horned as a unicorn", one feels that he views this activity (and, by implication, poetry) as an expression of natural, fecund forces: these operate at the most fundamental (physical) as well as sophistocated (spiritual) levels giving birth to and offering a knowledge of the "real" self.

The effort Heaney puts into getting these characters and their occupations "true", his accuracy in describing them, is a sign of how much he admires and is indebted to them. The poems convey, precisely, their worth and significance, as direct responses to an environment, born out of immediate contact with it, that subsequently realizes the real potential of both the craftsmen and their world. We are made to feel that they have attained some fruitful communion with it. Like the diviner and the blacksmith, the thatcher is a figure less in evidence these days. In "Thatcher" (DD, p. 20), we find the thatcher, something of a local legend ("Bespoke for weeks"), setting to work:

> It seemed he spent the morning warming up;
>
> Then fixed the ladder, laid out well honed blades
> And snipped at straw and sharpened ends of rods
> That bent in two, made a white-pronged staple
> For pinning down his world, handful by handful.
>
> Couchant for days on sods above the rafters
> He shaved and flushed the butts, stitched all together
> Into a sloped honeycomb, a stubble patch,
> And left them gazing at his Midas touch.

If "Midas touch" is slightly overdoing it (although the colour of the thatch itself goes some way towards legitimizing the phrase) there is no doubt that, given his achievement, the crowd are rightly left "gaping". The thatcher has not only provided an essential service to the community but also found a medium through which he can express ("expend") himself fully, "pinning down his world" (his "self"), a dual achievement to which I am sure Heaney himself

aspires. He does this in forms that are an organic extension of nature--the thatch is "a sloped honeycomb, a stubble patch". As a consequence, this places him within the natural order, having achieved an effective equilibrium between his own needs (and those of the community) and the materials and models which it offers him. A merging of "craft" (suggested by the intricacy of his skills) and "technique" (he "eyes" the old rigging, "pokes" at the eaves, estimating the extent of the undertaking intuitively) is completely fulfilling. As in "The Forge" (DD, p. 19), Heaney derives implications for his poetry from the work in hand. The composition of the poem is enacted in the making of the thatch (his use of narrative to describe the process of the craftsman's production rather than reverting to a simple appreciation of the end product facilitates this style of discourse on creativity). This provides him with an approach to materials and methodology, from which he can evolve a vocabulary, explicatory and appropriate, for his own activities: through an aesthetic of work he creates a working aesthetic for himself.

In poems like "The Diviner", "The Forge", and "Thatcher" we find Heaney apparently as voyeur, admiring and appreciative, quizzical, yet finding that these scenes engage and assure him at a basic level. Yet, what these poems are actually achieving is in the nature of an alleviation and a reconciliation. Characters in the poems, with whom he tacitly associates himself, become personae who dramatically enact the conflicts he feels at this stage in his poetic development. Extrinsically, the poems are concerned with his position in society, with establishing roles and techniques for himself: in this sense they are poems of estimation and aspiration. Intrinsically, they are poems of achievement. In retrospect, the organic relationship between the poems and their subject matter makes the two congruent and interchangeable activities. When Heaney describes the diviner,

the blacksmith, or the thatcher at work, the poems make it clear that, so similar are his and their activities, that they can be seen as alternative instances of the same, necessary, creativity. So that, what initially appear to be models for Heaney to follow are transformed, as the poems develop, into symbolic proofs of the feasibility of hiw own enterprise. Heaney, in a poem like "The Outlaw" (DD, pp. 16-17) may be an onlooker at the start of the "business-like conception" but by the time it is over, we realize that this is a simple rhetorical device designed to initiate a dialectic between Heaney the aspirant and Heaney the achiever (as "Kelly" and the "outlawed" bull), the latter consolidated in the success of the poem itself.

So, these poems find Heaney increasing in confidence, acquiring a sense of what it is to be a poet within his community and what the nature and function of his poetry should be.

"A Lough Neagh Sequence" (DD, pp. 38-45) is a relatively complete synthesis of the essential features of Heaney's poetry discussed so far. In it he fully incorporates personal idiosyncracy with local tradition in terms of his attitudes both to life and art. The sequence describes the lifecycle of the eels and the lifestyles of the fishermen who depend on them for a living. In the final poem, Heaney accounts for his own involvement with this environment. A blend of folklore, superstition and local custom (all conceived of as vital to, even determining his personal mythology) allows him an extensive view of the interaction between man and the darker forces of nature, which provide a suitable analogy for that between him and his own (poetic) nature. Just as the fate of the fishermen is bound up with the eels and the murky depths of the lough, guided by mysterious, irrational, and so undefinable forces, Heaney acknowledges his involvement with the same forces in both an objective and a subjective sense. Just as the fishermen

have, over time, developed an instinctive response to these forces, so, their seasonal rituals offer Heaney an example for his own poetic dealings with them. And the sequence is full of terms that are common in his poetry: the concern with dark depths, the instinctive and irresistible rhythms, mysterious origins--even the attitudes of the fishermen to their task shares characteristics similar to those Heaney adopts in dealing with his poetry.

The sequence (not, strictly speaking, a cycle) is full of images of circles that emphasize the harmony, completion and continuity of the lifecycle it describes, in an environment in which everything depends on and responds to everything else. Heaney describes the "orbit" of the eel (DD, p. 39): worms make "the globe a perfect fit" (DD, p. 40): "small hooks" are "coiled in the stern of the boat" whose "oars in their locks go round and round" while "The eel describes his arcs without a sound" (DD, p. 41): the seagulls "encompass" the worms before they sink into the sea (DD, p. 41): the wakes of the boats are "enwound" like the catch of eels (DD, p. 42): and for Heaney the eels constitute "his world's live girdle" (DD, p. 45).

The lifecycle of the eels (the poem "Beyond Sargasso" (DD, p. 39) describing the male eel and "The Return" (DD, p. 44) describing the female eel are complementary, adding to the content and to the structure of the sequence--perhaps paralleled in the alternate elongation and coiling of the eels) is determined by mysterious forces that assert a gravitational pull, bringing them year after year to their spawning grounds in the lough. "Beyond Sargasso" (DD, p. 39) follows the course of the eel "across the Atlantic" to its destination within the dark recesses of the land and lough, where he "buries/his arrival beyond/light and tidal water,/investing silt and sand/with a sleep root". The poem charts this journey until "Dark/ delivers him hungering/down each undulation". "The Return" (DD, p. 44)

tracks the female eel "through the weltering dark./Where she's lost once she lays/ten thousand feet down in her origins."

In both these poems the movement of the eels is imitated in the very shape of the poems themselves as they descend the page in pursuit of their subjects. The symbolic implications of this "descent", already hinted at in "Personal Helicon" (DN, p. 57), are important in Heaney's poetry. Like the eels, he too responds to this "insinuating pull" (DD, p. 39) exerted by the "dark". In these two poems he appears to indicate that each stage in this descent is marked by changing notions of identity until fulfilment is attained and a stable state established. In "Beyond Sargasso" (DD, p. 39) the eel is "A gland agitating/mud two hundred miles in-/land, a scale of water/on water", "a muscled icicle/that melts itself longer/and fatter" and "a sleek root". In "The Return" (DD, p. 44) the female eel is "silent, wakeless,/a wisp, a wick that is/its own taper and light". Each of these descriptions helps create a complex and inclusive identity for the eels. But these imaginative speculations that accompany the eels' development also formulate, by implication, a view of the poetic imagination as continually modifying conceptions of identity as it moves towards the "dark centre" of the self.

"Up The Shore" (DD, p. 38) examines the involvement of the fishermen with the eels. At first, their attitude appears stubborn, resolutely fatalistic. This is stressed by the repetition of the opening line at the end of the poem, a structural equivalent of the "cycle" theme of the sequence, that creates an almost parenthetical effect, reducing the intervening lines to a kind of irrelevancy, which, given the fishermen's response, is peculiarly appropriate. The initial contrast between their existence and the purely economic interests of those who work at Toomebridge

is effective, drawing attention to the difference between a life of "distance" and a life of "contact":

> At Toomebridge where [the lough] sluices towards the sea
> They've set new gates and tanks against the flow.
> From time to time they break the eels' journey
> And life five hundred stone in one go.

Casual and complete control, like clockwork. But the mechanical rhymes and rhythms are ironic. Clearly, Heaney associates himself with the fishermen "up in the shore in Antrim and Tyrone" where

> There is a sense of fair play in the game.
> The fishermen confront them one by one
> And sail miles out, and never learn to swim.
>
> 'We'll be the quicker going down', they say--
> And when you argue there are no storms here,
> That one hour floating's sure to land them safely--
> 'The lough will claim a victim every year.'

The fishermen are prepared to allow the "dark" forces that direct the eels' lifecycle to impose on and determine their own, recognizing that they should maintain contact with them. Their fatalism is unquestioning: the sacrificial "victim" is offered up, apparently without resistance, as a sign that they respect powers stronger and more influential than their own (now, the piety, the passivity, and the fearfulness that pervade the poems in Death of a Naturalist seem to be an inevitable consequence of these kinds of beliefs). Heaney observes that "The fishers, who don't know and never try,/Pursue the work in hand as destiny" (DD, p. 41). They respond instinctively to the irrational, their work initiated by "seasonal" rhythms (DD, p. 43). They "rustle" (DD, p. 40), "hunt" (DD, p. 41), and "stalk" (DD, p. 42) their prey in time honoured fashion, with an "indifferent skill" (DD, p. 41) that is gradually becoming the hallmark of Heaney's "craftsmen".

The final poem in the sequence, "Vision" (DD, p. 45), tells the story of Heaney's involvement with the eels, beginning in childhood with the threat

that

> Unless his hair was fine-combed
> The lice, they said, would gang up
> Into a mealy rope
> And drag him, small, dirty, doomed
>
> Down to the water.

"Years later" this threat all but materializes as "eels/Moved through the grass like hatched fears/Towards the water." The images of the eels as "a jellied road", as "sinewed slime", denote his barely suppressed horror in their presence. But the sequence itself indicates that emotional recoil is replaced by imaginative participation (as is the case in "An Advancement of Learning" (DN, pp. 18-19), which also exploits the potential proximity of beauty to fear within a certain mode of perception).

Heaney has said that "the landscape, for [him], is image, and it's almost an element to work with as much as it is an object of admiration or description."[4] "A Lough Neagh Sequence" confirms this both in its consideration of the attitudes to existence shared by Heaney and the fishermen and the opportunities the different scenarios offer him for exploitation of his own poetic consciousness.

I would now like to discuss two particular groups of poems from Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark that introduce historical and mythical perspectives in order to provide a larger context for Heaney's examination of his locale and his relation to it. These indicate an increasing awareness of the way in which the past is involved in the present and grant Heaney a more complicated consideration of his own and his community's activities in terms of their common inheritance. This extension of parameters encourages Heaney to formulate origins for contemporary attitudes whose genesis becomes important to him as the stage most likely to provide him with some insight into their significance.

Just how valuable these investigations can be is shown in a poem like "Requiem for the Croppies" (DD, p. 24). Heaney's gloss on this poem shows how an appreciation of the continuity of Irish history can produce poetry that operates in an almost prophetic mode. As the country's destiny becomes clearer, the poet finds himself involved in uncanny prediction:

> ...'Requiem for the Croppies'...was written in 1966 when most poets in Ireland were straining to celebrate the anniversary of the 1916 Rising. That rising was the harvest of seeds sown in 1798, when revolutionary republican ideals and national feeling coalesced in the doctrines of Irish republicanism and in the rebellion of 1798 itself--unsuccessful and savagely put down. The poem was born and ended with an image of resurrection based on the fact that some time after the rebels were buried in common graves, these graves began to sprout with young barley, growing up from barley corn which the 'croppies' had carried in their pockets to eat while on the march. The oblique implication was that the seeds of violent resistance sowed in the Year of Liberty had flowered in what Yeats called 'the right rose tree' of 1916. I did not realize at the time that original heraldic murderous encounter between Protestant yeoman and Catholic rebel was to be initiated again in the summer of 1969, in Belfast, two months after the book was published (SP, p. 56).

"For the Commander of the 'Eliza'" (DN, pp. 34-35), based on an extract from Cecil Woodham-Smith's The Great Hunger, deals with an historical precedent for a prevalent cultural/political stance delineating the kind of situation in which it is liable to occur. The attitude is that of the liberal, detached from the realities of a given circumstance, who is likely to misjudge and to effect a hasty retreat when confronted with the consequences of the misjudgement. On the surface, the Commander of the boat is sensitive to the needs of the Irish castaways he encounters: "[he] hailed the crew/In Gaelic." But his unconscious assumptions, inextricable from his actual point of view, are neatly exposed in the poem's language and imagery. He thinks that they have pulled to "from guilt or bashfulness". In fact, they are starving. His recognition of this is conveyed in an image both inappropriate and ironic that reveals his own well being: "Six grown men with gaping mouths

and eyes/Bursting the sockets like spring onions in drills". Their pleas for food are conceived of as "whines and snarls" that "[rise] and [fall] like a flock of starving gulls". They are "poor brutes" who curse and howl "Like dogs that had been kicked hard in the privates/...Violent and without hope". Any guilt he feels is dismissed by a reversion to the pragmatic and expedient disposition that so obviously becomes him and any sympathy we might feel for him is stymied:

> ...I hoisted
> And cleared off. Less incidents the better
>
> Next day, like six bad smells, those living skulls
> Drifted through the dark of bunks and hatches
> And once in port I exorcised by ship
> Reporting all to the Inspector General.

Like "Requiem for the Croppies" and "For the Commander of the 'Eliza'", "At a Potato Digging" (DN, pp. 31-33) makes use of Irish history. This poem takes a scene from the present and works backwards in time through the use of historical allusion and reference to cultural mythology. In this way, Heaney constructs a kind of continuous present, establishing a comprehensive interpretation of the scene being contemplated, simultaneously deploying the various perspectives offered by this kind of approach. The harsh conditions imposed on the labourers by the "bitch earth", the "faithless ground", have given rise to an attitude which combines urgent aggression (they are like "crows attacking crow-black fields") with submission. The rituals they observe are characterized by a reluctant reverence. Their

> Heads bow, trunks bend, hands fumble towards the black
> Mother. Processional stooping through the turf
>
> Refurs mindlessly as autumn. Centuries
> Of fear and homage to the famine god
> Toughen the muscles behind their humbled knees
> Make a seasonal altar of the sod.

The second section of the poem describes the potatoes themselves "whose wet

inside[s] promise taste of ground and root". But an image of them as "live skulls, blind-eyed" recalls for Heaney the great potato crop failure of the 1840s and those who suffered as a result of it:

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

As a consequence

> A people hungering from birth,
> grubbing, like plants, in the bitch earth,
> were grafted with a great sorrow.

And this persists:

> Stinking potatoes fouled the land,
> pits turned pus into filthy mounds:
> and where potato diggers are
> you still smell the running sore.

Even as the workers take a tea break Heaney sees in their apparently insignificant actions an unconscious acknowledgement of the part the land plays in determining their destinies: "...stretched on the faithless ground, [they] spill/Libations of cold tea, scatter crusts".

It is important to realize that while these poems (and the "landscape" poems that follow) show an increased awareness of history (the time-spans are over "centuries" (DN, p. 31), "millions of years" (DD, p. 55)) they almost negate it in their recognition of archetypal patterns that persist in spite of the flux of events. The full implications of this for the nature of his poetry (it is more inclined to reveal and accommodate old lives than to create new ones, a strategy that does have its limitations) are not realized at this stage, but we shall see how, when this technique is exploited to its greatest extent (as is the case in North) it can be highly effective.

The second group of poems, comprising the final section of Door into the Dark, deal with particular landscapes. However, superficial descriptions

of their actual appearances are complicated by archaeological and anthropological considerations. These reveal historical perspectives, analysing traces of previous cultures that reside and inhere in these landscapes and allow Heaney a complex interpretation of possible cultural continuities and interconnections. Richard Murphy has observed that in Ireland "The past is happening today"[5] and these poems appear to affirm this as they expose fundamental and persistent strains in Irish life that have developed as a response to the social and natural history whose presence is palpably felt in these environments.

"Whinlands" (DD, pp. 47-48) is the first of these poems. The whin is a severe, barbaric form of vegetation. In "full bloom" it is

> As if the small yolk stain
>
> From all the birds' eggs in
> All the nests of the spring
> Were spiked and hung
> Everywhere on bushes to ripen.

And it is resilient, even indestructible. "Incineration" will not destroy it, "The tough sticks don't burn", instead, they "Remain like bone". Significantly, it "Persists on hills, near stone ditches,/Over flintbed and battlefield". Heaney tentatively associates features of the landscape with the historical events that have taken place in it, suggesting a "spirit" common to both. In this case it is one of violence. The way in which landscape and history offer a definition of each other proposes a certain propriety (perhaps even an inevitability) for this interrelationship. It seems that just as locale is a major contributor to the development of individual consciousness (a basic premise in both Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark) this has more extensive implications in an historical context.

"Shoreline" (DD, pp. 51-52) utilizes the same shift from an initial

description of "the sea/Sidling and settling to/The back of a hedge" in County Down towards historical speculation. Heaney considers past invasions, his meditations prompted by the sounds of the sea:

> Listen. Is it the Danes,
> A black hawk bent on the sail?
> Or the chinking Normans?
> Or currachs hopping high
>
> On to the sand?

"Bogland" (DD, pp. 55-56) is the most important of these poems and marks a vital development in Heaney's poetry. In the Selected Prose he describes the motivation that led him to write "Bogland":

> ...I had been vaguely wishing to write a poem about bogland, chiefly because it is a landscape that has a strange assuaging effect on me, one with associations reaching backwards into early childhood. We used to hear about bog-butter, butter kept fresh for a great number of years under the peat. Then when I was at school the skeleton of an elk had been taken out of a bog nearby and a few of our neighbours had got their pictures in the paper, peering out across its antlers. So I began to get an idea of bog as the memory of the landscape, or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in and to it. In fact, if you go round the National Museum in Dublin, you will realize that a great proportion of the most cherished material heritage of Ireland was 'found in a bog'. Moreover, since memory was the faculty that supplied me with the first quickening of my own poetry, I had a tentative unrealized need to make a congruence between memory and bogland and, for the want of a better word, our national consciousness (SP, pp. 54-55).

This landscape, deep, rich, and retentive provides Heaney with an ideal basis for his explorations of the "national consciousness" as well as of his own. The more localized activity depicted in "Personal Helicon" is re-created here on a national scale:

> 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.

Taken figuratively, these lines describe certain essential characteristics of Heaney's poetry up to this point, while they also anticipate the direction it will take from here on. If one had to characterize the motion of Heaney's poetry it would be "Inwards and downwards" towards the dark centre of the self, of the community, of history, of the land, towards the "last definition" upon which these are founded. Closely connected with those mode of dis/covery is the concept of "layering" which has both personal and extra-personal connotations. For Heaney as an individual it defines the composition of the self both in the accrual of experiences in memory and in the "race memory" he inherits. In relation to the history of his community it signifies the accretion and accumulation that accompanies cultural evolution both locally and nationally. It is a structure common both to his/story and history, something that allows him to draw parallels frequently between them. As a poet, Heaney is especially concerned with the linguistic implications of this "layering" which manifests itself in the etymology of words. In Wintering Out we will see Heaney "sounding" words in an attempt to recover their pre-verbal music and the circumstances that gave rise to them which have been obscured in the process of their acquiring particular "meanings".

The spirit in which "Bogland" is written is positive and unequivocal. Yeats, in his poem "The Second Coming" declared that "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold". This is echoed and rejected by Heaney whose confident assertion is in marked contrast to Yeats' despair. For Heaney "The wet centre is bottomless", a potentially endless source of possibilities for him and for his community. The poem "Bann Clay" (DD, pp. 53-54) hints that if the symbolic "old floor" (Sunk/For centuries under the grass" that "underruns the valley") towards which he "labours" is reached it will "glut" and "hold".

In Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark one observes Heaney

establishing what will become major features of his poetry. His subject matter is drawn from the rural lifestyle that he was born into. He considers its traditions, mythology and history as part of an integrated whole, a well adapted response to the environment in which it has evolved. His poetry attempts to ensure its continuity by giving it substance in a language that is appropriate to it--physical, sensuous, palpable, "Words entering almost the sense of touch" (FW, p. 34). Having fixed his own stance in relation to it, realizing shared roots and concerns, he can then proceed to utilize its resources, not only as subjects for his poetry in an objective sense, but as potential sources for material that will reveal the nature of his own personal identity.

## CHAPTER TWO

The prefatory poem to Wintering Out offers quite a contrast to those that close Door into the Dark. Overtly political, it proposes a history of Ulster based on political and social repression, on subjection and incarceration (associations prompted by references to the internment camp, the "stockade", and Stalag 17). The inhabitants apprehend their destinies in terms of defeat and resignation. In the face of this, no active opposition is proposed. Instead:

> Is there a life before death? That's chalked up
> on a wall downtown. Competence with pain,
> coherent miseries, a bite and sup,
> we hug our little destiny again.

This is a compact summation of a siege mentality that indulges an unquestioning acceptance of the situation which is likely to give rise to an unproductive fatalism. It is this fatalism that the collection seeks to displace, substituting a more positive and invigorating approach in its place, absorbing rather than deflecting circumstantial implications. The poems are at once an expression of love and loss, a composed amalgam of moods in which despondency and despair are continually confronted by a forward-looking idealism. Heaney investigates the more complex aspects of history in order that he can achieve a better understanding of the way events unfold in the province (and consequently exert a potentially greater control over them). This is not simply to restore the past intact (although it sometimes appears this way) but is part of an effort to accommodate it, to realize how beneficial an awareness of it can be.

If we look at the co-ordinates established by three of the poems from the first part of Wintering Out, the real struggle going on becomes obvious. "Fodder" (WO, p. 13) remembers a vision of plentitude, miraculous and sustaining, but concludes:

> These long nights
> I would pull hay
> for comfort, anything
> to bed the stall.

The final poem, "Augury" (WO, p. 53) with its images of disease and environmental pollution, pictures Heaney in a precarious position, almost succumbing to an equally unhealthy skepticism: "We hang charmed/On the trembling catwalk". This leads him to ask:

> What can fend us now
> Can soothe that hurt eye
>
> Of the sun,
> Unpoison great lakes,
> Turn back
> That rat on the road.

Once again, disease, deprivation and a sense of anxiety pervade the sequence at the centre of the collection, "A Northern Hoard" (WO, pp. 39-44). The sense of completeness and relative harmony of "A Lough Neagh Sequence" is replaced by an unremmittingly bleak picture of dis/integration that is possibly incapacitating. The poems are shot through with violence: physical pain and mental anguish are presented amidst images of amputation and mutilation. Feelings of guilt, of being ineffectual before circumstances that appear unavoidable prevail. In "Roots" (WO, p. 39) even personal love is threatened. Against a soundtrack "Of gunshot, siren and clucking gas/ Our there beyond each curtained terrace/...The touch of love,/Your warmth heaving to the first move,/Grows helpless in our old Gomorrah". Faced with this situation Heaney offers the choice: "We petrify or uproot now." But this is no choice, since both options are explicitly condemned in the poems

that follow. A diminuition of sensibility or an abandoning of the task in hand would aggravate rather than alleviate the pressures he is placed under. He will attempt to restore continuity by performing a ritual exorcism (something the collection as a whole appears to do too) of the "plague", so appositely alluded to in the poem's epigraph taken from "The Ancient Mariner", that afflicts them. But he is aware that this action can only exist in a dream:

> I'll dream it for us before dawn
> When the pale sniper steps down
> And I approach the shrub.
> I've soaked by moonlight in tidal blood
>
> A mandrake, lodged human fork,
> Earth sac, limb of the dark;
> And I would its damp smelly loam
> And stop my ears against the scream.

The reality is not so simple. "No Sanctuary" (WO, p. 42) shows a familiar ritual, usually a source of refuge and reassurance for Heaney, failing hopelessly, an unproductive undertaking. Heaney closes the poem with a solemn declaration of defeat: "We ring and stare into unhallowed light". In "Tinder" (WO, pp. 43-44) one reads again of deficiency, of "shrunken" hopes, as the poem's protagonists involve themselves in a futile re-enaction of a previously worthwhile practice. They are left "Huddled at dusk in a ring,/[Their] fists shut, [their] hope shrunken", asking "What could strike a blaze/From [their] dead igneous days?".

Wintering Out attempts to provide some viable answers to this question. The incipient mood of despair calls up the need for resistance and struggle that will restore unity for Heaney and for his community. The collection brings together the fragments of a scattered culture in an attempt to reunite them, to make them cohere and adhere. There is a strong feeling of a culture, diminished and deprived, on the verge of vanishing (even a poem as early as

"Gone" (DD, p. 14) can be interpreted as symbolizing a loss that extends beyond the immediate personal significance it has for Heaney). One notes the references to aspects of the indigenous culture as being "lost" (WO, pp. 23, 33, 37) "forgotten" (WO, p. 31) and failing or dying out (WO, pp. 29, 45). The collection is remarkable for its number of outcasts, people abandoned or deserted, people out of their "element" and unable to function in a new one: old rituals born out of primordial contact with the land are discarded in favour of modern surrogates which are clearly unsatisfactory: pedigree strains of all kinds are crossed and diluted: rape replaces normal sexual relationships. Everything seems in a state of disarray. There is a concentration of negative aspects as the native culture is made redundant, buried under an imposed one (although it would be wrong to suggest that this is the reason for all the disorder within the community--it hardly accounts for the "illegitimate spawning" and contingent horrors described in "Limbo" (WO, p. 70) for example--we cannot underestimate the importance it holds for Heaney in his reading of the situation). The need for the comfort and consolation provided by the "antediluvian lore" as suggested in "Gifts of Rain" (WO, pp. 23-25) is stressed, before the "flood", which takes on various forms in the poems, engulfs everyone.

In Wintering Out Heaney comes to a true notion of his proper work which is

> a retrieval of ancestry, an attempt to shore up more than fragments against the ruin, an attempt to make poetry once again an act of faith in the land and language that the poet shares with the dead.[1]

Consequently, although the collection is, in a sense, an intensifying of previous concerns, it is marked by a change in the type of incident considered which stimulates more diverse contemplations. Accompanying this is a broadening of technique as Heaney examines and estimates the value of his

resources, literary and otherwise. In its own way, Wintering Out is quite analytical in its approach as he attempts to identify the various strains at work both in the past and at present in his community, discovering ways of getting back past the "mists" of history to make contact with previous lives, building up an anatomy of the native culture along the way. Naturally, there is a strong emphasis on the possibilities offered by language, exploiting "the relationship between the word as pure vocable, as articulate noise, and the word as etymological occurrence, as symptom of human history, memory and attachments" (SP, p. 150) and "words as bearers of history and mystery" (SP, p. 45) to help find lives he could have led and which would prove exemplary.

In poems like "Oracle" (WO, p. 28), "Annahorish" (WO, p. 16) and "May" (WO, p. 75) he proposes a past as felicitous as that envisaged by Yeats in "The Happy Townland". This "first" world (presumably similar to Sean Armstrong's "local, hoped for, unfound commune" (FW, p. 20)) and his quest to recover it is the subject of "May" (WO, p. 75):

> My toecaps sparkle now
>
> Over the soft fontanel
> Of Ireland. I should wear
> Hide shoes, the hair next my skin,
> For walking this ground:
>
> Wasn't there a spa-well
> Its coping grassy, pendent?
> And then the spring issuing
> Right across the tarmac.

The poem closes in that spirit of pastoral idealism, optimistic and enthusiastic that recurs in Heaney's poetry, sometimes with undertones of pathos, sometimes with a genuine, unassailable confidence (one is tempted to say that it is a major feature of the dialectic which underlies his poetry):

> I'm out to find that village
> Its low sills fragrant
> With ladysmock and celandine,
> Marshlights in the summer dark.

As an indication of the general direction taken by the collection and the spirit in which it is undertaken, the phases described in "Summer Home" (WO, pp. 59-61) are instructive since they establish a possibly strategy for restoration. In Northern Voices, Terence Brown quotes John Wilson Foster who sees in this poem "an entire curve of emotion from premonition, through revolution, placation, passion and reconciliation to the final chastened assertion"[2] of:

> Yesterday rocks sang when we tapped
> Stalactites in the cave's old, dripping dark--
> Our love calls tiny as a tuning fork.

Although this depicts a specifically personal relationship I think that this "love" that "calls tiny as a tuning fork", this spirit of embrace and conciliation, is the note to which the poems in Wintering Out are orchestrated. It seems to me to be the primary motivation for his trying to re-establish fruitful connections with the country's pre-colonial and colonial past. Even a poem like "The Other Side" (WO, pp. 34-37), with its ironic account of the Heaney household with its "scraggy acres" and "patriarchal dictums" and the neighbour's, one of the "chosen people" with his "promised furrows", who is given to "prophesy", moves towards reconciliation. Heaney appears uncertain:

> Should I slip away, I wonder,
> or go up and touch his shoulder
> and talk about the weather
>
> or the price of grass-seed?

But there is only one real answer to this question. The sense of cultural division is deep-rooted (it is already hinted at in the deceptive simplicity of the kind of outlook pinpointed in the poem's title). The encounters between the poem's protagonists are awkward, characterized by an uneasy combination of embarrassed reticence and grudging respect. Yet the poem tentatively indicates that this division can be bridged by responding to an

undefined personal attraction which both recognizes and transcends the characters' potentially antagonistic assumptions.

Yet, if these poems outline a programme that must ultimately lead to unification, they also recognize that it must have its origins in individual definition. As in his earlier poems, Heaney attempts to define his own past and his relation to it, and, on a larger scale his community's past and their relation to it. A series of poems in Wintering Out symbolically determine the type of stance that Heaney feels it necessary to adopt and indicate the ancestry with which he aligns himself. In "Bog Oak" (WO, pp. 14-15) he says:

> I might tarry
> with the moustached
> dead, the creel-fillers,
>
> or eavesdrop on
> their hopeless wisdom

And referring to an extract from A View of the Present State of Ireland[3] he imagines Spenser

> dreaming sunlight,
> encroached upon by
>
> geniuses who creep
> 'out of every corner
> of the woodes and glennes'
> towards watercress and carrion.

Clearly, he sides not with Spenser but with the indigenous population, the colonised rather than the coloniser. In "Servant Boy" (WO, p. 17) he establishes once more his relationship with the oppressed. The character in the poem is an "Old work-whore, slave-/blood...", out in the snow "among shadows", his trail leading to "the back doors of the little/barons...". But although his circumstances may be demeaning (using "little" to derogate the status of the "barons" makes his even worse), he is in contact with something vital, signified in his "carrying the warm eggs". The fact that this is harnessed for somebody else's (mis)use does not entirely diminish

its value. He has kept his "patience" and his "counsel" and his attitude to his task is "resentful/and impenitent". Fine though this may be, it still proposes an illusory independence. He remains a slave, a station from which he must rise up and free himself. Given that he is in touch with nature at the level suggested in the poem, this merely confirms that he should use this contact for his own ends and for those of his community , not for the "little barons". This poem re-states the tendency, already observed in the prefatory poem to the collection, for the Ulster community to mix "competence" with "pain" and to formulate and endure "coherent miseries". But it does specify the beginnings of a productive resistance which Heaney appears to see as both worthwhile and necessary. The labourer who is the subject of the poem "Navvy" (WO, p. 51) is a modern equivalent:

> He has not relented
> under weather or insults,
> my brother and keeper
>
> plugged to the hard-core,
> picking along
> the welted, stretchmarked
> curve of the world.

Their persistence, in spite of (and a product of) adversity is a quality they share with "The Last Mummer" (WO, pp. 18-20). This poem introduces an interesting complication. The man with the vocation, in touch with native taboos and traditions, and who, realizing their value, is trying to uphold them, is rejected by the community. They have become "civilized", a part of the "modern" world (synonymous here with the imposition of an alien culture signified by "the lawn", "the terrace" and the television). Their need for ritual has not disappeared. The television is a "luminous screen in the corner" that "has them charmed in a ring". Content with this surrogate they ignore him, and his frustration is clear:

He catches the stick in his fist

and, shrouded, starts beating
the bars of the gate.

His boots crack the road. The stone
clatters down off the slates.

The future looks bleak for him, the last of the mummers: the "bars" suggest both exclusion and imprisonment, the "shroud", death. This is made all the more portentous considering his association with country customs concerned with peace and continuity. He is knowledgeable, versatile and able to pick "a nice way through/the long toils of blood/and feuding". He can offer a lead to those who have lost contact with the earth and its mysteries, untousling "a first dewy path/into the summer grazing". The fact that he is in danger of being ignored (and, by implication so is his counterpart, the poet) compounds the difficulties faced by those who would try to restore and clarify traditional features of this kind of existence: a whole way of knowledge, of perceiving life, is slowly being alienated, as are its adherents.

Having established antecedents for his position and realized the kind of resistance it requires, he proceeds to survey and experiment with the resources offered to him by the language, land and history which will be useful in diagnosing and rectifying the plight of his community.

"Traditions" (WO, pp. 31-32), an unusually partisan poem, but under the circumstances necessarily so, indicates, and to a certain extent accounts for the problems that face Heaney and his community. While it opens by describing the literary consequences of colonisation it quickly realizes its broader social ramifications. He depicts the symbolic "rape" of Ireland (as he does in "Ocean's Love to Ireland" (N, pp. 46-47)) and the subsequent displacement of native traditions that are seen as being fundamental (like the "coccyx") and concerned with fertility (the Bridgid's Cross is bound on

the first of February) and continuity. They are replaced by "custom, that most/sovereign mistress" (echoes here of Keats' "Ode to Melancholy" and Enobarbus' final speech in Antony and Cleopatra both of which would connect this "custom" with melancholy) that "beds us down into/the British Isles". The consequences are typified in MacMorris' predicament (also referred to in Heaney's Selected Prose, page 32):

> MacMorris, gallivanting
> round the Globe, whinged
> to courtier and groundling
> who had heard tell of us
>
> as going very bare
> of learning, as wild hares,
> as anatomies of death:
> 'What ish my nation?'

MacMorris, an Irish captain in the English army (similarities in this case with Francis Ledwidge) is clearly perplexed: wandering, aimless, exiled from country and self, from communal identity, his situation reflects the turmoil that colonisation can inflict on the individual, leaving him with no sense of custom, no practical reference points from which he can derive precedents for his emotions and behaviour. Significantly, it is Joyce's Ulysses that provides the answer:

> And sensibly, though so much
> later, the wandering Bloom
> replied, 'Ireland,' said Bloom,
> 'I was born here. Ireland'

In "Midnight" (WO, pp. 45-46) colonisation leads not only to a feeling of confusion but is almost incapacitating. The fact that in Ireland "The wolf has died out" is used to allude to the loss of an essential spirit, one that would animate and stimulate Heaney's poeticising. It is weakened, transmuted "The wolfhound was crossed/With inferior strains,/Forests coopered to wine casks". The outc ome is a testimony to the personal consequences of this lack of dynamism: "Nothing is panting, lolling,/Vapouring. The tongue's/

Leashed in my throat". But the essential contradiction within the poem, that it is a spirited exposition of the loss of spirit, is important to the collection as a whole: it embodies one of the underlying assumptions in these poems, that a proper and perceptive awareness of the nature and extent of this loss is, in fact, a gain. That out of this awareness Heaney is slowly but surely evolving a positive replacement is evident in the effectiveness of his shift "into dialect/into variations" (WO, p. 29).

"Gifts of Rain" (WO, pp. 23-25) suggests a method of reaching back past colonial history, the context in which this activity can take place and the kind of considerations that should prevail. The poem opens in a symbolic postdiluvian world following the "Cloudburst and steady downpour". The farmer in the poem is "wading lost fields (the "lost" world glimpsed at different stages in Wintering Out). He "breaks the pane [sic] of flood" which has swamped the "sunken drills" that are "an atlantis" (again an appropriate evocation of a "lost", submerged world with Utopian connotations) that "he depends on". In spite of the flooding, the farmer's communion with nature ensures that he will survive. Even though his hands "grub" and "grope", these graceless actions are part of a much larger harmony for

> he is hooped to where he planted
> and sky and ground
>
> are running naturally among his arms
> that grope the cropping land.

Part of the reason for his ease in surmounting these adverse conditions is because he has developed a mode of perception that is sensitively attuned to nature's vicissitudes. He can "sense weather/by his skin", his "world-schooled ear" can "monitor" environmental change, and "He fords/his life by sounding". His contact with his environment is instinctive and, for Heaney, instructive. Relating the scene to his own experience Heaney says:

I cock my ear
at an absence--
in the shared calling of blood
arrives my need
for antediluvian lore.

And this can only be realized by an adaptation of the farmer's techniques. To return past the "flood" of history (in terms of his own experience and that of the community ) to interpret the "Soft voices of the dead", he must "sound" the landscape, the language and their inter-related identities. In this way, he can counter the "flood's" tendency to go "uprooting", he can learn "about crops rotted, river mud/glazing the baked clay floor". As Heaney observes, "the features of the landscape [can then become] a mode of communion with a something other than ourselves, a something to which we ourselves still feel we might belong" (SP, p. 132). It appears that the activ ity of "sounding", in its purely literary context, implies "the kind of poetry which Eliot had in mind when he spoke of the auditory imagination, that feeling for word and syllable reaching down below the ordinary levels of language, uniting the primitive and civilized associations words have accrued. It is a poetry that offers a continuous invitation into its echoes and recesses" (SP, p. 81). The final section of "Gifts of Rain" explains and exploits the use of these conventions. "Moyola" the river, "Moyola" the name, and "Moyola" as the "hoarder of common ground" all draw Heaney into a timeless contemplation. The sound and music (musical metaphors are integral to the poem's theme and to its structure: "the Moyola harping on/its gravel beds", "spouts.../ brimmed with their own aris", "Moyola/is its own score and consort,/...reed music, an old chanter") of the name and of the river itself are heard as "bedding the locale/in the utterance". And just as he is "wooed into the cyclops' eye/of a tarn" in "Bogland" (DD, p. 55) this is a sensual activity:

A swollen river,

a mating call of sound
rises to pleasure me.

The landscape exudes a seductive power that, if Heaney is responsive to it, will lead him through instinct to identity.

However, linguistic "sounding" must be seen in its proper context. Primarily it involves an intuitive awareness of the elements of language that can go "back past/philology and kennings" and "re-enter memory" (N, p. 29) at a pre-verbal level, retrieving the most fundamental perceptions of existence that have since been buried under layers of acquired and often misleading meanings (particularly true in a colonised country where there can be quite a discrepancy between the imported and imposed language and the native experience it attempts to signify). This is not designed simply to replace linguistic "meaning" with some vague notion of a primitive musical response to existence (although this does seem to be an important aspect of "sounding"). Rather, it is then incorporated into a more educated, literary use of language. Heaney can then establish a tension between these two modes in which his language functions, recovering atavisms yet modifying and accommodating them within a framework of more recent concerns. The genesis of the poem "Undine" (DD, p. 26) is a good example of the way in which these two aspects of the "auditory imagination" work in Heaney's poetry:

> ...It was the dark pool of the sound of the word that first took me: if our auditory imaginations were sufficiently attuned to plumb and sound a vowel, to unite the most primitive and civilized associations, the word 'undine' would probably suffice as a poem in itself. Unda, a wave, undine, a water-woman--a litany of undines would have ebb and flow, water and woman, wave and tide, fulfilment and exhaustion in its very rhythms. But...I discovered a more precise definition...An undine is a water-sprite who has to marry a human being and have a child by him before she can become human. With that definition...the thump in the ear, undine, became a thought, a field of force that called up other images. One of these was an orphaned memory, wothout a context...of watching a man clearning out an old spongy growth from a drain

> between two fields, focusing in particular on the way the water, in the cleared-out place...began to run free...And this image was gathered into a more conscious reading of the myth as being about the liberating, humanizing effect of sexual encounter. Undine was a cold girl who got what the dictionary called a soul through the experience of physical love (SP, pp. 52-53).

Although there is an effective synthesis of the two aspects of language in this instance, this is not always the case. For Heaney, the characteristics of particular kinds of poetry depend on which part of this process is made more prominent, which part the poet finds most congenial to his purpose. He has developed a terminology which deals with the poet's initial motivation for writing, the effect he desires and the final outcome of relying either on the more "civilized" or the more "primitive" resources of language. He calls these two modes the "masculine" and "feminine" modes:

> ...In the masculine mode, the language functions as a form of address, of assertion or command, and the poetic effort has to do with conscious quelling and control of the materials, a labour of shaping; words are not music before they are anything else, nor are they drowsy from their slumber in the conscious, but athletic, capable of displaying the muscle of sense. Whereas in the feminine mode the language functions more as evocation than as address, and the poetic effort is not so much a labour of design as it is an act of divination and revelation; words in the feminine mode behave with the lover's come-hither instead of the athlete's display, they constitute a poetry that is delicious as texture before it is recognized as architectonic (SP, p. 88).

Using these definitions Heaney's poetry clearly operates in the "feminine" mode, tending to deal more with states of feeling than statements of fact, relying more on the resonance of "soundings" than the ostensible knowledge offered to him by language, although always realizing that this can be a productive conflict. It inclines more towards the mystic and mysterious in accordance with the territorial pieties we have observed as a feature of Heaney's poetry so far. In Wintering Out a combination of "sounding" and the revelationary potential of this "feminine" mode are extremely important

as Heaney tries to re-live lives from the Irish past. He is attentive to the wealth of information that words are inclined to hoard, attempting to "set them echoing", realizing that they can release a past which will offer precedents and patterns previously unavailable to him and to his community. And, as "Gifts of Rain" makes clear, this awareness of history and of its roots and origins is vital not only to him but to his children too, since destiny is in such a close relation to an understanding of the historical process.

In Wintering Out a series of poems "sound" place names in an attempt to discover facets of the country's past. Heaney takes as his starting point the old Gaelic tradition of the Dinnseanchas,

> ...poems and tales which relate the original meanings of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology...Ardee, for example, the town in Co. Louth. In Irish, Ardee means Ferdia's Ford, and it was at this point...that Cuchullain and Ferdia, brothers in arms in their youth, fought their great single combat by day and tended each other's wounds by night until Cuchullain slew Ferdia with his magical weapon...So the place name, Ardee, succinctly marries the legendary and the local...We have to retrieve the underlay of Gaelic legend in order to read the full meaning of the name and to flesh out the topographical record with its human accretions (SP, pp. 131-132).

Heaney constructs his own "mythological etymology" around place names that have particular associations conscious or otherwise for him. These reveal to him not only aspects of previous cultures that have inhabited his locale but also provide correlatives for different frames of mind and outlooks that he may feel instinctively, but which apparently lack any objective and immediate manifestations in Ulster society.[4]

"Anahorish" (WO, p. 16) is the first of these. Anahorish is a version of the Gaelic "anach fhior uisce" which when translated into English means "place of clear water." This leads Heaney to see it as Edenic, a place, pure, untainted and fertile:

"Broagh" (WO, p. 27) uses a similar technique in "sounding" a place name as "Anahorish" (Broach: Gaelic "bruach" = English "riverbank"). And Heaney is walking along this riverbank with an unidentified companion. The "shower/gathering" in a heelmark reminds him of an "O". The "O" recalls the open vowel sound of "Broagh" (taken in reverse, this correlation could, of course, have initiated the poem itself). The way the heelmark ends "almost/ suddenly" reminds him of the abrupt sound that ends the word, the "last/gh the strangers found/difficult to manage". Presumably, these "strangers" are to be associated, loosely, with colonisers. So, inhering in the very pronounciation of the word "Broach" there is an incident from Heaney's personal past, an implied incident from the communal past, a particular part of the landscape and a commentary on colonial history as it manifests itself in the inflection given to particular words. As in "Anahorish", land, social landscape and language are in an extremely close relationship with one another, proving that the concept of the word as a "hoarder" of experiences can be extremely valuable in helping to retrieve the history of particular places.

"The Wool Trade" (WO, p. 37) "sounds" the title phrase. Its vowel sounds suggest (and become a metaphor for) the "spools" on which the wool is wound, and initiate a litany that describes the process that leads up to it: "To shear, to bale and bleach and card". These activities take place in pastoral surroundings (not unlike those portrayed in "Anahorish", although a part of more recent history) in which life is integrated and industrious:

> O all the hamlets where
> Hills and flocks and streams conspired
>
> To a language of waterwheels,
> A lost syntax of looms and spindles

The easy measure and soft mechanics of the work pass into the rhythm and

texture of the language. But both the lifestyle and the language are disappearing, becoming a source of artifact and archaism (the use of the "O..." construction emphasizes this) hanging "Fading, in the gallery of the tongue!" The final lines, monosyllabic and full of hard consonantal sounds (the vowels are displaced by them except for the contemptuous "e" sound in "tweed" and the disgust registered in his use of the word blood) offer a sharp contrast to the poem's overall soft, rambling ambience:

> And I must talk of tweed,
> A stiff cloth with flecks like blood.

Apparently, even sartorial preferences are fair game for Heaney's analyses of cultural divisions. If this is dialectic in danger of becoming diatribe it does indicate a tendency which is important in Wintering Out--that of seeing as many aspects of present circumstances as possible, as symbolic manifestations of various stages of the historical process.

"A New Song" (WO, p. 33) is the most optimistic of this group of poems. In "The Wool Trade" it is "the phrase" that calls up the past. In "A New Song" it is "the name" Derrygarve, "a lost potent musk" that conjures up images of an ideal existence, a "twilit" scene, pleasant and pleasurable, from Heaney's past. As is the case in all the other poems this is a world that has vanished or is about to vanish. But Heaney wants to see it resumed, it must re-assert itself. In the now familiar shorthand used by Heaney to signify the parties on either side of the cultural divide, he proposes to move towards a unification that will restore continuity to the province: there must be a union of (using the linguistic metaphors that describe the antagonists) "vowels" and "consonants", natives and planters, "native haunts" and Demesnes (and the philosophies that accompany them). This achievement will lead to renewed growth and fertility "Like bleaching-greens resumed by grass". In poetry, it will be marked by "A vocable, as

rath and bullaun" (cf. SP, p. 37 for the place of the vocable in Heaney's poetics). In the culture in general it will be marked by an accommodation of the world views (rational, aggressive and irrational, pietistic) that "rath" and "bullaun" signify and an acceptance of the value of looking to previously ignored historical antecedents.

In contrast to the relative optimism of "A New Song", there are a number of poems in Wintering Out that incline towards a pessimistic vision of life. As well as "The Tollund Man" (WO, pp. 47-48), which I will come to later, "Part Two" of the collection contains a number of what one could classify as "folk" poems, anticipated in Door into the Dark by "The Wife's Tale" (DD, pp. 27-28). "A Winter's Tale" (WO, pp. 64-65), "Shore Woman" (WO, pp. 66-67) and "Maighdean Mara" (WO, pp. 68-70) have more in common with folk tales and ballads than with the lyrics in "Part One" of Wintering Out, although despite overt stylistic differences, they share certain concerns and attitudes with them. The structure of these poems, the language they use and the incidents they are based on all accentuate the feeling that here he is dealing with fundamental, inescapable aspects of existence. What is most admirable in these poems, particularly in "Shore Woman", is their native grace: Heaney does not compromise proverbial wisdom by indulging in complicated interpretation. His "understanding" of these people and their predicaments is registered more through an emotional empathy than an intellectual analysis. The apparent simplicity of the characters' emotions is qualified by a depth that is conveyed in the strength and persistence of their convictions. The apparent loneliness they are resigned to is inseparable from an evolved sense of dignity and independence. Nonetheless, the three poems appear to propose sorrow and suffering as integral and unavoidable aspects of human existence, which, when taken into

consideration with some of the poems already considered, creates a turbulent groundswell to the collection as a whole.

The "maiden daughter" in "A Winter's Tale" (WO, pp. 64-65) is portrayed as maternal, offering nourishment despite her youth (at the close of the poem she "Uncradle[s] her breasts"). But this resource has been realized only through deliberate estrangement, through suffering that appears to be a necessary prelude to her fulfilling her proper role. The poem intimates that she is a kind of willing scapegoat for the community, subjecting herself to pain that they may benefit from it, an intermediary between them and the darker aspects of existence.

"Maighdean Mara" (WO, pp. 68-69) describes a cycle of existence that is relatively sombre. The mermaid is displaced from her natural element. Her experience of "life" is confined to a demeaning servility, "The dead hold of bedrooms,/Dread of the night and morrow". She is forced to suffer "milk and birth" before she can escape and exert her revenge by liberating those she leaves behind who were in similar predicaments.

"Shore Woman" (WO, pp. 66-67) taking as its epigraph the Gaelic proverb "Man to the hills, woman to the shore" describes an existence similarly characterized by alienation and isolation. This time it occurs within marriage, the identity of each of the sexes seen not as complementary but as antagonistic and irreconcilable. The bitter humour with which the wife tells her tale emphasizes not only incompatability, but the way in which it is her sensitivity that is suppressed rather than her husband's insensitivity. All that is left for her is to return to the "taste of safety.../Astray upon a debris of scrubbed shells", that the proverb assures her is her rightful (and only) place.

What makes these poems all the more effective is that the proverbial

wisdom they offer is actually attested to in other poems in Wintering Out. Each has its own relation to the kind of politics, sexual or otherwise, that are behind a lot of the situations described in the collection. Taken in the abstract, each of them could be related to Heaney's own situation, to the community's, and without pushing their interpretation too far, to the effects of colonisation with which Wintering Out is partly concerned.

"The Tollund Man" (WO, pp. 47-48) and, to a lesser extent, "Nerthus" (WO, p. 49) indicate the direction which Heaney's poetry will take in North, posing a rather bleak counterpoint to poems like "Anahorish". In a statement that could typify the tenor and aspirations of many of the poems in Wintering Out, Heaney charts his progress towards the writing of "The Tollund Man":

> [After "Requiem for the Croppies"] 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 [sic] predicament...[that would] 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 (SP, pp. 56-57).

He goes on to intimate historical and mythical precedents for the current situation in Ulster:

> And when I say religious, I am not thinking simply of the sectarian division. To some extent the enmity can be viewed as a struggle between the cults and devotees of a god and a goddess. There is an indigenous territorial numen, a tutelar of the whole island, call her Mother Ireland, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the poor old woman, the Shan Van Vocht, whatever; and her sovereignity has been temporarily usurped or infringed by a new male cult whose founding fathers were Cromwell, William of Orange and Edward Carson and whose godhead is incarnate in a rex or caesar resident in a palace in London. What we have is the tail-end of a struggle in a province between territorial piety and imperial power (SP, p. 57).

Lest we should consider this too abstract an appreciation of the predicament in Ulster, Heaney admits that

> this idiom is remote from the agnostic world of economic interest...[and] from the political manoeuvres of power-sharing; but it is not remote from the psychology of the

> Irishmen and Ulstermen who do the killing, and not remote from the bankrupt psychology and mythologies implicit in the terms Irish Catholic and Ulster Protestant. The question, as ever, is 'How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea?' And my answer is, by offering 'befitting emblems of adversity' (SP, p. 57).

Heaney found suitable emblems while reading P.V. Glob's book The Bog People which deals with the ritual fertility sacrifices in Jutland during the Iron Age.[5] Glob gives the following account of these sacrifices:

> ...The Tollund Man and many of the other bog men, after their brief time as god and husband of the goddess [Mother Earth]--the time of the spring feasts and of the wanderings through the villages--fulfilled the final demand of religion. They were sacrificed and placed in the sacred bogs; and consumated by their death the rites which ensured for the peasant community luck and fertility in the coming year. At the same time, through their sacrificial deaths, they were themselves consecrated for all time to Nerthus, goddess of fertility--to Mother Earth, who in return so often gave their faces her blessing and preserved them through the millennia.[6]

Heaney finds that this type of sacrifice

> Taken in relation to the tradition of Irish political martyrdom for that cause whose icon is Kathleen Ni Houlihan...is more than an archaic barbarous rite: it is an archetypal pattern (SP, p. 57).

Within this pattern, "the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles" (SP, p. 58) past and present, are reconciled.

"The Tollund Man" (WO, pp. 47-48) is the first of a series of poems Heaney has written which attempt to relate this earlier pagan religion, its ceremonial rites and sacrificial victims, to contemporary events in Ulster. The poem opens with a description of one of the victims' bodies recovered from the bog, stressing the religious and possibly sexual connotations of the sacrifice as being in some way fulfilling and so beneficial:

> 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.

The second section of the poem shifts abruptly from the past to the present in its depiction of a recent atrocity in Ulster:

> I could risk blasphemy,
> Consecrate the cauldron bog
> Our holy ground and pray
> Him to make germinate
>
> The scattered, ambushed
> Flesh of labourers,
> Stockinged corpses
> Laid out in farmyards,
>
> Tell-tale skin and teeth
> Flecking the sleepers
> Of four young brothers, trailed
> For miles along the lines.

This macabre scenario (possibly sensational and melodramatic were it not based on fact) with its elaborate and expert violence really tests the applicability and validity of the poem's underlying premise. The opening lines of this section are hesitant to begin with--how appropriate would such an intercession be? Faced with the horrible reality of the brothers' deaths, ritual killings in the Iron Age seem to be an unlikely and unsatisfactory context in which to place them. Yet the poem's final stanza acknowledges certain undeniable affinities Heaney feels with this older way of life, an instinctive familiarity with attitudes that appear to persist:

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

The observation provides much of the tension in North, "Part One". Heaney is "at home" in Jutland because he recognizes that inherent in its Iron Age culture (and that of Northern Europe as a whole) are the foundations for his own. In relation to the Jungian sense of the "self" that Heaney entertains, this has certain important implications. His response to this culture stems from an intuitive identification with it at a fundamental

## CHAPTER THREE

North comprises two distinct modes of poetry. "Part Two" is concerned with contemporary events in Ulster. Heaney examines the relationship between these events and the development of his poetry and the particular pressures they exert on those who adopt the occupation of poet. The poetry is characterized by a relatively prosaic and often satirical approach to its subject matter. "Part One" deals with similar events, particularly those that involve violence. However, they are seen in a broader and more historical Northern European context. As he has done in "The Tollund Man" (WO, pp. 47-48) Heaney continues his investigations into possible cultural precedents for the current situation. He attempts to discover patterns of behaviour that have persisted and whose continuity would provide a context in which the prevailing violence could be explained. This is part of an effort "to define and interpret the present by bringing it into significant relationship with the past...to forge the uncreated conscience of the race" (SP, p. 60). On a more symbolic level, the consciously heightened poetic language and forms of "Part One" accompany his attempt to internalize and personalize the implications of the historical process, converting them into an image of the constituents that make up the self, making this section something of an odyssey through his own spiritual hinterland. Although strikingly different in their techniques, taken together the two sections provide a diversity of information which offers a compact summation of the development of communal values and attachments and defines Heaney's own identity in relation to them.

The sequence "Singing School" (N, pp. 62-73) complements the growing

number of poems that deal explicitly with Heaney's personal situation. Once again, they reveal him trying to estimate the impact made by the immediate cultural environment on his sense of self, and on the function of his poetry in revealing and clarifying the various social influences at work. The epigraphs to the sequence, drawn from the works of Wordsworth and Yeats, indicate the major preoccupations in the poems here. The extract from The Prelude alludes to the importance of birthplace on the growth of the soul. The extract from Autobiographies alludes to "the pleasure of rhyme" (N, p. 62). While these quotations are appropriate to the poems that follow, they are also partially ironic. If Wordsworth was "Fostered alike by beauty and by fear" we find Heaney struggling to discover any beauty in an atmosphere remarkable for its apparently ubiquitous fear. The suggestion that "the pleasure of rhyme "alluded to by Yeats may alleviate this distressing situation is modified by the perception that while the aesthetic appeal of poetry may transcend the vagaries of circumstance, its proper function should be to elucidate rather than evade them. As a result, the poems in "Singing School" attempt to maximize the potential of poetry by adjusting form (the poetry) to accommodate content (the life) in an effort to establish the exact nature of the social and spiritual influences that have helped to shape Heaney's and the community's consciousness. As is the case in Heaney's poetry in general, he initiates a particular form of the English lyric that can be "faithful to the nature of the English language...and, at the same time, be faithful to one's own non-English origin, for me that is County Derry".[1] For as he states in "The Ministry of Fear" (N, p. 65):

> Ulster was British, but with no rights on
> The English lyric.

No amount of comic satire can disguise the fundamental emotion that pervades the sequence. Surrounded by actual and implicit violence, there

is an oppressive sense of fear. This arises largely as a result of the omnipresent sectarian conflict. But "The Ministry of Fear" (N, pp. 63-65) also makes it clear that this has been deliberately cultivated within each of the disputing factions: each encourages a sense of conflict as integral to an Ulster education, inseperable from a true notion of cultural identity. So that, while fear may be a characteristic attitude within this kind of existence, it is also manipulated in order to generate and perpetuate it (a point which is more important than it might at first seem, since it tends to compromise Heaney's more "poetic" interpretations, indicating that this situation has arisen as a result of, for example, political expediency).

This concentration on violence and fear does not come altogether as a surprise. Heaney's poetry has been marked by an increasing awareness of these elements, whether they result from the barbarous in nature, pagan religious rites, or, as they do in North, from the day to day realities that accompany and ensure the continuity of social repression. Piety and fear give way to "arithmetic and fear" (N, p. 66), the generalities of territorial politics enforced (rather than replaced) by the particulars of colonial/ sectarian politics. Although the exact nature of the relationship between the two is not made explicit, it is enough to know that they effect a continuum. Both myth ("Centuries/Of fear and homage to the famine god" (DN, p. 31)) and recent social history ("all around us, though/We hadn't named it, the ministry of fear" (N, p. 65)) confirm just how pervasive this fearfulness actually is.

In North the world of the naturalist recedes and is replaced by a world (anticipated to some extent in "A Northern Hoard" (WO, pp. 39-44)) populated by police constables, Guardia Civil, the British Army, prisoners, internees, lambeg drummers. Landmarks, symbolic or otherwise, are Stalag 17,

the Bastille and Long Kesh. Personal belongings are liable to include revolvers, rifles, gelignite, gas and bombs, all the paraphernalia and perogatives of oppressor and oppressed. At this stage, Heaney appears to be more willing to acknowledge the mundane realities of colonisation (rather than, as in Wintering Out, the more oblique and esoteric ones) and to adopt an attitude of quiet but persistent defiance, in an attempt to prevent the disappearance of the indigenous culture on which he, for one, depends. And if ever his poetry becomes strongly political in its implications (something he normally avoids) it is in "Part Two" of North.

The feeling that there is a limit to the amount of harassment the native community can take before the situation becomes potentially explosive, inevitably destructive, is succinctly alluded to in the poem "A Constable Calls" (N, pp. 66-67). A proliferation of forceful consonants, belligerent and bullying, indicates the nature of the laws by which Heaney's family was made to live and the uncompromising fashion in which they were enforced. But the poem closes on a tense note, insidiously evoking an unavoidable consequence:

> A shadow bobbed in the window.
> He was snapping the carrier spring
> Over the ledger. His boot pushed off
> And the bicycle ticked, ticked, ticked.

One of the more important aspects of this poem is the way it invokes the urgent necessity for Heaney to confront the looming crisis in Ulster. But how to do this?

"The Ministry of Fear" (N, pp. 63-65), in the guise of autobiography, offers an account of the social pressures that initiate and maintain sectarian conflict, and attempts to propose a distinct role for the poet and poetry within it. It presents a portrait of the artist caught between aspiration and resignation. His acceptance of his community's values is countered by

an uncertainty about the premises on which they are founded: his intuitive feel for poetry is matched by an equally uncertain idea of the direction it should take, of the value it could have. Heaney begins the poem with a humourous account of his education, the unquestioning obedience to an authority that asserts itself through force:

> 'What's your name, Heaney?'
> 'Heaney, Father.'
> 'Fair
> Enough.'
> On my first day, the leather strap
> Went epileptic in the Big Study
> Its echoes plashing over our bowed heads

And the tactfully cultivated awareness of cultural division based on a sense of inequality, excluding rationale, including dogma:

> Have our accents
> Changed? 'Catholics, in general, don't speak
> As well as students from the Protestant schools.'
> Remember that stuff? Inferiority
> Complexes, stuff that dreams were made on.

His early romances appear to offer some relief. But there is still that mixture of desire and dread, the same contagious aura of restriction: "My fingers tight as ivy on her shoulders/A light left burning for her in the kitchen". And all the time "Freedom" is "dwindling night by night". This is emphasized by his encounter with the police. His anxiety and indignation are resolved in the comic derogation effected by the description:

> ...the air
> All moonlight and a scent of hay, policemen
> Swung their crimson flashlamps, crowding round
> The car like black cattle, snuffing and pointing
> The muzzle of a sten-gun in my eye:
> 'What's your name, driver?'
> 'Seamus...'
> Seamus?

although the question and answer format does not allow us to ignore the depressing similarities this situation shares with those of his schooldays. Still, his answer does indicate a growing resistence to authority,

self-assertion replacing his earlier fearful acquiescence. The slightly modified verse structure (open-ended rather than closed) shows how even the slightest act of civil disobedience seems to offer a potential subversion of the accepted social norms. In spite of this, the "ministry of fear" is, as he says, and as the majority of poems confirm, "all around [him]".

However, as the poem closes, its undertheme of possible poetic redemption (evinced in the innovation of "South Derry rhyme[s]" that transform "pushed and pulled" to "hushed and lulled" and the potency "Vowels and ideas" have for him) is made explicit. If a satisfactory provincial version of "The English lyric" can be evolved then "naming" can begin. The value of "naming" cannot be underestimated. Of the poem "Digging" (DN, pp. 13-14) Heaney has said: "The facts and surfaces of the thing were true, but more important, the excitement that came from naming then gave me a kind of insouciance and a kind of confidence" (SP, p. 41). Elsewhere, he has said of Patrick Kavanagh's poetry: "Here, the book learning disappears and the mind is purified by naming the actual" (SP, p. 142). This "naming the actual" seems to describe the ability of an appropriate language to make contact with and precipitate the truth that resides within particular situations. Taken in conjunction with the dictum "Description is revelation" (N, p. 71) this activity, if successfully undertaken, can lead to a new awareness of social realities (remembering that for Heaney the "real" world is never simply to be equated with the world of appearances which he continually seeks to go beyond using language as a mode of access to the "buried life of the feelings" (SP, p. 52)). And this clarification (bound up with an accuracy and propriety of language) through poetry is accompanied by two things. The first is that it provides a base for social assessment and change, revealing the true nature of the problems faced by Heaney and by the community. The second is

that its achievement is marked by an encouraging resurgence of confidence founded on the knowledge that the poet has made this contact with the crucial issues involved. Which is not to say that "naming" the "ministry of fear" exactly exorcizes it, but certainly the amount of comedy and humour in some of the poems in North, "Part Two" testifies to a kind of relief, achieved, one presumes, through the agency of poetry.

A well-documented Social Reality in Ulster, an everyday incident, simply and starkly stated:

Men die at hand.

And the poem "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" (N, pp. 57-60) gets to the heart of the matter--it is almost impossible to get to the heart of the matter. It realizes that any actual problems that exist are compounded by an inability on the part of everyone concerned to find the appropriate terminology and context in which to examine them. This is exacerbated by a variety of political stances and viewpoints that do not engage and clarify issues but use a language (seen in the poem as inextricable from the outlook it represents) that effectively bars their advocates from the real events. The language of the politicians and "media-men" (the "scribblers") appears to Heaney to deflect the actual significance of these events, re-creating them merely as instances that prove the basic tenets of their own particular ideologies. Heaney seems to see their interpretations as evasive, at several removes from reality, yet he does not exempt himself from indulging in the contemptible consolation they can offer. He describes himself as

> Expertly civil tongued with civil neighbours
> On the high wires of first wireless reports
> Sucking the fake taste, the stony flavours
> Of those sanctioned, old, elaborate retorts

In a flurry of self-criticism he quickly disposes of the validity of the

"liberal papist note" (so well described in his wife's remarks in "An Afterwards": 'You weren't the worst. You aspired to a kind,/Indifferent, faults-on-both-sides tact" (FW, p. 44)):

> We tremble near the flames but want no truck
> With the actual firing. We're on the make
>
> As ever.

Naturally, Heaney feels that poetry has the potential to realize the true nature of the conflict and can offer a solution to it. It appears to function by means of a language that is somehow closer to the realities of the situation. However, he is aware that poetry too has a tendency to generate its own misleading conclusions:

> The liberal papist note sounds hollow
>
> When amplified and mixed in with the bangs
> That shake all hearts and windows day and night.
> (It's tempting here to rhyme on 'labour pangs'
> And diagnose a rebirth in our plight
>
> But that would be to ignore other symptoms.
> Last night you didn't need a stethoscope
> To hear the eructation of Orange drums
> Allergic equally to Pearse and Pope.)

But in spite of this, Heaney describes himself sitting

> ...with a pestering
> Drouth for words at once both gaff and bait
>
> To lure the tribal shoals to epigram
> And order. I believe any of us
> Could draw the line through bigotry and sham
> Given the right line, aere perennius.

In the meantime, the advice offered in the poem's title, "Whatever You Say Say Nothing", has modulated into a statement of inertia and incapability: "And whatever you say, you say nothing". By the time the poem closes (with a repetition of the prefatory poem to Wintering Out, an appropriate chorus in this context) the only line to have eluded the "tight gag of place/And times", the only line to offer any hope whatsoever (even though it hovers

with some uncertainty between pride and a defiance that is not entirely devoid of pathos) is from the opening section:

Yet I live here, I live here too, I sing

This one statement is enough to challenge all the assumptions made in the poem about life in Ulster. It displaces even the strongest elements of doubt displayed in the poem. Its tone testifies to a recognition of kinship, of deep-rooted involvement with the community that compels him to celebrate his existence and theirs: in spite of elements that could ostensibly reduce this desire to a series of melodramatic gestures (as opposed to poems) he persists. For Heaney, the inevitability and the efficacy of this "singing" seem to be proof that (through his poetry) he is actually or potentially in touch with something positive that, if restored, can resolve the Ulster situation.

The scenes described in "Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication" (N, pp. 8-10) are perhaps more positive and optimistic than any others in North. In these poems Heaney locates the circumstances in which the harmony which eludes so many of the poems in North is most liable to occur. In "Funeral Rites" (N, pp. 15-18) Heaney is specific about what should be restored: "we pine for ceremony,/customary rhythms". Here these are seen in operation. "Sunlight" (N, pp. 8-9) opens with Heaney acknowledging an "absence". Yet this absence is not that referred to in "Gifts of Rain" (WO, p. 24). Rather than implying a debilitating absence of "antediluvian lore" (WO, p. 25), it appears to refer to the absence of all elements that are anathematic to a peaceful existence. For once it is a joyous "absence". We note the calm composure of the character in the poem which is accompanied by a corresponding difference in tone and texture from most of the other poems in North. Although it maintains the same minimal structure as the poems in North, "Part One", it

it is fleshed out: it exudes the warmth and contentment of love through a slow accumulation of rich, almost sumptuous vowel sounds, culminating in the final image:

> 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.

The companion poem, "The Seed Cutters" (N, p. 10), although it takes as its subject matter, a more blustery scenario, represents something of an ideal too. If the stability and reassurance of the yard scene in "Sunlight" are not immediately in evidence, there is no doubt as to Heaney's intention to evoke a peaceful, contented world. The seed cutters are depicted engaged in an activity that is described in terms that indicate the real and symbolic (by reference to the use of key words in Heaney's personally evolved vocabulary) potency of "calendar customs" and the nourishment that accompanies contact with the soil and with roots:

> Lazily halving each root that falls apart
> In the palm of the hand: a milky gleam
> And, at the centre, a dark watermark.

As is the case in "Digging", the poem moves towards the resolution of Heaney's initially ambiguous relation to the poem's protagonists ("They seem hundreds of years away"). The poem becomes a way of entering into and sharing the seed cutter's experience until Heaney becomes identified with them, involved in an analogous occupation:

> Under the broom
> Yellowing over them, compose the frieze
> With all of us there, our annonymities.

The use of the Shakespearean sonnet and the invocation to Breughel stress the strongly traditional elements involved in the form and content of this

evocation, and the desire to see them upheld.

However, the poems that constitute North could hardly offer a more marked contrast to the well-being envisaged in "Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication". If they do embody an ideal, then this ideal is a long way off and Heaney has a lot of ground to cover (literally) before he can rightfully embrace it. The traditional peasant life of the seed cutters is only one aspect of Ulster's inheritance. If Breughel's paintings offer a vision of stability that exists somewhere in the Ulster psyche, it is Goya's which get closer to the predominant realities. In the poem "Summer 1969" (N, pp. 69-70) a description of Goya's paintings employs a distinctly Irish vocabulary to make clear the sympathy Heaney feels with Goya's view of suffering humanity:

> I retreated to the cool of the Prado
> Goya's 'Shootings of the Third of May'
> Covered a wall--the thrown-up arms
> And spasm of the rebel, the helmeted
> And knapsacked military, the efficient
> Rake of the fusillade. In the next room
> His nightmares, grafted to the palace wall--
> Dark cyclones, hosting, breaking; Saturn
> Jewelled in the blood of his own children,
> Gigantic Chaos turning his brute hips
> Over the world. Also, that holmgang
> Where two berserks club each other to death
> For honour's sake, greaved in a bog, and sinking.

It also appears that Goya's different reactions to his environment were similar to Heaney's. He, too, used the specificity of time and place characteristic of social realism (as in North, "Part Two") as well as the mythological/symbolic mode (as in North, "Part One") to express the different responses possible to such circumstances, that will realize the two co-ordinates within which events take place.

Before considering North, "Part One" it is worth bearing in mind Heaney's observations, made in an interview with Seamus Deane, on these two

distinctly different modes, which he sees as being typified in the works of Kavanagh and Yeats respectively:

> On the one hand Kavanagh with his sense of 'home' and his almost extreme realization of the disobedience and peremptoriness of creative nature, on the other Yeats with his platonic rendition of 'heaven', and of what can be made of this in terms of deliberated poetic effort. You need both. North saw the shades of a possibility of such a union. 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.[2]

What Heaney is trying to achieve in North is a resolution of these two modes, "a poetry that would be neither a matter of day to day spontaneities alone, nor of a schematic mythologizing alone"[3] as Deane puts it. The poems in North, "Part Two" clearly carry out this intention. Each of the poems realize, in the situations they describe, a kind of latent, mundane "mythology". For example, the question and answer forms in "The Ministry of Fear" (N, p. 64). In one sense, they are simple, humourous accounts of daily life in Ulster. In another, they reveal a persistent authoritarianism that has arisen from it and has become integral to it. However, the poetry does not seek to separate these responses but to promote a simultaneous awareness of the ephemeral and enduring aspects of that particular situation, of its immediate and its wider contexts. However, the real problem for Heaney is that he is faced with a communal environment in which more specific activities apparently lack a mythology that would make them comprehensible. No pattern can be "abstracted" from the seemingly random and gratuitous day to day violence in Ulster. Heaney is, therefore, faced with the task of discovering and establishing a mythology that will give some "meaning" to these activities. And this will have to appear as an almost organic extension of them, rather than, as he implies of Yeats' mythologizing, an abstract and distant formulation that usurps their immediate integrity as daily occurrences,

which should have an equal importance.

It is important to recognize the exact nature of the parameters Heaney intends to be set by the two poems that frame "Part One" of North, "Antaeus" (N, p. 12) and "Hercules and Antaeus" (N, pp. 52-53). In the interview with Seamus Deane, Heaney has remarked on the significance of these poems, and the values and ideas that they symbolically imply. Hercules "represents the balanced rational light"[4] and is associated with the "humanist domain which produced what we call civilization in the West".[5] Antaeus, on the other hand, "represents the pieties of illiterate fidelity"[6] which are associated with cultural atavisms and an attitude loosely termed "bigotry".[7] The two are seen as conflicting approaches to existence and as Deane suggests "if rationality is to be worth the name it must confront and take account of Antaeus' bigotry".[8] Heaney's description of "Herc ules and Antaeus" indicates that he feels that the "poem drifts towards an assent to Hercules, though there was a sort of nostalgia for Antaeus",[9] though he makes it clear that in retrospect this was wrong. He observes that "There is always the question in everybody's mind whether the rational and humanist domain... should be allowed full command in the psyche, speech and utterance of Ulster".[10] As Deane points out: "this humanism, represented by Hercules... is a dangerous feature because the nature of humanism is always to detach itself from that out of which it initially arises...from its atavisms".[11] Heaney is in partial agreement but adds: "I think the obstinate voice of rational humanism is important".[12] For him the conflict is seen in terms of "a see saw, an advance-retire situation".[13] This is born out in the two poems that deal specifically with these two mythical characters. Although Antaeus appears to lose out in the end, I find that Heaney's "nostalgia" for him slightly understates the case.

In the poem "Antaeus" (N, p. 12) Antaeus gathers strength from contact with the soil:

> I cannot be weaned
> Off the earth's long contour, her river-veins.
> Down here in my cave
>
> Girdered with root and rock
> I am cradled in the dark that wombed me
> And nurtured in every artery
> Like a small hillock.

However, the imagery used here indicates that this "contact" is synonymous with a refusal to grow, a resistance to maturation. In "Hercules and Antaeus" (N, pp. 52-53) "Antaeus, the mould-hugger,/is weaned at last" by his opponent Hercules (who is "Sky-born and royal": associated with a different element and a different set of values). He is "grasped" "out of his element/into a dream of loss/...and origins" becoming a "pap for the dispossessed". In spite of Hercules's triumph it seems clear (although Heaney's comments on the poem compromise this interpretation) that it is to Antaeus-like traditions (earthy, fundamental) that Heaney as a poet inclines. This "dream of loss/and origins" could successfully characterize much of the substance of his poetry in general (the dual meaning of "pap"--a nipple, a small round hill resembling a nipple in shape--in the last line emphasizes this inclination towards a primitive land-bound mythology that Heaney is attempting to revive, and the nurture it is capable of providing).

The historical manifestations of this conflict between Antaeus and Hercules and the traditions they represent forms the basis for the poems in North, "Part One" in which Heaney "sounds" the Irish (and Northern European) past and his uncertain relationship to it. With disarming ease, he finds "satisfactory imaginative parallels"[14] between the context in which sectarian killings and earlier sacrificial killings take place (this has already been hinted at in "The Tollund Man" (WO, pp. 47-48)). The kind

of responses these connections invite Heaney to make put him in a difficult predicament. He cannot deny his roots, yet he cannot completely accept them either. As a result, he is more inclined to expose the complexity of his dilemma rather than to attempt to resolve it, maintaining, for the most part, a terse ambivalence. He recognizes a kinship with his pagan forbearers and their modern descendants and the attitudes towards existence that they share. Yet he remains quizzical, vacillating between attachment and detachment, uncertain of the extent of his complicity, of the nature of his guilt, if guilty he is. He seems to feel affinities with their way of life (and certainly there are similarities in approach and subject matter with the less violent aspects of these territorial religions in his poetry up to this point--even to the extent that language might have a primitive magical potency) yet their values are obviously irreconcilable with other prevailing schools of thought in Ulster to which he appears to be attracted.

In terms of the definition of his poetry offered in "Personal Helicon" (DN, p. 57) "...I rhyme/To see myself, to set the darkness echoing", North, "Part One" marks a complete achievement of this original goal. As Heaney digs deeper into the land-history-language-self continuum he makes contact with an older, buried part of the self, primitive, irrational, violent. He presents us with a kind of dramatic encounter between the rational part of the self and its irrational foundation (his poetry meets its essence?). The ensuing confrontation finds Heaney in an almost schizophrenic mood. The relief at finding this part of the self (the quest achieved) is edged out by the prospect of having to repress it, to effect a necessary dissociation of sensibility. Truly, an act of self-denial.

The rarified atmosphere in which the quest depicted in North, "Part One" takes place, is accompanied by a distinct change in the form and texture

of the poetry. If Heaney's previous work has been characterized by its earthy, sensuous and substantial qualities (a kind of "body" poetry, testifying to the equality of immediate physical experience with its intellectual implications) the poetry in North, "Part One" is in complete contrast to this. The verse is sparse and compact, almost skeletal (frequent references to bones, ribs, the spine, testify to its stripped structure and the fact that it is more concerned with the framework than the fleshy parts of his existence). The poems suggest the tingling of an activated central nervous system as Heaney descends literally (down the page, through the land, throwing out the palpable traces of history as he uncovers them) and figuratively (down the "backbone" of history, of culture, and of the layered self) in a search for total definition. And all the time, as a poet, he is quarrying the language for all he can get out of it. In North, "Part One" there is a perfect coalescence of vision and form, a crystallization of all that has been implicit in his poetry up to this point.

In the title poem "North" (N, pp. 19-20) a voice relates to Heaney the procedure he must follow if he is to make contact with the past:

> It said, 'Lie down
> in the word-hoard, burrow
> the coil furrowed brain.
>
> Compose in darkness.
> Expect aurora borealis
> in the long foray
> but no cascade of light.
>
> Keep your eye clear
> as the bleb of an icicle,
> trust the feel of what nubbed treasure
> your hands have known'.

Workmanlike in the word-hoard, brain-burrowing, Heaney must persevere with a process of gradual enlightenment. Typically, he is directed to "trust the feel of what nubbed treasure/your hands have known". He must have faith in

intuition, maintain contact with the palpable and rely on a, hopefully, pristine vision if he is to travel back past the violent social disruption and disorder that followed the Viking invasions of Ireland. In this way he can reach the origins of a preceding native culture which would supply him with a more appropriate mythology for his work, presumably related to that in the poem "Belderg". It will also allow him to pursue his descent towards the sources of his own "self".

"Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces" (N, pp. 21-24) utilizes the techniques advocated in "North", as Heaney "sounds" Viking colonial culture in Ireland. A "small outline" incised on a piece of bone stimulates a poetry of possibilities, as Heaney uses it to "conjure" in, improvising a vision of the past from this palpable artifact, one of the "craft's" mysteries. He surrenders himself to his suggestions, lets it exert complete control over his powers of association until it becomes "a buoyant/migrant line [of thought]/...That enters [his] longhand,/turns cursive, unscarfing/a zoomorphic wake,/a worm of thought/[he] follow[s] into the mud". This description accounts symbolically for both the genesis and the subsequent form of the poem, as it savours word-lists, turns on puns and word association, and seemingly realizes each image's potential for generating (logically?) the one that follows it. As in "North" the Viking culture it penetrates is depicted in less than favourable terms. The Vikings are envisaged as "neighbourly, scoretaking/ killers, haggers/and hagglers, gombeen men,/hoarders of grudge and gain". Heaney uses a surreal image to describe the kind of violence they indulged in (this surrealism that touches a lot of the poems in North, "Part One" at some point accentuates the primal, irrational, dream/nightmare ambience in which he is working):

> With a butcher's aplomb
> they spread out your lungs

and made you warm wings
for your shoulders

and this leads him to invoke the help of the "Old fathers", representatives of the native culture who attempted to resist the Vikings' colonial incursions. But in spite of their efforts modern-day Dublin is seen as directly descending from the Viking culture (the word "Dublin" itself has "conjured" up part of these meditations). This is compounded in Jimmy Farrell's speech (taken from The Playboy of the Western World) that forms the basis for the sixth section of the poem, in which he associates the "skulls they have/in the city of Dublin" with those of Danes who drowned in "the Flood". And as Heaney makes his way through Dublin his "words lick around/cobbled quays, go hunting/ lightly as pampooties/over the skull-capped ground".

In the course of the poem Heaney has also managed to locate a direct predecessor, the model investigator, Hamlet, whose quest shares uncanny similarities with his own, in both its circumstances and its methodology. Heaney in a modd of quiet hysteria, adopts the mock-heroic:

I am Hamlet the Dane,
skull handler, parablist,
smeller of rot

in the state, infused
with its poisons,
pinioned by ghosts
and affections,

murders and pieties,
coming to consciousness
by jumping in graves,
dithering, blathering.

However, it is to an older Iron-Age culture that Heaney returns seeking enlightenment. The Vikings are still seen as intruding colonists, importing an unfamiliar urban, materialistic ideology, characterized by its greed and insistence on the necessity for trade as fundamental to society's well-being. They fall half-way between the Antaeus-like and Herculean philosophies,

betraying both.

The first sign that this culture he seeks has actually existed is indicated in "Belderg" (N, pp. 13-14). "Quernstones out of a bog" bring Heaney in under "The soft-piled centuries" towards "the first (it is noticeable how different the "first" world of North is from that of Wintering Out) plough-marks,/The stone-age fields". There is a distinct continuity between past and present. The landscape is fossilized, "Its stone-wall patternings/Repeated before our eyes/In the stone walls of Mayo". Naturally enough these patterns that persist through each layer of land/history (imaged in the poem's final stanza as symbolic "vertebrae") lead to a consideration of how they might signify "persistence,/A congruence of lives". Using the name Mossbawn and its varying etymologies, (Cf. SP, p. 35) which are as "mutable as sound", he initially derives a "forked root" for his ancestry. On the one hand, it could lead bac k to the English planters. On the other, it could lead back to an indigenous culture, much older, which figures in the surreal vision of persistence, continuity, and congruence:

> 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.

And the imagery alludes to the possibility that this culture might turn out to be the core and backbone of his own. Heaney follows up this discovery in the series of "bog" poems.

"Kinship" (N, pp. 40-45) re-affirms his relationship with the bog landscape and the history it embraces, effecting a blend of the possibilities suggested in "Bogland" (DD, pp. 55-56) with the discoveries related in "The

Tollund Man" (WO, pp. 47-48). The "heiroglyphic peat" contains the connection between the domestic present and its darker origins: it maintains "the cooped secrets/of process and ritual". Yet Heaney's litany of love to this landscape and its history, his trust in its ability to retain and renew, is continually disrupted by an uncertainty about the validity of those assumptions. More sinister elements manifest themselves:

> Kinned by heiroglyphic
> peat on a spread field
> to the strangled victim,
> the love-nest in the bracken...
>
> I love the spring
> off the ground,
> each bank a gallows drop

These introduce a real tension into the poem as Heaney's instinctive response is complicated and disrupted by the facts of history, a complication the poem subsequently attempts to come to terms with. The second section of the poem opens with a succession of words that probe, quiz, attempt to find and establish the true significance of the landscape for Heaney: "Quagmire, swampland, morass/the slime kingdoms,/domains of the cold-blooded,/of mud pads and dirtied eggs". Each word prompts a potential identity for the landscape, but none of them "sound" right, none offer a point of entry into the land. "But bog/meaning soft" initiates the slow, controlled, evocative chant that penetrates the memory of the land, the "outback of [his] mind" revealing aspects of the "national consciousness" (SP, p. 55) and aspects of the self:

> the fall of windless rain,
> pupil of amber,
>
> Ruminant ground,
> digestion of mollusc
> and seed-pod
> deep pollen bin.
>
> Earth-pantry, bone-vault

sun-bank, embalmer
of votive goods
and sabred fugitives.

Insatiable bride.
Sword-swallower,
casket, midden,
floe of history.

The succession of kennings has an almost panoramic effect in terms of the facets of history it discloses and the potential self-definition it composes. But the main feature of the verse is the way it generates its own rhythm that all but flows over the actual significance of the words themselves (which are well-chosen, but whose meanings are not immediately obvious, adding to the sense of mystique, to the sense of recent discovery). This strategy lures us into a total agreement with Heaney's own sentiments: we accept his findings in the same (unquestioning?) spirit as he does. The verse has a fluid, hypnotic effect which invites us to comply more with its music than with its sense. He moves through admiration and adoration towards the close of the third section which ends in mythic evocation, Heaney saying: "I stand at the edge of centuries/facing a goddess". But against this flow there are the jarring implications of the "sabred fugitives", and the ambiguous "Sword-swallower" suggesting both circus magic and the swords of a warlike culture. These are enough to maintain the dualities in the poem's opening section.

However, Heaney opens the fourth section with a reiteration of his faith in the bog landscape (as the "outback of [his] mind", national consciousness, preserver of previous cultures, retainer of all that has happened to it, revealer of "loss/and origins"). First in "Bogland" (DD, p. 56), now in "Kinship", his confidence undiminished, he defies Yeats:

This centre holds
and spreads

And using the landscape/language metaphor Heaney once again imagines that he, the language, and the landscape are all a part of the same activity previously symbolized in "sounding":

> This is the vowel of earth
> dreaming its root
> in flowers and snow

In the fifth section of the poem, archaeological finds preserved in the bog stimulate and permit Heaney's passage back through history, contact with a "root" culture, and a kind of fantasy re-enactment of a former self:

> I deified the man
> who rode there,
> god of the waggon
> the hearth-feeder
>
> I was his privileged
> attendant, a bearer
> of bread and drink,
> the squire of his circuits.

If "deified" marks an unequivocal reverence for this way of life, the final section returns to the more ambiguous relevations made in the poem's opening sections, its tone unrelievedly sombre. Heaney turns to (challenges?) Tacitus for his information, basing the section on two extracts from Germania. Tacitus writes of the pagan sacrifices that were an integral part of the culture with which Heaney has tentatively associated himself (and, in "Section V", completely identified himself with):

> At a time laid down in the distant past all peoples that are related by blood meet through their delegations in a wood, which the prophetic utterances of their ancestors, and inherited awe, have rendered sacked. Here they celebrate the grim initiation of their barbarous rites with a human sacrifice for the good of the community.[15]

and speaking of the Earth Goddess:

> In an island of the ocean is a holy grove, and in it a consecrated chariot, covered in robes. 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 and all places keep holiday, as many as she

> thinks worthy to receive and entertain her. They make no war, take no arms; every weapon is put away: peace and quiet are then, and then alone, known and loved, until the same priest returns the goddess to her temple, when she has had her fill of the society of mortals. 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 are straight-away swallowed by that same lake. Hence a mysterious terror and an ignorance full of piety as to what may be which men only behold to die.[16]

Parallels are evident between this lifestyle and that of the Ulster community at present. In Heaney's case, he has previously intimated the possibility that the poet might also be a "priest" (cf. "The Diviner" (DN, p. 36)) "interpreting" mysterious "presences": and his poetry has frequently exhibited, in both its tone and in its attitudes, a "terror" and an "ignorance full of piety". So both the way he works and the atmosphere he works in, share definite affinities with this earlier culture. In the case of the community, Heaney has already observed that he perceives in these "archaic barbarous rites", "archetypal pattern(s)" that persist in contemporary Ulster society (SP, p. 57). But this does not mean that Heaney is content to align himself with this world-view. The "desolate peace" it offers (another version of "terrible beauty", of the Tollund Man's "sad freedom" (WO, p. 48)) seems to worry Heaney, it appears to be an unsatisfactory consolation. The poem here testifies to a state of exhaustion: Heaney seems bewildered, possibly even feeling betrayed in a situation where "nothing will suffice" (finding what will suffice seems to be a major concern of the poems in North). Yet he resists the rational gaze of Tacitus (whose remark on the activities described in the second extract, "if you will believe it" mixes incredulity with disdain and disgust) under which the continuing "slaughter/for the common good" is viewed as a blatant paradox. However, for Heaney, as he gravitates towards a recognition of kinship with these pagan ancestors and their modern day counterparts ("how we slaughter/for the common good", "how

the goddess swallows/our love and terror") within an Antaeus-like context these activities more or less make sense. So, in terms of the poem's overall dual perspective, it seems that Heaney opposes the humanist rationale implied in the views of Tacitus, preferring to admit his relationship with this older culture as being more enduring, more liable to lead him towards the "roots" which he is attempting to discover.

The remaining "bog" poems concern the discovery of bodies preserved for centuries under the layers of peat. These are sacrificial victims who have been "slaughtered for the common good" and are palpable evidence for Heaney of the Iron-Age culture which he is convinced shares links and similarities with his own, both of them united in a common mythology.

In "Bog Queen" (N, pp. 32-34) he imagines himself as one of those sacrificed to the goddess of the ground. The "bog queen" is preserved and renewed by the ground awaiting re-birth. Once "underground" she does not decay but achieves a mythical stature:

> dawn suns groped over my head
> and cooled at my feet,
>
> ...
>
> My diadem grew carious
> gemstones dropped
> in the peat floe
> like the bearings of history
>
> ...
>
> I knew winter cold
> like the nuzzle of fjords
> at my thighs

But although the poem seeks to evoke this status, conferred on the "bog queen" as recognition by the goddess of the ground of the value of her sacrifice, Heaney's main point in writing the poem is somewhat different. It opens with the speaker telling us:

> I lay waiting
> between turf-face and demesne wall,

between heathery levels
and glass-toothed stone.

From Heaney's point of view it seems that the "bog queen" (and the culture she comes from) might be discovered by either of two parties. In the poem these are represented by the turfcutter (native, Antaeus-like outlook, sympathetic) and the peer's wife (colonist, Herculean outlook, unsympathetic). The one is respectful, the other is a "robber" forcing the "bog queen" to suffer an ignominious birth. So the poem raises simple but important points. This cultural heritage is liable to potentially different interpretations depending on its significance to those who come in contact with its various manifestations. Its true value is probably only going to be discovered by those native to it, who have an intuitive sensitivity to it that will allow them to understand its processes (hence Heaney adopting the persona in the poem as a sign of kinship, of good faith). It is as much a matter of "feel" ("braille/for the creeping influences") as it is of objective study.

"Come to the Bower" (N, p. 31) (also the title of an Irish folk song calling on exiles to return home, which adds a particular significance to the poem) finds Heaney "Foraging past the burst gizzards/Of coin hoards" to the "dark-bowered queen", the poet as sympathetic turfcutter. He reaches past "The riverbed's washed/Dream of gold to the bullion/Of her Venus bone". Heaney is compelled by instinct to make contact with this pagan culture (a kind of love-act that discovers real "treasure", a concept which turns up in the imagery in several of the poems, indicating the value he places on these "finds").

The sonnet "Strange Fruit" (N, p. 39) initially appears to be similar in certain respects to "Bog Queen" (N, pp. 32-34) and "Come to the Bower" (N, p. 31) as it relates the uncovering of more "perishable treasure". The octet concerns itself with the girl's "leathery beauty". But there is something

sinister about her appearance: "Her broken nose is dark as a turf clod,/ Her eyeholes blank as pools in the old workings". Then the last four lines of the sestet complicate, even oppose, the original perceptions. This is stressed in the broken line, with its emphatic pauses that begins them:

> Murdered, forgotten, nameless, terrible
> Beheaded girl, outstaring axe
> And beatification, outstaring
> What had begun to feel like reverence.

If reverence and beatification are immediate, intuitive responses (as they are in "The Tollund Man") to this "strange fruit" they are modified by a more rational awareness of the horror involved in her death. The "gradual ease" (this attests to a real temptation, a genuine possibility of adopting the initial reaction) of Diodorus Siculus among "the likes of [these people]" must be resisted: the darker aspects of that society and the part of Heaney they represent are repulsed. Even though they exert a strong attraction for (the Antaeus-like) Heaney he feels compelled to deny them: the victim conveys a sense of the brutality that surrounded her death, that effectively destroys any attempt to see it as anything other than murder. Heaney, the humanist, appears to reject the validity of such violence even as part of a well established religious cult. This context is not enough in itself to justify such actions: it does not, in any way, alter the basic fact that this is an act of savagery, and is inadequate as either an explanation or an excuse for it. In a "Herculean" sense it makes it all the more meaningless rather than meaningful, it does not suffice. Heaney's response in this case is unequivocal, one of the few instances in which the humanist strain ultimately prevails.

"The Graubaulle Man" (N, pp. 35-36) adopts a similar poetic structure to "Strange Fruit", but instead of moving towards a firm resolution it becomes increasingly hesitant, as Heaney's ambivalence to the situation

makes itself manifest. The poem's opening description of the body in the bog is marked by an aesthetic appreciation of its superficial appearance. Over the years the sacrificial victim has been assimilated into the land: he has become one with the goddess to whom he was offered and who has preserved him, bestowing upon him an earthy beauty, permanent and enduring:

> The grain of his wrists
> is like bog oak,
> the ball of his heel
>
> like a basalt egg.

As the description continues, one simple word, effectively placed, intrudes and throws Heaney's response into confusion, forcing him into a complete re-examination of the kind of context in which his initial considerations were made:

> The head lifts
> the chin is a visor
> raised above the vent
> of his slashed throat

This graphic detail, almost sensational in effect, heightens the tension in the poem. Even the sound of the word "slashed" prompts associations with an intense and efficient violence that disrupts the poem's previously steady flow and offers an insight into the kind of society that would undertake such an act. The last two stanzas focus on Heaney's dilemma when faced with these two seemingly irreconcilable viewpoints. He remains in Heaney's memory:

> 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.

Faced with discerning a possible choice being implied by Heaney, we cannot

underestimate the force of "actual" in this context. Taken in connection with the macabre description of sectarian killings in the final stanza, it conveys an urgency that threatens to displace any of the poem's more "abstract" assertions. The balance between "beauty" and "atrocity" signifying an Antaeus-like identification with cultural precedents and a "Herculean" rejection of them, tends to move in favour of the latter. Although not denying atavisms completely, Heaney admits to the possibility that they could be both unacceptable in themselves, and inappropriate as a context in which to interpret contemporary events. He questions both the premises on which the original cults were based, and the part they play in his own mythology. He seems to favour a more rational, moral assessment, the myth of the "Dying Gaul" being "too strictly compassed/on his shield," too easy (and ultimately evasive) a formulation.

Although this is not one of the considerations in "Punishment" (N, pp. 37-38) he returns to the dual perspective that initially characterizes "Kinship" and "The Graubaulle Man". Heaney attempts to enter further into the complexity of the situation by adopting shifting points of view that permit him to examine all the possible perspectives that could and do come into operation. As the poem opens, he is sympathetic to the plight of the murdered adultress. He imagines the circumstances of her death:

> I can feel the tug
> of the halter at the nape
> of her neck, the wind
> on her naked front.
>
> It blows her nipples
> to amber beads,
> it shakes the frail rigging
> of her ribs.

Heaney invites us to share his compassion for the victim by portraying her as being vulnerable and fragile (simultaneously inviting us to condemn her

killers and the culture they represent). However, this response is slightly complicated by the fact that the description of the scene is not without its own austere beauty. And this is almost compounded by the depiction of the excavated body, which, like that of the other victims, has been assimilated by the land/Earth Goddess, the horror of her death diminished by its power to preserve:

> Under which at first
> she was a barked sapling
> that is dug up
> oak-bone, brain firkin:
>
> her shaved head
> like a stubble of black corn,
> her blindfold a soiled bandage,
> her noose a ring
>
> to store
> the memories of love.

The contrary associations in the line "her noose a ring" now introduces a paradox which defines the conflicting sentiments Heaney seems to entertain (and their simultaneity). The noose is the agent of death but envisaged as a "ring" it becomes a symbol of marriage and continuity. It is as if the girl's death fulfils something constructive rather than destructive, that it is positive rather than negative in its implications. Heaney continues, maintaining this dualism by admitting her culpability, yet returning to a contemplation of her beauty which can only elicit further pity:

> Little adultress
> before they punished you
>
> you were flaxen-haired
> undernourished, and your
> tar-black face was beautiful.

But the poem gradually moves away from this point of view, as Heaney drops his "Herculean" stance and places himself firmly in line with the culture that condemned her. When he calls her "My poor scapegoat" it is clear that

he isn't simply referring to the victim's role in her society, but also to her function as a scapegoat for Heaney himself, allowing him to indulge his own (dishonest) "humanist" aspirations. Heaney "almost" loves her, yet if the truth were to be known, he too "would have cast.../the stones of silence" and reproaches himself for being simply "the artful voyeur". The poem's last stanzas sum up (but certainly don't resolve) the dilemma that runs through all these poems:

> 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.

He acknowledges cultural continuities and the persistence of tribal customs that are, by now, highly evolved. And he recognizes that in spite of his "conniving" in "civilized outrage" (itself something of a contradiction in terms, a specious, impossible combination of responses) he shares these values. They are as deeply rooted in him as they are in the community around him.

I would like to finish this consideration of North, "Part One" by turning to "Funeral Rites" (N, pp. 15-18) which offers quite a contrast to the "bog" poems. It refers instead to "the cud of memory/allayed for once, arbitration/of the feud placated", to a victim of the violence who goes "unavenged". The poem centres on the assumption that "Now as news comes in/of each neighbourly murder/we pine for ceremony,/customary rhythms". The opening section, describing a funeral in which Heaney himself has been involved, alludes to the consolation and solace that ritual lends to the dead person's relatives. In fact, the image of wax melting down, "veining"

the candles, all but reverses the associations death normally has. Heaney can even kneel "admiring it all". While these funeral rites help to minimize the trauma involved (the funeral cortege is envisaged as a "black glacier", cold, powerful, overwhelming) they are a part of the past. Heaney, given the present situation in Ulster, proposes their restoration on a much grander scale. He has a vision (magnanimous and magnificent) of the restoration of the great megalithic chambers of the Boyne valley, and a funeral procession of "ten thousand engines" moving in "slow triumph" towards them. Not only will this provide adequate "ceremony", it will also unify the feuding factions as they recognize the potency of their cultural heritage (that precedes and transcends sectarian division). This is one aspect of native pre-historic culture that could prove entirely beneficial.

The poems in North mark the achievement of Heaney's dictum that proposes poetry as being a "revelation of the self to the self, as restoration of the culture to itself" and "poems as elements of continuity" (SP, p. 41). He has evolved a particular mythology that (although it may not become an essential feature of future Irish culture) embodies the complex patterns shared by both his and the community's psyche, and allows him to express his, generally ambivalent, responses to them.

Nor surprisingly, the intensity and magnitude of his enterprise has taken its toll on him in more ways than one. "Exposure", (N, pp. 72-73) the final poem in North, is a poem of exhaustion, agitated by a kind of exasperation that, in spite of his achievement, sections of his audience remain unimpressed, even antagonistic. Heaney has said in an interview following the writing of North:

> I have begun to feel a danger in the responsible, adjudicating stance toward communal experience. I just feel an early warning system telling me to get back inside my head.[17]

In my final chapter I would like to direct attention to the nature and consequences of the reaction to this situation that are an essential feature of Field Work.

## CHAPTER FOUR

In North, "Part Two" Heaney adopts quite a wide variety of personae in his attempt to discover the exact relationship that has developed between him and his community as his poetic career progresses. He is poet, prisoner, slave, exile, "inner émigré". And all these exist in an atmosphere charged with distrust, accusation and reproach. Clearly, Heaney's new status is becoming problematic for him. The blend of private and public concerns that had initially proved so productive, has brought with it an accountability, and subsequently exposed a kind of vulnerability in Heaney. His increasing involvement with communal matters, with a more expansive "nationalistic" poetic has led to a dramatic encounter between the exigencies of personal vocation and public demand (even though ironically the more "objective" his poetry seems to become, the more it offers "subjective" definition). In "Exposure" (N, pp. 72-73) we find him asking:

> 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?

These questions lead us back to those that concerned him in Death of a Naturalist. Inevitably they prompt a revaluation of the place of the poet and his poetry in society, and an answer to one of those "central preoccupying questions" that is omnipresent in Heaney's work: "how should a poet properly live and write?" (SP, p. 13).

The poem "The Badgers" (FW, pp. 25-26) articulates what I see as being the major issues in Field Work. Observing the badger, Heaney poses a crucial question:

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

The rest of the poem leading up to this question offers, although somewhat indirectly, an answer to it. Both Heaney and the community in which he lives have strayed from the life they've been shown. Instead of the simple earthy existence led by the badger, they have chosen to live one characterized by violence and murder. Its unnaturalness is emphasized by Heaney. It exists "between the cradle and the explosion".

When the badger appears at the opening of the poem its presence is immediately associated with "some soft returning" of one of "The murdered dead". This speculation by Heaney's companion is telling. It indicates how deeply rooted his/her acceptance of this "alternative" existence is. This person's response reveals a fixated, fatalistic imagination (I think in a couple of the poems in Field Work Heaney is subject to this himself. In his poetry it reveals itself as being obsessive and reductive in the imagery and associations he uses, as for example in "Sonnet VIII" (FW, p. 40) and the close of "High Summer" (FW, pp. 45-46)). However, Heaney hesitates:

> But could it not have been
> some violent shattered boy
> nosing out what got mislaid
> between the cradle and the explosion

I take it that "what got mislaid" in the boy's lifetime was the life that has been shown to Heaney by the badger at the end of the poem. If "Visitations are taken for signs" this particular one is a warning that the Ulster

community has gone horribly astray (and if the type of response to it given by Heaney's companion persists, it will continue to do so).

"At a second house" the duntings of the badgers seem to communicate personally with Heaney in his role as a poet (the reference to "the laurels" make this context clear). He hears "intimations whispered/about being vaguely honoured". This could have several implications. If he is "honoured" for the kind of intimation he perceives in the second section of the poem all is well and good. It is a function of the poet under these kind of circumstances to proffer (even if this is a form of idealism) notions of a proper existence and in the process to discover and reocver what has been "mislaid". This is a kind of service he does the community. On the other hand, if he is being "honoured" by this society itself that has gone so far wrong, then he is guilty of a double betrayal. He has left the land (the focal point for much of the poetry in Death of a Naturalist). But not only has he abandoned the life he was born into, but he has made a reputation in a society that has as a group rejected that kind of lifestyle and the values it upholds. In this case the badgers are warning him, which may account for the fact that he "fears" them more than he "honours" them (which would be an attitude appropriate to a naturalist as Heaney supposes himself to be).

If this second interpretation is slightly speculative, one cannot dismiss the fearfulness with which Heaney approaches his role as a poet in Ulster and the kind of responsibilities it is liable to place on him. And again Heaney is returning to one of the prominent themes in his earlier work, that of the relationship between poetry and the life close to the earth. In Field Work this is again a recurring preoccupation for Heaney.

However, Heaney's uncertainty over his function as a poet in Ulster had begun to manifest itself in the second part of North. Several of the

poems in it deal particularly with the problems peculiar to the poet involved in a society that is in the midst of civil unrest.

In "Summer 1969" (N, pp. 69-70) we find Heaney reproaching himself for not adopting and adhering to a firmer poetic policy. His retreat to Madrid is seen as reprehensible in the light of the examples set by Lorca and Goya, artists working in circumstances similar to his own. The self-depreciating tone of the opening lines decries his lack of commitment to the community: "While the Constabulary covered the mob/Firing into the Falls, I was suffering/ Only the bullying sun of Madrid". Although he is reading "The life of Joyce," a fellow exile, the poem continually reverts to images drawn from Irish landscapes, mixing feelings of guilt, nostalgia and an almost impersonal persistence of "a sense of place" (similar to that depicted in "Gravities" (DN, p. 43), "Blinding in Paris, for his party-piece/Joyce named the shops along O'Connell Street"). Strategies are proposed: "'Go back,' one said, 'try to touch the people.'/Another conjured Lorca from his hill". And he imagines the response of Goya: "He painted with his fists and elbows, flourished/The stained cape of his heart as history changed".

Yet, though Heaney ultimately adopts a similar stance, "Heroic" and self-sacrificing, it has not been met with the kind of approval it merits. We observe how the poem "Freedman" (N, p. 61) plots the stages of his emancipation from a state of social subjugation. He is redeemed when

> Poetry arrived in that city--
> I would abjure all cant and self-pity--
> And poetry wiped my brow and sped me.
> Now they will say I bite the hand that fed me.

This is a variation on one of Heaney's favourite themes: although poetry may be a means of liberation, it can also be a way of isolation. It may permit closer contact with the realities of any given situation, but it can also increase the distance between the poet and his community which is not

necessarily interested in the kind of revelations that poetry can offer. In "The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream" (N, p. 56) a sense of rejection and betrayal reaches paranoiac proportions, as Heaney takes the "hypocrite lecteur" motif to an extreme. Although his poetry has attempted to draw the line "through bigotry and sham" in an effort to "lure the tribal shoals to epigram/And order" (N, p. 59) this has not been met with approval. He is tortured and made to suffer by the state, his commitment to "[his] wronged people" yielding nothing but pain. The poem's final lines are pointed:

> In the cell, I wedge myself with outstretched arms
> in the corner and heave, I jump on the concrete flags to
> test them. Were those your eyes just now at the hatch?

The reader has become, by implication, an accomplice with those who would see the poet condemned for his enterprise, the kind of legislation he would introduce being viewed as an unnecessary and uncalled for intrusion. Even the commandant recognizes the "power" of poetry in these kind of circumstances. He is genuinely "honoured" to "add a poet to [his] list", presumably seeing him as a worthy opponent. It seems that Heaney's problems are multiplied. He will admit to having taken "scared, irrevocable steps" (FW, p. 14) but the more his commitment to the community increases the more it encounters opposition not only from expected quarters, but from unexpected ones as well. The more he and his poetry achieve, the less the audience seem to want to do with it. One cannot rule out the possibility that whereas Death of a Naturalist offers the community an acceptable image of itself, North is inclined to get too close to the bone, offering a less than flattering one in its place. As well as this, presumably there are those, who, considering the realms in which North, "Part Two" operates, would like to see Heaney adopting a more radical political stance, to which Heaney can honestly reply: "I am neither internee nor informer" (N, p. 73).

"Exposure" (N, pp. 72-73) offers a self portrait of Heaney that focuses these problems and the impact they have on him. He questions the function his poetry has fulfilled, the stance he has adopted and attempts to account for his current situation. Ideally, his poetry would be "a gift like a slingstone/Whirled for the desperate" yet experience has forced him to retire from the fray, to escape from "the massacre", and like Yeats in "Meditations in Time of Civil War" he takes "protective colouring/From bole and bark, feeling/Every wind that blows". And this has been accomapnied by an introspection, which considering the relatively high-profile social concerns in the rest of the collection, is like an inner "emigration". But despite his dejection there is a quiet but tenacious optimism. The rain's "low conducive voices/Mutter about let-downs and erosions/And yet each drop recalls/...The diamond absolutes". Even though his musings mean that he misses "The once-in-a-lifetime portent,/The comet's pulsing rose", it is clear that it is from these "diamond absolutes", and from the more mundane considerations raised in the poem, that his existence will benefit. In disdaining the apocalyptic and the heroic he asserts his perogative as an individual to make a choice, to follow his own intuitive sense of what course will best suit both himself and his art. However, Field Work still finds Heaney in earnest over the lifestyle and the art that is most examplary, that is most appropriate in modern Ireland, as he sounds out both others' and his own.

"An Afterwards" (FW, p. 44) is a look at the domestic turmoil that is a possible contingency of the poet's adherence to his vocation, a humourous adaptation of the poem "Dolphin" in which Robert Lowell confesses:

> I have sat or listened to too many
> words of the collaborating muse
> and plotted too freely with my life
> not avoiding injury to others

not avoiding injury to myself

The woman in the poem characterizes the poet as an uncaring, careering opportunist. Poets are "Unyielding, spurred, ambitious, unblunted,/ Lockjawed, mantrapped, each a fastened badger/Jockeying for position...". She has closed her ears to "the sulphurous news of poets and poetry" preferring to find some relief by indulging in Dantesque visions of retribution. Heaney is inclined to admit to her accusations. He has forgone "that one evening of elder bloom/And hay, when wild roses were fading", presumably to compose nostalgic evocations of those kind of evenings in times gone by, regretting their passing. But in the midst of this neo-classical soap opera one question breaks through with undisguised urgency:

> ...'My sweet, who wears the bays
> In our green land above, whose is the life
> Most dedicated and exemplary?

In Field Work a group of elegies find Heaney describing lives and aspirations that prove inspirational and examplary. He uses the poems as occasions to raise questions about different lifestyles, the role of the individual in his society, and, in "Casualty" (FW, pp. 21-24), the function and value of "craft". And from the dreams of the defeated Heaney tentatively constructs a vision of an ideal society that could succeed (has proceeded?) and replace the current one so antagonistic to it.

"Casualty" (FW, pp. 21-24), a deliberate and ironic echo of Yeats's "The Fisherman", is the portrait of a murdered fisherman, a former friend of Heaney's. Their relationship is strained by a certain awkwardness arising from their apparently different professional interests, but the poem's third section reconciles this divergency as both Heaney and the fishermen are seen to share the same fundamental "freeing" craft:

I was taken in his boat,
The screw purling, turning
Indolent fathoms white,
I tasted freedom with him.
To get out early, haul
Steadily off the bottom,
Dispraise the catch, and smile
As you find a rhythm
Working you, slow mile by mile,
Into your proper haunt
Somewhere, well out, beyond...

However, his death exposes questionable assumptions made by the community that has killed him. The hard facts of social circumstance ("PARAS THIRTEEN ...BOGSIDE NIL") seem to demand total commitment and dedication to the community. Heaney's description of the "common funeral" of the murdered civilians realizes a community that is, paradoxically, strengthened by an adversity that gives birth to a renewed sense of unity: "The common funeral/ Unrolled its swaddling band,/Lapping, tightening/Till we were braced and bound/Like brothers in a ring". As a result, when Heaney asks "How culpable was he/That last night when he broke/Our [sic] tribe's complicity?", there is no simple answer. Yet the poem does drift towards an assertion of the individual's right to exist outside such a community, the right of the "craftsman" to find his own element and to work in it, to fulfil what is almost an obligation to something other than "tribal" mores (the parallels between the fisherman's and Heaney's situations becomes clearer as the poem develops, the poem itself assenting to the fisherman's act and so marking a break in Heaney's complicity with the "tribe").

"The Strand at Lough Beg" (FW, pp. 17-18) and "A Postcard from North Antrim" (FW, pp. 19-20) effect a similar juxtaposition of model lives and their dreams and desires with ignoble, savage deaths. In "The Strand at Lough Beg", Heaney's cousin (like the fisherman and Francis Ledwidge) dies where he wasn't known and "far from what [he] knew/The lowland clays and

waters of Lough Beg,/Church Island's spire, its soft treeline of yew", the "local mecca" described in "Mossbawn" (SP, p. 19). Heaney identifies completely with the countrified, peace-loving McCartney. His lifestyle (recalling Heaney's own in Death of a Naturalist) is anathema to the more destructive forces that have led to his death. Heaney recalls that

> ...you and yours and yours and mine fought shy
> Spoke an old language of conspirators
> And could not crack the whip or seize the day:
> Big-voiced scullions, herders, feelers round
> Haycocks and hindquarters, talkers in byres,
> Slow arbitrators of the burial ground.

The same simple pastoral existence is envisaged in "A Postcard from North Antrim". Like the fisherman and Heaney's cousin the subject of the elegy is individualistic and enigmatic. But in an atmosphere where violence is a fact of domestic life, completely integrated into the community's routine, even the "clown" of the town isn't exempted from stopping "A pointblank teatime bullet". But Heaney reveals Sean Armstrong as one similar to himself, one who dreamt about (but never saw) a return to the land. Heaney tells him to

> Get up from your blood on the floor.
> Here's another boat
> In grass by the lough shore,
> Turf smoke, a wired hen-run--
> Your local, hoped for, unfound commune.

And both the life led by McCartney and that yearned for by Armstrong have their similarities with Heaney's own ideal "township built of light" (FW, p. 27), the "original townland" of "Harvest Bow" (FW, p. 58), and that described in the opening section of "Triptych" (FW, pp. 12-14):

> In that neuter original loneliness
> From Brandon to Dunseverick
> I think of small-eyed survivor flowers,
> The pined-for unmolested orchid.

> I see a stone house by a pier.
> Elbow room. Broad window light.
> The heart lifts. You walk twenty yards
> To the boats and buy mackerel.

Although "Casualty" (FW, pp. 21-24) deals to a certain extent with the role of the artist in his society and the degree to which he must serve it, it is to two famous artists that Heaney turns in order to establish the kind of commitment they showed to their vocation, and by implication, the kind he could and should show to his.

The poem "Elegy" (FW, pp. 31-32) indicates that, for Heaney, Robert Lowell's was a life "dedicated and exemplary". Faced with the choice of an existence that could be either "timorous or bold" Heaney (rhetorically?) associates himself with the former, while admiring Lowell for adopting the latter. And Lowell appears to have an unlikely predecessor in Yeats. The poem contains several significant verbal echoes from Heaney's lecture "Yeats as an Example?" (SP, pp. 98-114) and these suggest that he views Yeats's and Lowell's achievements as comparable. Both were defiant and forceful characters, both were uncompromising in their assertion of the value of their art, and in the application of it: their trust in it unwavering. Heaney quotes Yeats's poem "The Choice" to lead up to his point:

> The intellect of man is forced to choose
> Perfection of the life or of the work
> And if it take the second must refuse
> A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.

But follows this by stating that "What is finally admirable is the way his life and his work are not separate but make a continuum" (SP, p. 100), which, as I see it, is one of Heaney's own aspirations, in spite of the "daunting pressures and responsiblities" (SP, p. 60) this might place on him. Heaney continues:

> I admire the way that Yeats took on the world on his own terms, defined the areas where he would negotiate and where he would

> not; the way he never accepted the terms of another's argument but propounded his own. I assume that this peremptoriness, this apparent arrogance, is exemplary in an artist, that it is proper and even necessary for him to insist on his own language, his own vision, his own terms of reference. This will often seem like irresponsibility or affectation, sometimes like callousness, but from the artist's point of view it is an act of integrity, or an act of cunning to protect the integrity (SP, p. 101).

In "Elegy", Lowell is seen as having done just this, as he

> ...drank America
> like the heart's
> iron vodka,
>
> promulgating art's
> deliberate, peremptory
> love and arrogance.

He is the inveterate adventurer/explorer, intrepid, fearless,

> ...our night ferry
> thudding in a big sea,
>
> the whole craft [sic] ringing
> with an armourer's music
> the course set wilfully across
> the ungovernable and dangerous.

"In Memoriam Sean O'Riada" (FW, pp. 29-30) continues the attempt to define the ideal stance for the artist and to establish the validity and potentiality his art can attain. Again it is helpful to turn to Heaney's Selected Prose, for observations that seem to clarify the kind of context in which the poem operates. Commenting on the dictum "Art for art's sake" which he finds has become a "gibe" simply because of "an inadequate notion of what art can encompass" he reveals that for him

> ...Art has a religious, a binding force, for the artist. Language is the poet's faith and the faith of his fathers and in order to go his own way and do his proper work in an agnostic time, he has to bring that faith to the point of arrogance and triumphalism. Poetry may indeed be a lost cause--like Jacobitism, as a young Scottish poet observed recently--but each poet must raise his voice like a pretender's flag. Whether the world falls into the hands of the security forces or the fat-necked speculators, he must get in under his phalanx of words and start resisting (SP, p. 217).

As far as Heaney is concerned, O'Riada typified this doctrine in his work: "he was our jacobite/he was our young pretender". If Heaney himself cannot completely identify with this stance (both this poem and "Elegy" function more as homages than masks) both he and O'Riada shared a similar technique in responding to nature's small symphonies, trying, in their respective arts, to approximate "To the music of what happens" (FW, p. 56):

> 'How do you work?
> Sometimes I just lie out
> like ballast in the bottom of the boat
> listening to the cuckoo.'
>
> ...
>
> trusting the gift,
> risking gifts undertow

However, it is not enough for Heaney simply to claim success by association. The poems that comprise "Glanmore Sonnets" find Heaney examining his motives for moving away from Ulster amidst accusations of retreat and assertions of quest. Heaney claims that the move was designed as a "kind of test" putting "the practice of poetry more deliberately at the centre of [his]life" (SP, p. 13). We find Heaney deconstructing his poetic assumptions and reconstructing them, analyzing and coming to terms with elements antagonistic to them, devising a new strategy that will redeem him from the kind of situation described in "Exposure" (N, pp. 72-73). Primarily they assess the integrity and the value of his choice to return to the land as part of a poetic and personal strategy that will, hopefully, lead to a renewal of trust in "the clear light, like poetry or freedom/ Leaning in from sea" and that will "quicken [him] all into verb, **pure verb**" (FW, p. 11).

The "Glanmore Sonnets" (FW, pp. 35-42) are an account of his "four years in the hedge-school" in Glanmore, County Wicklow. The sonnets question the nature and function of poetry and its relation to the lifestyle of the

poet. In "Sonnet VI" (FW, p. 38) (presumably talking about his work to date, though in a tone that is perhaps too self-accusing) Heaney asserts: "'I will break through'...'what I glazed over/With perfect mist and peaceful absences ...'". The dialectic in which this activity takes place is familiar. The poems shuttle between the potentially incapacitating desperation and skepticism of "Sonnet IX" to the assured triumph and affirmation of "Sonnet X". Returning to the country life of his earlier poems he is still faced with nature that can be either malevolent and destructive or benevolent and constructive. It is to the latter that he eventually turns, validating his move to Glanmore and to the simple life close to the earth, so that "What we have is a deeply instinctive yet intellectually assented-to idea of nature in her benign and nurturant aspect as the proper first principle of life and living" (SP, p. 112).

Yet this realization is not made without a struggle. In "Sonnet IX" (FW, p. 41) we witness the return of the "black rat/...like infected fruit" that had become the symbol of adversity in Death of a Naturalist. Again it challenges him, staring him out, filling him with fear. It re-affirms those earlier perceptions, confirming their permanency, always there to be confronted. His fear is compounded in the violent images of "Blood on a pitch-fork, blood on chaff and hay,/Rats speared in the sweat and dust of threshing". Against these real and direct challenges to the brutal "wilderness", his own seem somewhat ineffective, even quaint:

> We have our burnished bay tree at the gate,
> Classical, hung with the reek of silage
> From the next farm, tart-leafed as inwit.

And maybe his poetry is an equally futile gesture in the face of a seemingly ineluctable horror, forcing him to question its propriety and worth: "What is my apology for poetry?" It is this question that the sequence, through a rigorous revaluation of poetic practice seeks to answer.

However, oppressive anxiety and self doubt are not confined to "Sonnet IX". In "Sonnet VII" (FW, p. 40) Heaney describes another more ominous manifestation of malevolence that seems all pervasive and capable of striking at any time, highlighting his vulnerability, finding him almost completely powerless. The poem is portentous, prefiguring some sinister revelation that (good strategist that Heaney is) never actually materializes, although is implied in the queer image of the old woman in Les Landes and the poem's direct, urgent questions:

> This morning when a magpie with jerky steps
> Inspected a horse asleep beside the wood
> I thought of dew on armour and carrion.
> What would I meet, blood-boltered, on the road?
> How deep into the woodpile sat the toad?
> What welters through this dark hush on the crops?

But, in spite of these visions of nature harbouring some virulent strain that can only serve to heighten Heaney's apprehension and compromise his poetic efforts, the remaining sonnets ev olve a confident optimism that all but dispels these intimations of destruction. Faced with the choice of a life "timorous or bold" he chooses the latter, "promulgating art's/ deliberate, peremptory/love and arrogance" (FW, p. 31), moving towards the harmony ("vocable") envisaged in "Sonnet III" (FW, p. 35): "This evening the cuckoo and the corncrake/(So much, too much) consorted at twilight./It was all crepuscular and iambic". All the poems tend towards a reassurance and a confirmation of the worth of the choice of lifestyle he has made and of the poetics that arise out of it.

"Sonnets V" (FW, p. 37) and "VII" (FW, p. 39) both consider the ways in which this lifestyle might be part of a withdrawal that is regressive and evasive. In "Sonnet V" (FW, p. 37) Heaney is considering a "boortree", describing it in that accurate, sensuous language (now second nature to him) that reflects his heightened sensitivity to nature, his ability to fix

every momentary shade:

> I love its blooms like saucers brimmed with meal,
> Its berries a swart caviar of shot
> A buoyant spawn, a light bruised out of purple.

He has recently "learned" to call it "elderberry". But "etymologist of roots and graftings" that he is, he "sounds" "boortree" and comes up with "bower tree" and falls back to his "tree-house and would crouch/Where small buds shoot and flourish in the hush". The fact that Heaney does not see such a return as being regressive is attested to by his obvious distaste for the "learning" he has acquired in his absence from this kind of life, which is seen as preventitive rather than helpful. Rather, this is a homecoming that is rejuvenating: to an atmosphere that is filled more with love than the fear which pervaded North, more with life than with death and decay.

"Sonnet VII" (FW, p. 39) again finds him in a "haven" but once more this is seen as being positive and animating rather than being simply escapist. Just as the boats have taken shelter from the storm, so Heaney has moved away from the violence of Ulster to the relative calm of Wicklow. Both their "havens" are "marvellous/And actual", firm and reassuring. The poem opens with Heaney rehearsing the "beautiful sprung rhythms of the old BBC weather forecast" (SP, p. 45). Here they have become "Sirens of the tundra", "driv[ing] the trawlers to the lee of Wicklow" in the same way as the "comfortless noises" which fill Ulster have driven him to it as well. The poem is a joyous realization ("deepening" and "clearing") of the change of lifestyle and the effect it will have on him and on his work (the music of the poem is completely captivating, particularly the sound of the stream of kennings that flows across it, his use of language exuberant as if to emphasize the genuine freedom he feels).

"Sonnet III" (FW, p. 35) and "Sonnet X" (FW, p. 42) consider the

effect this move to Wicklow has had on the relationship between Heaney and his wife. "Sonnet III" (FW, p. 35) agonises over the possibility of Heaney relapsing from the "strange loneliness" that he has brought them to (a situation that half-comically, half-seriously reminds him of Dorothy and William Wordsworth's). The poem suggests that while for Heaney himself the natural harmony around him is sufficient cause for celebration, there is still the nagging suspicion that it is obscuring some flaw in his marriage: and in his imposing this kind of lifestyle on his wife.

However, "Sonnet X" (FW, p. 42) dispels this notion completely, as Heaney compares them with the lovers Lorenzo and Jessica and Diarmuid and Grainne, suggesting that their move to Wicklow, as well as being for particular artistic reasons, was all for love. Disdaining the politics of North, Heaney has returned to the "foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart" as an artist and as an individual. Their leaving the north of Ireland was an elopement to save not only the art, but more importantly the will to love (attested to by the number of poems in Field Work in which Heaney's wife appears). In re-establishing this fundamental union they have been granted a saintly beatification. In Heaney's dream they are "Darkly asperged and censed... laid out/Like breathing effigies on a raised ground". Once again Heaney refers to their "separateness". But this time it is not a "strange loneliness". It is used to allude to the paradox of perfect union. When Heaney recalls "Our separateness", he seems to refer to two things. The marriage in which the two partners become one, yet each manages to maintain their own self identity, and the way in which its accomplishment distinguishes and sets them off from those around them.

In "Sonnet II" (FW, p. 34) Heaney states his reasons for living in "the hedge-school of Glanmore" in terms of the contribution it could make

towards revitalizing his poetic quest. From "the backs of ditches [he] hoped to raise/A voice caught back off slug-horn and slow chanter/That might continue, hold, dispel, appease". He feels that it has been productive. In terms of Heaney's personal mythology, the line "Vowels ploughed into other, opened ground" is a symbolic statement of achievement. It echoes the observations made in the opening lines on renewed activity: "Sensings, mountings from the hiding places,/Words entering almost the sense of touch/ Ferreting themselves out of their dark hutch". These are proof that this environment is providing a more than adequate return in relation to his poetry and its contribution to self identity.

"Sonnet I" (FW, p. 33) is similarly optimistic. His renewal of contact with the land is seen as replenishing. Using ploughing as both the subject matter of the poem and as a metaphor for his own poetic activity, Heaney substantiates the fruitful effects of this lifestyle on his work. The "good life could be to cross a field/...of earth new from the lathe/ Of ploughs" which is itself an ideal source and "paradigm" for art. Using the self/memory/landscape analogies that have previously characterized his poetry, he imagines the "ploughsocks" as they "gorge the subsoil of each sense" until he is "quickened with a redolence/Of the fundamental dark unblown rose" that has become the end of his quest. This affirmation of the potentiality of his current lifestyle for creating an atmosphere in which this kind of revelation becomes possible, is confirmed in the poem's concluding lines where Heaney can hardly contain his "ghosts" enthusiastic, but maybe premature, re-appearance.

The collection's title sequence "Field Work" (FW, pp. 52-55), while it restates some of the themes already observed in "Glanmore Sonnets" specifically compounds the marriage theme of "Sonnet X" (FW, p. 42) with

the "marriage" with nature theme that is alluded to in "Sonnet I" (FW, p. 33) and "Sonnet II" (FW, p. 34). It has an air of completeness about it, that encourages us to read it as a testimony to Heaney's unquestioning satisfaction with his life in Glanmore. Stylistically it is more experimental than the other poems in the collection, reflecting Heaney's renewed sense of confidence in his art. The opening section (FW, p. 52) is imagist in its technique and intensity. Heaney manages to elevate ordinary circumstances to the level of epiphany. Everything in it feels significant, all the details of the scene effortlessly convey a depth of emotion and sentiment in their fearful evocation of transcience and death. A sign of the real achievement of the sequence is that in this opening section and in the third section (FW, p. 54) it becomes impossible to abstract the ideas from their sensuous depictions. In the third section one feels that Heaney is depicting a search for a validation in nature of his own quest. That "the sunflower, dreaming umber" is Heaney dreaming of union with his "umber one" (FW, p. 55), that it is "the vowel of earth/dreaming its root" (N, p. 43), that it is "shires dreaming wine" (FW, p. 37). Yet to interpret these poems is to deny their initial premise, which is something similar to Pound's dictum that "the natural object is always the adequate symbol" or William Carlos Williams's "no ideas but in things", a strain which recurs in Heaney's poetry but reaches its highest pitch here. It exhibits Heaney's trust in two things: that "Description is revelation!" (N, p. 71) and that description of nature affords the greatest revelation.

The sequence's second section (FW, p. 53) continues the allusions to completion and harmony, in its use of the circle motif, that echc the earlier "A Lough Neagh Sequence" (DD, pp. 38-45). But its effect is diminished slightly by his reference to the "Pequod". Although this neatly defines the nature and consequences of his quest, it is too obtrusive,

## CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters I hope I have showed clearly how Heaney has evolved a distinctly personal poetry and poetic mythology that successfully unites his concerns and those of the community's, providing a new sense of identity for both. In this way Heaney has avoided the "useless equilibrium" to which Francis Ledwidge had fallen prey. By way of concluding I would like to consider briefly one of the poems in Field Work that re-confirms Heaney's affiliations with, and commitment to, the native culture on which he depends.

"The Singer's House" (FW, p. 27) displays an unqualified trust in the traditions and mythologies of the native culture whose continuity he has always sought to ensure. The problem is, as ever:

> What do we say any more
> to conjure the salt of our earth?
> So much comes and is gone
> that should be crystal and kept

So, Heaney "says" to himself "Gweebarra" and a "sounding" of the place name itself conjures up aspects of a local mythology suffused with music and magic, an environment that is characterized by harmony and contentment. The poem confirms in its own progression the potency of sound, of song and of poetry for Heaney and their ability to preserve and hoard what should be kept, providing a source from which it can subsequently be evoked and recalled. This is stressed in the poem's rousing final line as Heaney addresses the singer: "Raise it again, man. We still believe what we hear." Following his five collections of poetry, I think that this kind

of response is appropriate to Heaney's own work, which has become almost completely integrated with this tradition he set out to preserve, as he has evolved a truly native mode.

## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION

1. Seamus Heaney, Field Work (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 59. All subsequent quotations from Heaney's poetry and prose will be indicated in the text by the following abbreviations, each accompanied by the relevant page number(s):

   DN: Death of a Naturalist (London: Faber and Faber, 1966).
   DD: Door into the Dark (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).
   WO: Wintering Out (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).
   N: North (London: Faber and Faber, 1975).
   FW: Field Work (London: Faber and Faber, 1979).
   SP: Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978 (London: Faber and Faber, 1980).

2. Conor Cruise O'Brien in his Preface to Modern Irish Writing, edited by Grattan Freyer (Dublin: The Irish Humanities Centre Ltd., 1979), p. xii.

3. William Carlos Williams, Selected Essays (New York: Random House, 1931), p. 157.

4. Derek Mahon, Poems 1962-1978 (Oxford: University Press, 1979), from the poem "The Last of the Fire Kings", p. 65.

5. John Montague, The Rough Field (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1972), from the poem "The Sound of a Wound", p. 46.

### CHAPTER ONE

1. Terence Brown, Northern Voices: Poets from Ulster (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1975), p. 174.

2. Ibid.

3. One of several excerpts from a television interview on BBC I quoted in "King of the Dark", The Listener, Vol. 83, no. 2132 (Feb. 5, 1970), p. 181.

4. From an interview with Patrick Garland published as part of "Poets on Poetry", The Listener, Vol. 90, no. 2,328 (Nov. 8, 1973), p. 629.

5. Richard Murphy, The Battle of Aughrim (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 19.

## CHAPTER TWO

1. Heaney in the "Editor's Note" to his selection of contemporary Irish writing, Soundings (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1972), p. 5.

2. Brown, op. cit., p. 185.

3. Edmund Spenser, A View of the Present State of Ireland, Spenser's Prose Works, edited by Rudolf Gottfried (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1949), p. 158.

4. Heaney discusses this group of poems in an interview with Seamus Deane printed in The Crane Bag, Vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring, 1977), p. 65.

5. P.V. Glob, The Bog People (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).

6. Ibid., pp. 190-191.

## CHAPTER THREE

1. From the interview with Seamus Deane in The Crane Bag, op. cit., p. 65.

2. Ibid., p. 66.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 63.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Heaney in a television interview with Andy O'Mahoney (Nov. 21, 1972) cited by Brown, op. cit., p. 176.

15. Glob, op. cit., p. 152.

16. Ibid., pp. 159 and 162.

17. Heaney quoted by Harry Marten in his review of Field Work in New England Review, Vol. III, no. 2 (Autumn, 1980), p. 147.

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