THE WRITERS AND THE TROUBLES:

THE IMPACT OF POLITICS ON NORTHERN IRISH WRITING IN THE LATE 1960s AND EARLY 1970s, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE WORK OF BRIAN FRIEL AND SEAMUS HEANEY

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the Degree of Doctor in Philosophy by Michael Richard Parker

September 1997

CONTENTS

Introduction		**i-x**
Chapter One:	Contexts and Texts 1963-1971	**1-79**
Chapter Two:	Telling Tales: Brian Friel's *The Gentle Island* (1971)	**80-121**
Chapter Three:	Exposure: Seamus Heaney's *Wintering Out* (1972)	**122-202**
Chapter Four:	Throwing Shadows: Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* (1973)	**203-245**
Chapter Five:	Small Gleams: Seamus Heaney's *North* (1975)	**246-306**
Conclusion		**307-309**
Bibliography		**310-320**

THE WRITERS AND THE TROUBLES:
THE IMPACT OF POLITICS ON NORTHERN IRISH WRITING IN THE LATE 1960s AND EARLY 1970s, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE WORK OF BRIAN FRIEL AND SEAMUS HEANEY

Abstract

A work of art, as Yeats observed, is 'no rootless flower', but something which has developed from particular stock, has a particular form, and has grown out of a particular soil. The aim of this thesis is to examine the historical, political and cultural contexts from which Northern Irish literature emerged between the years 1969 and 1975, and to address its problematic relationship with the political 'narrative' during that period. The study, as a whole and within each of its chapters, stresses how an engagement with these contexts can enrich both the understanding and evaluation of Northern Irish literature. It explores in detail the different literary narratives and strategies deployed by Northern Irish writers in their attempts to represent a crisis and a violence which, in its scale and nature, were resistant to framing in words and forms. Since writers were acutely aware of each other's work as they formulated their own responses to the conflict, intertextuality is a very significant element within the study.

What characterises so much of the writing from this initial phase of the 'Troubles' is its complexity, its uncertainty, its profound disquiet with its own authority and with all other forms of authority and their acts of inscribing. And yet many literary critiques, written from the ideological perspectives of the 1980s and 1990s, have tended to attribute to Northern Irish writers fixed, coherent positions on politics, aesthetics and gender, and have not taken sufficiently into account the contexts in which these writers were composing.

'The Writers and the Troubles' consists of five chapters. The first of these, 'Contexts and Texts', provides a careful account of events preceding the crises of 1969 and their immediate aftermath up until the introduction of internment in August 1971. Since what happened, why it happened and who is ultimately 'responsible' are such extremely contentious matters in Northern Ireland, the thesis draws on a wide range of differing perspectives and available interpretations, some contemporaneous, many more recent. The study brings into relationship the diverse discourses of professional historians, investigative journalists, political polemicists and writers from both communities. Chapters 2 and 3, 'Telling Tales' and 'Exposure', offer contextualised readings of Brian Friel's *The Gentle Island* - a relatively neglected play from 1971 - and Seamus Heaney's *Wintering Out* (1972). They aim to establish affinities between them, and place a particular emphasis on their self-referential concern with narrative. 'Throwing Shadows' and 'Small Gleams', Chapters 4 and 5, examine two highly politicised texts, Friel's *The Freedom of the City* (1973) and Heaney's *North* (1975), written in the immediate wake of Bloody Sunday. These chapters evaluate Friel and Heaney's attempts to create art-works which would be 'of present use', and discuss the often highly critical responses they have engendered.

The thesis concludes that individually and collectively writers have contributed greatly to the cultural and political debate in Northern Ireland by exposing the ideological premises underlying and sustaining the conflict.

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the Degree of Doctor in Philosophy by Michael Richard Parker
September 1997

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take the opportunity of recording my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Kelvin Everest, and to a number of colleagues from my own and other universities, who took time to read and comment constructively on sections of the thesis. These included Richard Haslam and Harvey Cox of the University of Liverpool, Rufus Wood and Richard Greaves of Liverpool Hope University College, Gerry Smyth of Liverpool John Moores University, Liam Harte and Lance Pettitt of St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, Richard Kirkland of the University of Keele, and Neil Sammells of Bath College of Higher Education. I would also like to thank Csilla Bertha of the Kossuth University, Debrecen, whose editorial comments considerably strengthened Chapter 2, 'Telling Tales: Brian Friel's The Gentle Island'. This was published in *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, Irish Drama Issue, 2:2, 1996.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOOTNOTES

Full bibliographical details are provided in the text and in the final Bibliography

Plays by Brian Friel

GI *The Gentle Island*
V *Volunteers*
T *Translations*
SP *Selected Plays of Brian Friel*
MH *Making History*
FH *Faith Healer*
DL *Dancing at Lughnasa*

Poems and Prose Works by Seamus Heaney

DN *Death of a Naturalist*
DD *Door into the Dark*
WO *Wintering Out*
N *North*
S *Stations*
P *Preoccupations*
FW *Field Work*
SI *Station Island*
HL *The Haw Lantern*
GT *The Government of the Tongue*
See *Seeing Things*
SL *The Spirit Level*
RP *The Redress of Poetry*

Other Frequently Cited Texts

CP Hewitt	*The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* ed. Frank Ormsby
CP Montague	*The Collected Poems of John Montague*
RF	*The Rough Field* John Montague
WB	*The Wearing of the Black* ed. Padraic Fiacc

INTRODUCTION

> The best way of understanding this situation is by looking once more at its origin.(Gombrich)[1]

In discussions of twentieth century art, Picasso's *Guernica* is often cited as a classic representation of human suffering and savagery. The visual power of the painting and the frequency with which it has been reproduced have made it into a universal image. Visitors to the New York Museum of Modern Art, where it was exhibited until December 1982, viewed it alongside works by Cézanne, Matisse, Monet, Dali and Pollock, and thus were able to 'place' it within the history of European art, and, more specifically, within the context of modernism.

Following the artist's death, and in accordance with the terms of his will,[2] *Guernica* was returned to Spain. One of the effects of re-locating the painting was that ways of seeing it changed fundamentally. Restored to the place and culture which brought it into being, its intimate bond with a particular event, a particular region, a particular period in Spanish history might again be better recognised.[3]

Like Picasso's work, Northern Irish literature occupies a space within, but also beyond the rarefied sphere of aesthetics and art-objects. Its texts and its writers constantly strive

[1] E.H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1972), p.459. Gombrich is commenting on Picasso, and the impossibility of achieving a complete grasp of any work of art: 'No painting can be fully "explained" in words. But words are sometimes useful pointers, they help to clear away misunderstandings and can give us at least an inkling of the situation in which the artist finds himself'.

[2] Picasso stipulated that the painting should only go back to Spain when democracy was restored.

[3] In origin Picasso's painting 'belonged' to 27 April 1937, the second year of the Spanish Civil War. On that day, Guernica, an important town in the Basque region, was bombed by the Luftwaffe who were supporting Franco's fascists; the casualties were mostly civilians, many of them peasants strafed while they worked in the fields.

to transcend the material and ideological conditions that formed them, are constantly pulled back to and by specific moments, places and names. One of the principal convictions behind this thesis is the belief that critical discussion of this literature - or any other literature for that matter - ought not to confine itself solely to aesthetic considerations. A considerable contribution can be made to literature and literary understanding by studies that attempt a detailed engagement with the historical, political and cultural contexts from which texts emerge. A work of art, as Yeats observed, is 'no rootless flower',[4] but something which has developed from particular stock, has a particular form, and has grown out of a particular soil. It is 'written' through a complex interplay of forces both external and internal to the writer, and is the product of a time. Sometimes this can be a specific historical moment; more often it is born of a longer sequence of changes, which may appear to be more amenable to interpretation in retrospect.

And yet there may be, as some historians have recognised, a danger in historical or literary analyses which incline too much in the direction of 'present-mindedness',[5] which attempt to mask their own ideological positioning, and pass judgment without taking due account of circumstances operative at the time in so far as we may know them. This is true of some critical work on Northern Irish writing, which too often has been inattentive to the contemporaneous contexts, especially the political events which

---

[4] W.B.Yeats, draft of a lecture, 'Friends of My Youth', 9 March 1910, cited in Roy Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), vii: 'Above all it is necessary that the lyric poet's life should be known that we should understand that his poetry is no rootless flower but the speech of a man'.

[5] For a discussion of this concept, see D. George Boyce in 'Past and Present Revisionism and the Northern Ireland Troubles', in *The Making of Modern Irish History* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.216-7.

played no small part in framing the writers' responses. As a consequence, many readers from one's own and later generations, in and outside Ireland, are likely to encounter the primary texts - the poems, plays and fiction - detached from the contexts which pressed them into being, and with a limited awareness of that larger cultural and political narrative in which those texts perform a small, but significant part. For such readers, problems may be compounded if the critical or historical texts they turn to as sources of 'authority' make little or no allusion to specific political events,[6] or have been either consciously or unconsciously 'tailored to match the prevailing political climate'.[7]

Where some historical and political contextualisation is attempted, too often it results in simplifications or highly misleading statements.[8] For example, from Henry Hart's *Seamus Heaney: Poet of Contrary Progressions* (1993), one learns that 'the civil rights movement in the sixties' was followed by 'the resurgence of the I.R.A.' which then prompted 'Protestant counterattacks in the early seventies', and that 'England...entered Northern Ireland in the early seventies to exert a civilising force when Protestants were terrorising Catholics'.[9] While the first statement ignores the fact that loyalist violence and British policy played a major role in the resurgence of republicanism, the second

[6] Bernard O'Donoghue's *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), is one of the most useful of recent studies of Heaney's work, and adopts a formalist approach, charting key linguistic changes within the poet's work. Although he highlights, for example, what he sees as the curiously 'static' language in *North* and the preponderance of 'more active verbal forms' in *Field Work* (p.16), he offers no biographical, political or historical explanation for these phenomena.

[7] See below, Chapter 1, pp.5-6.

[8] One honourable exception to this 'rule' is Marilynn Richtarik in *Acting Between the Lines: The Field Day Theatre Company and Irish CulturalPolitics 1980-1984* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

[9] Henry Hart, *Seamus Heaney: Poet of Contrary Progressions* (New York: Syracuse, 1993), pp.3, 15. Andrew Murphy's *Seamus Heaney,* (Northcote House: Plymouth 1996) - a remarkably succinct study of both the poetry and the critical debate - contains similar historical inaccuracies and elisions: e.g. 'With the failure of the Civil Rights Movement, militant nationalism (and militant unionism) revived' (p.29).

implies that 'England' rather than 'the British Government' is an invasive power, an alien presence in Northern Ireland, and that 'Protestants' - not militant Loyalists - needed 'English' constraint in order to get them to behave in a 'civilised' manner. Later in the book, Hart implies that the British Government's decision to send in troops 'ostensibly to protect Catholics'[10] may in fact have masked darker colonial purposes. What we are being presented with here is a repetition of Edward Said's version of 'Ireland', which imagines a homogeneous people 'possessing a common history, religion and language' falling prey 'to the dominion of an offshore power'.[11]

The aim of this thesis is to give full weight to what was and is a complex political narrative, and to address the problematic relationship between literature and politics in Northern Ireland, in particular between the years 1969 and 1975. My method will involve placing a number of texts from the earliest phases of the 'Troubles' within their contexts and examining the different narratives and strategies deployed by writers in their attempts to represent a crisis and a violence which in its scale and nature were resistant to framing in words or forms. I do so knowing full well that even though certain indisputable historical facts can be established - by, for example, sifting through chronologies of the events, or examining contemporary or later interpretations of the various dates and statistics - the narrative one constructs from those accounts will be affected by one's own ideological stance, inflected by one's position in time, in my case the late 1990s.[12]

---

[10] Hart, p.93.

[11] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto, 1993), p.266.

[12] Inevitably one reads Padraic Fiacc's 'Credo Credo', *Ruined Pages* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1994), for example, with its references to the destructiveness of soldiers searching for arms/ ransacking Catholic houses on the Falls in July 1970, with a knowledge of the terrible price that would be paid over the next two and a half decades, by those soldiers, by those who applauded them, by those they

Although at first it may appear that the focus of the study is somewhat restricted in terms of its time-span and its singling-out of four literary texts (*The Gentle Island, Wintering Out, Freedom of the City* and *North*) for particular attention, there are very good reasons for this. The very complexity of the political narrative and of the literary responses - along with the cultural and critical debates that they have engendered - requires detailed consideration and attentive reading. Many of the critical books on Northern Irish writers have, partly one suspects to meet publishers' wishes, endeavoured to cover the entire oeuvre and, as a result, contain analyses which, though coherent, informed and succinct, do not always do justice to the tensions within and between individual texts or have space to consider the importance of intertextual relationships within Northern Irish writing. Chapters 2-5 focus in depth on six years in the long literary careers of Brian Friel and Seamus Heaney, because this particular period between 1969 and 1975 wrought such dramatic changes in their work and in Northern Irish literature in general.[13]

Each of the chapters that follow bears witness to the lively dialogue that continued between writers and texts throughout the early years of the conflict, and since, and contradicts the idea of the writer as 'individualistic entrepreneur'.[14] A considered examination of Brian Friel's drama quickly forces one to recognise parallels between

appalled.

[13] Although it is tempting to regard 1969 as Northern Ireland's Year Zero, Peter Taylor in *Families at War* (London: BBC Books, 1989), p.8, sounds an appropriate note of caution about reading the North in retrospect, and from a 'Britocentric' point of view. 'The events and climate that conditioned...attitudes did not suddenly begin when British soldiers marched into Londonderry and Belfast'.

[14] Edna Longley, 'Irish Bards and American Audiences', *The Southern Review*, Louisiana State University, Summer 1995, 31:3, 768.

his aesthetics and those of Kavanagh, Montague and Heaney, not to mention other influences such as Shakespeare and Chekhov. And when Michael Longley in an early poem talks of how 'Each gives the other's lines a twist',[15] he is perhaps not only referring to the salutary effects of the critical friendships and rivalries that developed between himself and Heaney, Mahon and Simmons, but also how they would frequently answer one another's poem by embodying phrases and motifs in their own. Long after the demise of Philip Hobsbaum's Belfast Group,[16] a kind of writing community has continued to operate within Northern Irish literature, despite the various re-locations of many of the principal players.[17]

Although the writers afforded most space within this study both originate from Catholic-nationalist backgrounds, the issues of language and authority, identity and gender, politics and ethics inscribed in their texts are, of course, by no means exclusive to writers from the minority community.[18] Friel's defiant assertion in 1972 that 'Art should not be the servant of any movement'[19] no doubt received and continues to receive broad assent amongst the North's writers, but, as their work and this study show, some movements proved difficult to resist; past and present history would and will not leave them be. Though concurring with MacNeice, in not denying

[15] Michael Longley, 'Letters to Three Irish Poets: To James Simmons', *Poems 1963-1983* (Edinburgh: Salamander Press, 1986), p.80.

[16] See my own account of the Group in *Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp.49-53. See also John Wilson Foster, *The Achievement of Seamus Heaney* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1995), p.19. For an alternative, fuller reading of factors behind the upsurge in Northern Irish poetry in the mid-1960s, see Edna Longley, *The Living Stream* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1995), pp.18-21.

[17] The importance of intertextual links within Northern Irish writing has been stressed by Edna Longley in 'Irish Bards and American Audiences', 770, where she comments on how 'physical horizons may change without the loss of deeper co-ordinates'.

[18] Considerable attention is given in the thesis to the work of writers from the Protestant tradition, in particular John Hewitt, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley.

[19] 'Plays Peasant and Unpeasant', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 March 1972, 306.

the past to which my self is wed.
The woven figure cannot undo its thread[20]

both individually and collectively they disclose an unwillingness to accept many strands in the sampler they had inherited.[21]

For all their apparent similiarities in origins[22] and interests, there are, of course, important distinctions to be made between Heaney and Friel, not least because they belong to different generations and work in different genres. Friel was born ten years before Heaney, in 1929, the year which saw the arrival of the Censorship of Publications Act on the statutes of the 'Free State'. Not surprisingly because of his father's long involvement in Derry politics,[23] his own formative four-year stint in the South at Maynooth and contacts with what might term *The Bell* Group,[24] Friel's earlier work contains a broader awareness of contemporary political issues than Heaney's and stresses much more an all-Ireland context. Whereas Friel was working in a genre which, by its very nature, is a *dialogic* act, bringing together a range of voices and conflicting perspectives, the lyric tradition in which Heaney operates has been dominated by the mediating presence of a single voice, usually that of a persona whose experiences and values often - but not always - bear a striking resemblance to that of the author. Such, however, have been the profound repercussions of the crisis that poetry from the North

[20] Louis MacNeice, 'Valediction', *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p.52.
[21] Mistakenly some critics have endeavoured to place both writers as *representative* Northern Catholics. Friel's description of the Irish Catholic Church in 'Plays Peasant and Unpeasant'as 'the most authoritarian church in the world' does not suggest he was its most fervent admirer, nor do his plays. His comments sound a note that anticipates Heaney's 'Freedman', *N*, p.61.
[22] Both were pupils of St.Columb's College, Derry. Friel moved to Derry City in the year Heaney was born, and lived there until the late 1960s.
[23] See Chapter 4, pp.207-8.
[24] See Chapter 2, p.96.

since the late 1960s has had to become much more engaged in public concerns, much less narcissistic[25] in its subject matter.

Interestingly the careers of both writers took an upturn at a time when major political and cultural changes were afoot in Ireland, North and South.[26] The breakthrough in Friel's career came in 1964 following the acclaimed first production of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin.[27] His innovative use of two actors to play one riven character could almost be seen as paradigmatic in terms of later Northern literature,[28] haunted as it is by motifs of doubleness, division, 'things unsaid'.[29] Heaney's rise to prominence began just two years later with the London publication of *Death of a Naturalist* (1966). By the late spring of 1969, and several major awards later,[30] Michael Mc Laverty was referring to Heaney in a private letter as 'the best poet we have in Ireland at present'.[31]

[25] In one of Heaney's earliest poems, 'Personal Helicon', he acknowledges the self-reflective origins of the poetic act: 'I rhyme to see myself / To set the darkness echoing' (*DN*, p.57).

[26] Lord Brookeborough retired as Northern Ireland's Prime Minister after twenty years in office, and was replaced by Terence O'Neill. Meanwhile in the South 'the accession of Sean Lemass to the position of Prime Minister upon the retirement of de Valera from parliamentary politics...was to have a profound effect on Irish society in the next decades' (Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-1985* [London: Fontana, third impression, 1985], p.214).

[27] Prior to that, Friel had enjoyed some success as a short story writer, and had been a regular contributor to *The Irish Times*. Ulf Dantanus, in *Brian Friel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p.47, cites one of his pieces which voices 'his sense of exclusion' in his new Donegal home, referring to himself as 'a stupid townie'.

[28] Dillon Johnson, in *Irish Poetry After Joyce* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p.145, has spoken, for example, of the 'calculated schizophrenia' in *North*.

[29] Richtarik, p.78.

[30] Heaney received an Eric Gregory Trust Award (1966), the Cholmondely Award for Poets (1967) and the Somerset Maugham Award (1968).

[31] Michael McLaverty, *In Quiet Places: The Uncollected Stories, Letters and Critical Prose*, ed. Sophia Hillan King (Swords: Pollbeg, 1989), p.227. Such was Heaney's pre-eminence by 1971 that the normally reticent Michael Foley was moved to speak of him as 'a sort of Queen Mother of the poetry world' because of the frequency of his public appearances ('This Thing Could Rule the World', *Fortnight*, 23, 3 September 1971, 20). From Padraic Fiacc's article, 'The North's Younger Poets' (*Hibernia*, 20 October 1972, 12), one learns that Paul Muldoon used to refer to Heaney as 'Our father-figurehead'.

Although it has not proved possible to discover precisely when Heaney's friendship with Friel developed, it is evident from reading their work that their relationship has been and continues to be of immense mutual benefit.[32] What certainly appears to have deepened the creative bond between them was the advent of the political crisis in the late 1960s and the dilemmas it posed to them as private citizens and as artists. Under intense and increasing pressure from their communities of origin, they struggled to resist slipping into partisan, sectarian stances. At first, like other leading writers from both traditions, they chose to represent their responses to the politics and violence in a cautious, somewhat oblique, seemingly distanced manner. However, as the crisis intensified, particular events insisted on making their mark on texts,[33] and, along with others, they found themselves unable to escape the 'Pains from a shattered past', 'The dead man on the gate and in the myth'.[34]

The thesis consists of five chapters. The first of these, 'Contexts and Texts', provides an account of events preceding the crises of 1969 and after, and, in doing so, orchestrates a range of differing perspectives and interpretations available, some contemporaneous and many more recent. Since what happened, why it happened and who is ultimately 'responsible' are extremely contentious matters in Northern Ireland, the narrative in Chapter One is meticulous in its detail, and brings into relationship the diverse discourses of professional historians (such as Roy Foster and Patrick

[32] Richtarik, p.66, speaks of them as 'old friends' by the time Friel invited Heaney onto the Field Day Board of Directors in September 1981.

[33] One thinks, for example, of the riots in Derry and Belfast in August 1969, the Falls Curfew in 1970, the Provisionals' bombing campaign and the introduction of internment in 1971, Bloody Sunday and the beginning of Direct Rule in 1972, the power-sharing experiment of 1973 and the Ulster Workers' Strike of 1974.

[34] Roy McFadden, 'I won't dance', *New Statesman*, 1 July 1966, 24. The full text appeared later in *The Wearing of the Black*, ed. Padraic Fiacc (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1974), p.84.

Buckland), investigative journalists (such as the *Sunday Times* Insight Team and Fionnuala O Connor), polemical political writers (like Conor Cruise O'Brien and Paddy Devlin), and poets from both communities. Chapters 2 and 3, 'Telling Tales' and 'Exposure', offer contextualised readings of Brian Friel's *The Gentle Island* (1971) and Seamus Heaney's *Wintering Out* (1972), and establish a number of points of affinity between them, in particular their self-referential concerns.[35] 'Throwing Shadows' and 'Small Gleams', Chapters 4 and 5, examine two highly politicised texts and consider the often highly critical responses they have engendered. Friel's *The Freedom of the City* (1973) and Heaney's *North* (1975) were written in the immediate wake of Bloody Sunday, and strove to be 'of present use'.[36]

In addressing these texts I have deployed a range of different methodologies, though the approach is principally historical. Inevitably in encountering and countering other ways of reading texts - formalist and feminist, postcolonial and post-structuralist - one's own critical discourse is modified and enriched. The imposition of any single template or critical perspective can be extremely limiting, as is the deterministic view that literary texts are solely and simply products of class, race or gender, or authored by ideology. In emphasising the importance of shifts in the historical, political and cultural narratives in any consideration of writing from Northern Ireland, this study, in its limited way, effects a re-location of that writing. The picture - like *Guernica* - modifies when set in its own place, when perceived in terms of its own imagined time.

[35] See Chapter 2, pp.82-3, Chapter 3, pp.122-5.
[36] Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), p.1.

CHAPTER ONE : CONTEXTS AND TEXTS 1963-1971

I hear the street names on the radio
and map reported bomb or barricade:
this was my childhood's precinct, and I know
how such streets look, down to the very shade
of brick, or paintwork on each door and sill,
what school or church nearby one might attend,
if there's a chance to glimpse familiar hill
between the chimneys where the grey slates end.
(John Hewitt)[1]

The mirrors curl up like paper
In the rumpling fire;
Sightless we follow the blind
Whose hands

Drum fire from our brittle dread (Seamus Deane)[2]

I

Roy Foster is right to insist that the causes of civil conflict in Northern Ireland which broke out in 1969 were as much to do with 'the crisis in Unionism', as with 'the radicalisation of Catholic politics; though the latter process captured the headlines at the time.'[3] At least some of the culpability for the increasing tensions within the Unionist community in the mid-1960s and Northern Ireland as a whole must be laid at the door of the then Prime Minister, Captain Terence O'Neill. Although characterised by John Hewitt in 'The Well-Intentioned Consul',[4] and commended by John Cole in 1990 for his

[1] 'Street Names', *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, ed. Frank Ormsby, (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1993), p.134.

[2] Seamus Deane, 'Civil War: 13 August 1970', in *The Wearing of the Black*, ed. Padraic Fiacc, (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1974), p.45.

[3] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1989), p.587. In terms of literary politics and the reception of literature, it might equally be argued that for a substantial period over the past twenty five years writers from Nationalist backgrounds have often enjoyed far more coverage and esteem both inside and outside Ireland. This view is endorsed by Jackie Redpath speaking in the television documentary, *Shankill*, directed by Mary Holland and Michael Whyte, C4, 7 July 1994.

[4] *CP Hewitt*, pp.138-9. Hewitt credits O'Neill with the best of motives, blaming his downfall on 'patricians' - grandees within the Unionist Party - and ordinary people fired by 'zealots' ('The

prescience - 'O'Neill grasped, before other members of his party, that a safe future for Northern Ireland depended on healing divisions between Unionists and Nationalists'[5]- others, such as Roy Foster and Bob Purdie, have described his political strategy as 'inept' and his credentials as a liberal and moderniser highly suspect.[6] In Jonathan Bardon's account of the O'Neill premiership praise is often immediately qualified. After quoting Harold Wilson's commendation of O'Neill's 'remarkable programme of easement' within community relations, Bardon points out that 'Wilson's assumption that real progress had been made in ending discriminatory practices was false.'[7] Similarly the judgement that O'Neill 'certainly worked hard to improve community relations' is somewhat undermined when one looks at the numbers of Catholics who continued to be disenfranchised as a result of the failure to bring in universal suffrage in local government elections, or at the way that gerrymandering was allowed to persist. Several interviewees in Fionnuala O Connor's book, *In Search of a State: Catholics in Northern Ireland*, reflect a general nationalist scepticism about O'Neill. 'What did he do, after all?...Shook a few nuns' hands, and caved in to Ian Paisley away back in 1964 about taking the flag down on the Falls, when Paisley was only a crazy preacher on the edge of everything.'[8] According to Foster, O'Neill's brave 'New Ulster' continued to exclude Catholics from the Housing Trust and many other key public boards, and his presentation of himself as a

Tribunes').

[5] John Cole, 'The lost last hope of Northern Ireland', an obituary for Lord O'Neill of the Maine, *The Guardian*, 14 June 1990, p.39.

[6] R.F.Foster, p.585. 'O'Neill was an unconvincing liberal, as well as an inept tactician who refused to prepare the ground for his resentful colleagues.' Bob Purdie in *Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland* (Belfast:Blackstaff, 1990), cites O'Neill's unwillingness to confront strongly anti-Catholic traditions within the Unionist Party as one of his principal flaws. He refers also to an incident in January 1966 when the president of the Antrim Unionist Association stated that it was 'impossible for Catholics to join the Unionist Party. O'Neill, who spoke after him, made no reference to the remark'(p.35).

[7] Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, (Belfast:Blackstaff 1992), p.633.

[8] Fionnuala O'Connor, *In Search of a State: Catholics in Northern Ireland*, (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1993), pp.153-4. The speaker is referring to an incident in September 1964, during the general election, when Ian Paisley protested over the illegal flying of the tricolour at Republican Labour headquarters on

far-sighted, liberal politician was principally aimed at winning back Protestant working class voters who had swung towards the Northern Ireland Labour Party in 1962.[9] Anticipation of Foster's analysis can be found in Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson's book, *The State in Northern Ireland 1921-72*, where the authors point out how O'Neill's much-vaunted programme of modernisation made no attempt at 'dismantling sectarian structures'. The *raison d'être* of his economic policies, they claim, 'lay only in political conflicts within the Protestant bloc'.[10]

O'Neill's meeting at Stormont on 14 January 1965 with the Taoiseach, Seán Lemass, read by some as the beginning of a historic political *rapprochement* between Ireland north and south, was in fact principally motivated by economic considerations,[11] and in the long term proved counterproductive. One seemingly positive gain from the O'Neill-Lemass talks was the warm reception afforded to it by leaders in the minority community. Within a month the Northern Ireland Nationalist Party decided to abandon its long-sustained policy of abstentionism, and took their seats in Stormont as the official opposition.[12] Their response, however, was out of synch with the feelings of their supporters, according to Conor Cruise O'Brien. He speaks of the dismay felt by many Northern Catholics at all this fraternization. For them

---

Divis Street. When the R.U.C. stormed the building, three days of rioting ensued.

[9] In 1958 Labour had polled 37,000 votes, but in the 1962 election this shot up to 77,000. 'In Belfast Labour emerged from the election as a major threat to the position of the Unionist Party; although it did not win more than its existing four out of sixteen seats, its overall vote and its majorities were substantially increased' (Purdie, p.10).

[10] Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon, Henry Patterson, *The State in Northern Ireland 1921-72*, (Manchester University Press, 1979), pp.155-6.

[11] Conor Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, (London: Hutchinson, 1972), p.146.

[12] Bew, Gibbon and Patterson , p.169, represent the Nationalist Party's responses to the O'Neill government as excessively, embarrassingly deferential. According to their version of history, the NP leadership, and in particular Eddie McAteer, floundered ineffectually for much of the 1960s, and was in part responsible for the community's later willingness to turn to extra-parliamentary modes of protest.

> it seemed like a final abandonment. The old emphasis on anti-partition might not have done them much good - it had not in fact done them *any* good - but at least it had encouraged them to hope that, in some way, Dublin would manage to come to their aid. Now even that small hope was dimmed.[13]

For significant sections of the Protestant community any conciliatory gesture towards Dublin, and any move welcomed by northern nationalists, were bound to set off alarm bells. Possessed of more than 'a touch of *de haut en bas*'[14] in his attitude to his party, O'Neill had not even informed the majority of his Cabinet colleagues of the imminent meeting with Lemass. Previously O'Neill had been deeply opposed to negotiations with Dublin, while the Republic maintained its constitutional claim to the north. His meeting with Lemass was thus 'not simply a surprise sprung on his colleagues but a sudden reversal of a tenet of unionism that he had always seemed to endorse.'[15] As a consequence his actions provoked suspicions within his Unionist power base, which undermined his own authority. This was to be subjected to constant and ferocious attacks from the increasingly influential, populist politician, the Reverend Ian Paisley[16] at a critical turning point in the recent history of the island.

[13] O'Brien, p.148. Roy Foster describes the Nationalist Party's decision to come in from the cold as one which 'would help to marginalize them as attitudes polarised' (p.586).

[14] Cole, art.cit. O'Neill's sometimes embarrassingly condescending, Olympian attitude to those beneath him is revealed in an interview for the *Belfast Telegraph* in May 1969, following his fall from power. Like O'Brien, one doubts whether it won him any fresh admirers:

> It is frightfully hard to explain to Protestants that if you give Roman Catholics a good job and a good house, they will live like Protestants, because they will see neighbours with cars and television sets. They will refuse to have 18 children, but if a Roman Catholic is jobless, and lives in the most ghastly hovel, he will rear 18 children on National Assistance. If you treat Roman Catholics with due consideration and kindness, they will live like Protestants in spite of the authoritative nature of their Church (Quoted in O'Brien, p.170).

[15] Purdie, p.34.

[16] Even before the civil rights campaign got underway, Paisleyite demonstrations in the mid-1960s had had a seriously destabilising effect within Northern Ireland, deepening fissures within Unionism, and antagonising Nationalist opinion. Paisley's deep animosity towards O'Neill following the Lemass visit prompted his 'O'Neill must go' campaign.

The year following Lemass's visit, 1966, saw two intensely emotive anniversaries, which fuelled recalcitrance north and south of the border. In both northern communities it reinforced entrenched, passionately-held beliefs in the separateness of their histories. In his highly polemical account of the present states of Ireland, written in 1972, O'Brien quite rightly identifies the significance of these anniversaries in the subsequent narrative of violence:

> In 1966, the Republic - and also many of the Northern Catholics - solemnly commemorated the Easter Rising of 1916. These celebrations had to include the reminder that the object for which the men of 1916 sacrificed their lives - a free and united Ireland - had still not been achieved. The general calls for rededication to the ideals of 1916 were bound to suggest to some young men and women not only that these ideals were in practice being abandoned - through the Lemass meetings and in other ways - but that the way to return to them was through the method of 1916: violence applied by a determined minority...
>
> Ulster Protestants, in the summer of 1916, commemorated not only their usual seventeenth century topics but also the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, when the Ulster Division was cut to pieces at Thiepval Wood. From the perspective of those who commemorated these events, the commemorations in Dublin seemed a celebration of treachery, and at the same time a threat to 'Ulster'...the spirit and character of the Dublin celebrations showed that the leopard had not changed his spots.[17]

Undoubtedly the militant republicanism of 1916 and 1921-22 did retain an intense glamour for many Northern Catholics, but to place undue emphasis on a nostalgia for these 'heroic' narratives of resistance and defeat as a *cause* of, rather than a *factor* in subsequent nationalist violence can be misleading. This tendency has been most recently been exemplified in 'The Bloody Protest', Fintan O'Toole's re-reading for BBC Radio of Easter 1916 and its legacy.[18] From this one would surmise that the last twenty-eight

[17] O'Brien, p.150. Significantly, perhaps in the light of PIRA violence at the time of writing, O'Brien here foregrounds the threat from recalcitrant Nationalism, and has relatively little to say about the Reverend Ian Paisley and the responsibility of his supporters in raising sectarian tensions and inciting violence. Indeed O'Brien talks almost approvingly of 'Mr Paisley's huge, rocky face, with small, shrewd, watchful eyes...a symbol of the besieged Ulster fortress for which he stood.' (p.151). W.D. Flackes, however, cites a number of incidents which present Paisley as a less oracular, heroic figure. See *Northern Ireland: A Political Directory*, (London: Ariel Books, first publ.1980), pp.172-6.

[18] Fintan O'Toole, *The Bloody Protest*, BBC Radio 4, 10 April 1996.

years of conflict in Ulster was principally attributable to recidivism amongst the northern minority. Curiously, little is made of Stormont's role in Northern's Ireland's 'slip into chaos', not to mention the interventions and misjudgments of British and Irish governments, and the years between 1966 and 1970 form a lacuna in his text.

Seamus Heaney's contemporaneous poetic response to the first of these anniversaries, the Easter Rising, was the poem, 'Requiem for the Croppies'. Following Yeats's precedent in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Heaney recalls an earlier period in the complex narrative of Ireland and Britain, a time when history was simple and the truth of the nationalist version self-evident.[19] In attempting to construct an analogy between the Easter 'heroes' and the Catholic rebels killed in the *Wexford* rising of 1798, Heaney could be seen, however, as proffering a version of the 1798 Rebellion that in effect writes the Nonconformist Protestant contribution, notably within the United Irishmen organisation, out of Ireland's history. There are always dangers, however, in passing judgments on the basis of reading single poems. In 'Linen Town', from *Wintering Out*, Heaney does acknowledge the role of Irish Protestants in 1798, and thus redresses the imbalance, to some extent. The poem speaks of the 'swinging tongue' of Henry Joy McCracken,[20] the hanged leader of the Antrim rebellion against English rule, and reflects Heaney's later view of 1798 as 'the last turn/ In the tang of possibility', a time when Northern Presbyterians and Catholics fought alongside each other and temporarily found 'common ground' in the cause of Independence.

---

[19] Yeats's revising of his earlier morally naive response to 'armed struggle' in poems such as 'Easter 1916', 'Sixteen Dead Men' and 'On a Political Prisoner' finds its parallel in Heaney's 'A Northern Hoard', (*WO*, pp.43-4) and within *North*, as I shall argue.

[20] Purdie, p.131, informs us of how in 1967 the Belfast Wolfe Tone Society published a pamphlet on McCracken by Fred Heatley. There were also documentaries on BBC and Ulster Television to commemorate the bi-centenary of his birth, and an exhibition in the Ulster Museum.

Considerable insight into Seamus Heaney's political thinking at this juncture may be found in an important prose article from July 1966, 'Out of London: Ulster's Troubles', coincidentally published on the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Battle of the Somme, and shortly before a visit to Belfast by Queen Elizabeth II. Here Heaney constructs and contrasts two Northern Irelands: one, the political state, tainted, jaded and backward-looking, the other, the cultural entity, energetic, exciting and thriving, where artists of indeterminate religious origin add their individual enterprise to a common endeavour. For much of the piece, a traditional nationalist antagonism towards Unionist Ulster and Britain is apparent.[21] Though he had been Prime Minister for three years and had made some gestures towards *rapprochement* with the South and with Northern Catholics, significantly O'Neill is an absence from Heaney's text. One hesitates to suggest that the title itself might contain a coded reference to the Prime Minister, who spoke with a patrician English accent. Heaney might have been thinking of this when he suggests that to Unionist ears an English accent is a sound signifier, a guarantor of loyalty to the Crown and support for the Border, signalling the recognition that 'gerrymandering is a necessary evil in order to maintain a loyalist government'. Certainly the title itself implies an external, metropolitan source for 'Ulster's Troubles'. Its opening sentence refers slightingly to Belfast as the '*official* capital of the *partitioned* state of Northern Ireland'(my italics). Later Heaney goes on to voice his disapproval of its

[21] 'Out of London: Ulster's Troubles', *New Statesman*, 1 July 1966, 23. There is, for example, a pointed, albeit parenthetic reference to the destruction of Nelson's pillar in Dublin, until 1966 a 'dominating' presence in O'Connell Street, and for the republican splinter group who blew it up, a reminder of the colonial past. It was blown up at the second attempt on 7 March 1966, 'using American money and local talent', according to J.Bowyer Bell in *The Irish Troubles: A Generation of Violence 1967-1992*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993), p.53.

'country town' provincialism, its cultural and economic dependency on England, that 'state of mind that looks to England for approbation.'[22]

In a section which anticipates the place-name poems of *Wintering Out* - and Friel's *Translations* - Heaney draws attention to the lost, rural, 'Irish' reality beneath the urban, 'bourgeois', anglicised veneer, by pointing out the etymological origins of the Falls Road and Malone Road - 'the road of the hedges' and 'the plain of the lambs'. Heaney's language is, as always, revealing, as is his choice of oppositions. The Falls, the soon-to-be English lecturer at Queen's informs us, is 'the preserve of the Nationalist mass', where 'mass' implies not only a Catholic area, but also serves to remind his readers that Nationalists are a majority on the island as a whole. By contrast, the Malone Road is cited as a preserve of the 'bourgeois ascendancy', which clearly positions its largely Protestant inhabitants as relics and hangers-on from a colonial era, and adds the class factor to the inequitable equation.[23] A similar view would be articulated later by John Hewitt in his satirical poem, 'An Ulster Landowner's Song', written in September 1969. It also focuses on class as a key factor within the violence, but in doing so ignores the hostility to reform within the Protestant working-class, which Ian Paisley was able to mobilise, or, according to another view, to which he was attuned. The first two stanzas run:

[22] 'Out of London: Ulster's Troubles', 23. His reading here that Belfast lacks the self-sufficiency 'that a capital usually maintains' anticipates David Miller's contention in *Queen's Rebels* (1978) that Ulster Protestants constitute not a nation, but a 'contractarian' community. See John Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp.127- 8. Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, pp.152-4, claim that O'Neill's economic planning 'represented an intensification of post-war dependence on subsidisation by London', and that the boast that he would 'transform the face of Ulster' by inculcating a new spirit of enterprise was mere rhetoric.

[23] The implication is that Catholics are the masses and working-class, whereas the Protestants are middle-class. 'Bourgeois', of course, has implications of Philistinism, which is a charge often levelled at Northern Protestants, and deeply resented. See, for example, Edna Longley, *'A Barbarous Nook*; The Writer and Belfast', in *The Irish Writer and the City*, ed. Maurice Harmon, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1984), reprinted in *The Living Stream*, pp.86-108.

> I'm Major This and Captain That
> MC and DSO.
> The Orange Lily in my hat,
> I sometimes wear for show,
>
> so long as I can walk my dogs
> around the old estate,
> and keep the Fenians in their bogs,
> and peasants at the gate.[24]

Heaney treats the annual preparations for the Twelfth of July, 'something of a cross between religious and folk festival', with a mixture of awe and amusement. They are seen as constituting little threat to 'the papist minority', who apparently console themselves with the thought that, 'We'll outbreed them in the end.' Having emphasised that belligerence and triumphalism also lie behind this 'folk festival', Heaney taunts Unionists here with one of their greatest long-standing anxieties, that Northern Catholics' higher birth-rate would eventually bring them majority status.[25]

Far more serious in the long term for the stability of both communities, Heaney realised, was the danger posed by Paisleyism, a movement

> directed at the breaking down of any bridges that might exist between Catholic and Protestant; it would create its own Troubles and set the political and religious question back 40 years. The atmosphere of the Troubles has been growing: there have been stabbings, shootings and bomb-throwings...Life

[24] *CP Hewitt*, pp.134-5. In *Shankill*, a recent television documentary, Billy Hutchinson, the leader of the Progressive Unionists and a community worker, has criticised the generally distorted picture given of Protestantism, particularly in the British media: 'Protestants in the Shankill Road didn't belong to the Protestant Ascendancy...The people who gained from it were the mill-owners, the factory owners, the landed gentry...The people of the Shankill Road were the people who actually kept them in furs and diamonds; they were the people who worked for low wages. I can understand the anger, frustration and even hatred amongst the Catholic community...the (working class) Protestants didn't have much more. They were discriminated against.'

[25] In Glenn Patterson's fine novel, *Fat Lad* (London: Minerva, 1992), Greta Linden, a Protestant housewife, comments on this obsessive fear within her community. The scene is set in 1923, at the birth of the new state of Northern Ireland:

> 'The men especially seemed to do nothing else but to talk about the number of Catholics there were...Numbers, numbers, numbers, they'd've put your head away listening to them. It was simple arithmetic, they said...
>
> For all Greta knew, the Catholic men were at it too, worrying that the Protestants were getting too far ahead. It was as if the war had never stopped at all, instead of guns and bombs, women's bodies were the weapons'(p.154).

> goes on, yet people are reluctant to dismiss the possibility of an explosion. A kind of doublethink operates: something is rotten, but maybe if we wait it will fester to death.[26]

The allusion to *Hamlet* perhaps implies that rottenness has been endemic since the creation of the state itself; it is uncertain whether he means to apply it to the festering resentment within his own community, since the passage quoted identifies Paisleyism as the destabilising factor. Frequently in his poems, Heaney provides alternative readings of the same phenomenon, yet here both readings originate in and conclude in dismay and trepidation. One possibility is that Paisley's current prominence may signal '*the death throes* of the ignorant and ugly bigotry that has numbed the social life of the community for years.' (There is an interesting verbal slippage here, a suggestion that there is really only *one* community in Northern Ireland).[27] The other, more alarming hypothesis sees Paisley as '*a phoenix figure*, stirring the embers of old feuds into a new conflagration.'[28]

Writing from within the Protestant community and as a Socialist, John Hewitt, in his poem 'The Coasters' from September 1969, directs much of the blame on complacent attitudes within the Protestant middle classes. The images Hewitt employs often accord with Heaney's. Whereas Heaney views Paisley's brand of extreme Protestantism as beyond the pale, Hewitt, despite his ironic treatment of it, recognises that on some level it strikes some deep and common chord:

> Relations were improving. The annual processions
> began to look rather like folk festivals.

---

[26] 'Out of London: Ulster's Troubles', 23. The final image of a festering wound within the state of Ulster, harks back to 'At a Potato Digging' (*Death of a Naturalist*, pp.32-3) and looks forward to 'Summer Home' (*Wintering Out*, pp.59-61), encouraging one perhaps to see a potential analogy between private and public disorders.

[27] The belief that 'the people of Ireland form one nation' is fundamental to the traditional nationalist position regarding Northern Ireland, according to Whyte, p.117.

[28] In the early poem, 'Docker', written in 1963, Heaney had warned of the inherent dangers of those who speak in 'Mosaic imperatives'(*Death of a Naturalist*, p.41).

When that noisy preacher started,
he seemed old-fashioned, a survival.
Later you remarked on his vehemence,
a bit on the rough side.
But you said, admit it, you said in the club,
'You know there's something in what he says.'

You coasted along.
And all the time, though you never noticed,
The old lies festered;
the ignorant became more thoroughly infected [29]

Roy Foster claims that Heaney's article exhibits 'a poet's prescience',[30] but events such as the formation early in 1966 of the loyalist paramilitary group, the Ulster Protestant Volunteers, the emergence in May of another group ominously styling themselves the Ulster Volunteer Force, and a number of individual sectarian incidents gave pointers towards the way ahead. During May and June 1966 two people had been killed in sectarian attacks. The first was an elderly Protestant lady, Mrs Martha Gould,who died of injuries following a UVF petrol bomb attack on a Catholic-owned Belfast pub. Late in May, John Scullion, a Catholic, was stabbed on the Falls Road by a group who later escaped in a car. The worst incident, one referred to in 'Out of Ulster', was the shooting on June 26 of four Catholic barmen walking home from work. Two were injured, and one, an eighteen year old, Peter Ward, died. Five Protestants, including Gusty Spence, the leader of the UVF, were soon after charged and convicted of the murder. One of

---

[29] *CPHewitt*, pp.135-7. The poem's last line recalls one of C.Day-Lewis's 1930s poems, 'Newsreel', in which he admonishes contemporary cinema-goers, worshippers of the 'dream-house', over their failure to face up to the imminent threat of war. Lovers of illusion, like Hewitt's Protestant bourgeoisie, they may awake one day 'into a strangling air and the flung/ Rags of children and thunder of stone niagaras tumbling', to find that 'you slept too long'. (See *Poetry of the Thirties*, ed. Robin Skelton, [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964], pp.69-70.) In another poem, 'Demagogue', Hewitt asserts that Paisley's

chief skill is to articulate
the smouldering terrors and the prejudice
that makes our heritage a dubious freight
which, now exposed, is seen for what it is.

The poem concludes depressingly, picturing Paisley as the destroyer of 'generous light', of any prospect of reconciliation as 'he breaks that hope across his broadcloth knee'(p.140-1).

[30] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, p.585.

them, Hugh McClean, allegedly told police, 'I am terribly sorry I ever heard of that man Paisley or decided to follow him.'[31]

Heaney's much later, stated conviction that poetry, like the other arts, could become 'a force, almost a mode of power, certainly a mode of resistance'[32] within the public sphere is implicit within the closure of the article, which contrasts the Reverend Paisley's divisive rhetoric with the 'urgent tracts' of the playwright, Sam Thompson[33] who had died the previous year. Known best as the author of *Over the Bridge*, whose bravely anti-sectarian stance caused its initial production to be axed, Thompson is clearly presented by Heaney as an exemplary figure, a man with a 'passion for justice', with 'an anger at hypocrisy in high places' - in short the antithesis of Paisley and O'Neill. Interestingly, the reader is never informed as to which community Thompson springs from, and indeed when Heaney's discussion focuses upon the arts all sectarian labels disappear, as if to suggest that Belfast's artistic community can fly by the nets of 'ignorant and ugly bigotry' elsewhere in the province.

---

[31] Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, (London: Pluto Press, 1976), p.236. From J. Bowyer Bell's study, *The Irish Troubles*, pp.53-4, we are informed that 'In Stormont, O'Neill attacked Paisley for thanking the UVF for their support and called the organisation "this evil thing in our midst."' O'Neill labelled the Reverend and his supporters as 'self-appointed defenders who "see moderation as treason and decency as weakness."'

[32] Seamus Heaney, interviewed by James Randall, *Ploughshares*, 5:3, 1979, 18.

[33] Sam Thompson, born 1916 in East Belfast, spent much of his working life as a painter in the shipyards, and, after the war, was employed by Belfast Corporation. As an active trade unionist, he opposed discrimination and attempted to share jobs out equally. This egalitarianism, however, cost him his job. Encouraged by a B.B.C. Radio producer, Sam Hanna Bell, to try his hand at writing, Thompson came up with *Over the Bridge*. The production of the play, however, was halted by the directors of the Group Theatre in Belfast for fear that it might 'offend or affront the religious or political beliefs or sensibilities of the man in the street'. *Over the Bridge* became a *cause celebre* in Belfast, and, after winning his case for breach of contract in court, Thompson saw the play finally performed at the Empire Theatre on 26 January 1960, under the direction of James Ellis. A later play, *Cemented with Love* (1965), also got into difficulties during production, probably for political reasons, and was eventually televised two months after Thompson's death. For further details see Stewart Parker's introduction to *Over the Bridge*, (Dublin:Gill and Macmillan, 1970), pp.7-15.

Printed at the foot of Heaney's *New Statesman* article, however, are two stanzas from a Roy McFadden poem, which sound a further warning note.[34] 'I won't dance' makes an obvious, ironic nod to a jolly fourteenth century poem, 'Ich am of Irlaunde',[35] but also to Yeats who incorporated the poem in poem XX of *Words for Music Perhaps*.[36] With its bleak quatrains, appalled images, woeful narrator, chartered streets, the poem seems not a million miles away from William Blake's 'London':

> I am of Northern Ireland, born
> Behind a mattressed window, when
>
> the cross fire between love and hate
> Jerked a corpse across our wooden gate.
>
> Where introverted streets reflect
> Pains from a shattered past: where all
> My constitutionals end with
> The dead man on the gate and in the myth.

McFadden's direct confrontation, here and elsewhere, of the appalling fact of killing on the streets presages those of Padraic Fiacc, James Simmons and Paul Durcan, and is not one that Heaney's poetry was easily able to countenance.

---

[34] Roy McFadden, *New Statesman*, 1 July 1966, p.24. The full text of the poem appears in *The Wearing of the Black*, p.84.

[35] The original text appears in *Medieval English Lyrics: A Critical Anthology*, ed. R.T. Davies, (London: Faber and Faber, edn. of 1966), p.99:

> Icham of Irlaunde
> And of the holy londe
> Of Irlande
>
> Gode sire, pray ich thee,
> For of sainte charite,
> Come and daunce wit me
> In Irlaunde.

[36] W.B. Yeats, *Collected Poems*, (London: Macmillan, 2nd edition, 1950), pp.302-4. Yeats's poem, like McFadden's, is full of dissonance. The poem which precedes it in *Words for Music Perhaps* is entitled 'Those Dancing Days are Gone'. Like the other poems in Yeats's sequence it dates from 1929-1931, a particularly joyless period in the history of de Valera's Free State when, according to Terence Brown, 'Irish Ireland ideology and the exclusivist cultural and social pressures...bore fruit in the enactment of the Censorship Bill.' See *Ireland:A Social and Cultural History 1922-85*, (London: Fontana, 1981), p.67.

II

Although opening divisions within Unionism were clearly in part responsible for the crisis that was to overwhelm O'Neill and Northern Ireland, these were themselves exacerbated by political changes within the equally heterogeneous Catholic community. While an older generation of Northern Catholics had been prepared to endorse the abstentionism of their political leaders, to withhold consent from the constitutional arrangements, to wrap themselves in the tricolour and let themselves be wrapped by the Church, among many younger Catholics there was a growing dissatisfaction with the *status quo* inside and outside their community. Unemployment amongst unskilled Catholic workers was rapidly rising, while at the same time a growing, articulate Catholic middle class was emerging in the work place and in higher education,[37] which sought expression for their discontent within the campaign for Civil Rights. Founded in 1967 in order to voice what Heaney called 'the grievances of the Catholic majority: unemployment, lack of housing, discrimination in jobs and gerrymandering in electoral affairs',[38] the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association contained within itself a broad spectrum of political opinions. Not surprisingly given the 'startlingly high' level of

---

[37] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*, p.584, notes the percentage of Catholics at Queen's University between 1961and 1971, which rose from 22% to 32%. Bob Purdie traces the emergence of a number of influential political-cultural groupings at Queen's University, Belfast, during the 1960s, such as the New Ireland Society, the National Democratic Group, and the Conservative and Unionist Association, and the increasingly acrimonious relationship between QUB students and the Minister of Home Affairs, William Craig, over the setting up a Republican Club in 1967. (pp.198-205).

[38] Seamus Heaney, 'Old Derry Walls', *The Listener*, 24 October 1968, 522. Heaney's use of the word 'majority' indicates Catholics on the island as a whole, some of whom have been cut off from their co-religionists by the border. Although the Civil Rights movement at times claimed to be simply demanding 'British rights for British subjects', Heaney's comment suggests that many nationalist supporters soon saw it as an opportunity to overthrow what they regarded as the unjust 'settlement' of the 1920s. Steve Bruce in *God Save Ulster: The Religion and Politics of Paisleyism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), goes one stage further, claiming that 'the speed with which many of its leaders shifted to more traditional nationalist and republican positions suggests that *a large part of the movement* was always ultimately interested in dismantling Northern Ireland' (my italics), p.266. Purdie comments, however, that Bruce ascribes to the movement and its leaders 'a coherence and a level of strategic thinking which it never had' (p.157).

discrimination and 'institutionalised'[39] injustice prevalent in the west of the province, its Derry supporters were often amongst the most radicalised in their views.

Hostility to the political and economic status quo had been intensified in Derry only a few years previously, following its failure to secure the city as the site of Northern Ireland's second university. The idea of a new university had first been mooted in Stormont in 1960, but by early 1965 there were strong indications that the Lockwood Committee might decide against granting Derry's Magee College university status. As a result, a broad cross-section of the city's nationalist and unionist communities, including members of political and church bodies and trades unions, banded together to form the University for Derry Committee, under the leadership of a local teacher, John Hume.[40]

A meeting held in Derry's Guildhall on 8 February 1965 drew an audience of over 1,500 people to hear Albert Anderson and Eddie McAteer, the Unionist mayor and the Nationalist Party M.P., eulogise on the economic and social benefits that would accrue to the city; it would 'help to unite the people in the North-West in a way they have never been united for generations'.[41] However, when, on 10 February, the Lockwood findings were finally published, recommending that the new university be established in Coleraine, there was an outcry in Derry. In a symbolic, publicity-seeking gesture - one which

---

[39] See R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*, p.583. Foster cites comments from E.A. Aunger's 'Religion and Class: An Analysis of 1971 Census Data' in *Religion, Education and Employment: Aspects of Equal Opportunity in Northern Ireland*, eds. R.J.Cormack and R.D.Osborne, (Belfast 1983), pp.24-41.In 1964 a QUB student body, the Working Committee on Civil Rights, was established specifically to investigate the situation in Derry and Newry. Amongst its members were Bowes Egan and Michael Farrell, later prominent in People's Democracy.

[40] John Hume, born 1937, in Derry City, was educated, like Brian Friel, Seamus Heaney and Seamus Deane at St Columb's College.

[41] Albert Anderson, *Londonderry Sentinel*, 10 February 1965, quoted in Marliynn Richtarik's *Acting Between the Lines*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p.16. Richtarik offers an exemplary, detailed account of these events surrounding the university issue.

anticipates subsequent attempts at 'direct action' in the province - the University for Derry Committee dispatched a massive motorcade to Belfast to protest at the decision, but all to no avail. According to Marilynn Richtarik, many people in Derry still today recall the bitter disappointment that followed the rejection of the city's bid for a university of their own, regarding it as 'the final straw'.[42]

Whereas the University for Derry Committee was a broad-based, cross-community, interdenominational organisation, the people behind the first Civil Rights march in Derry City on 5 October 1968 were largely members of the local Labour and Republican left, whose agenda far exceeded that of the reformist wing of the C.R.A.; whereas the latter envisaged social, economic and minor political changes within the existing state to afford the Catholic minority greater opportunities, the former anticipated the emergence of a thirty-two county socialistic republic. There were some points of affinity between many of the young radicals, like Eamonn McCann, and constitutionalist Catholics in Derry, like John Hume;[43] they shared a determination to confront the abuses of power under the Stormont regime, and thus to make a decisive break with the abstentionist policies of the Nationalist Party, but differed sharply as to the means which they were prepared to utilise. In a series of articles for *The Irish Times* in 1964,Hume had voiced many of the frustrations of younger Catholics with the Nationalist leadership, which, he argued, had failed to produce 'in forty years of opposition...one constructive contribution on either

[42] Richtarik, p.18.

[43] Initially, according to White, Hume refused to join the NICRA, because of its reputed 'extreme left-wing bias', and only joined the 5 October march as 'an ordinary citizen'. However, by the time of the subsequent sit-down protest in Guildhall Square of 19 October, Hume had taken on a prominent role within Derry's civil rights campaign, serving as Vice-Chairman of the Derry Citizens Action Committee between 1968-69, which was established on the Wednesday after the march by more conservative forces in the city to wrest control from the radicals.

the social or economic plane to the development of Northern Ireland.'[44] His constitutionalist position is stated within these early articles, along with his belief that the Catholic Church in Northern Ireland had for too long stifled political debate amongst its members:

> It ought to be made fashionable that the Catholic Church does not impose upon its members any one form of political belief...a united Ireland, if it is to come, and if violence rightly is to be discounted, must come about by evolution, i.e. the will of the Northern majority. It is clear that this is the only way in which a truly united Ireland, *with the Northern Protestant integrated*, can be achieved'.[45]

The diminution in the Protestant population in the South following the creation of the Free State, it could be argued, did not provide an encouraging precedent for the process of 'integration'.

From the spring and early summer of 1968 the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC), an alliance of left-wing Republicans and left-wing Labour supporters headed by Eamonn McCann, had been engaged in a campaign which deliberately sought to provoke the authorities into violence. It was formed, according to its statement of March 1968, in order to compel the Corporation to embark on a crash housing programme and to mark 'the beginning of a mass movement away from the false political leaders and against the exploiting capitalist class who have left in their wake a trail of human misery, degradation and decay'.[46] Apart from systematically disrupting Londonderry Corporation business during April and May 1968, they were also responsible for a number of spectacular one-off protests. One of these concerned the plight of John Wilson, who lived with his wife and two children (one suffering from tuberculosis) in a caravan in the Brandywell district.

---

[44] Quoted in Barry White, *John Hume: Statesman of theTroubles*, (Belfast:Blackstaff, 1984), p.43
[45] ibid, pp.44-5, my italics.
[46] Quoted in Bardon, p.650.

The DHAC protesters wheeled the Wilsons' vehicle out into the middle of the Lecky Road in the anticipation that they would be arrested. McCann's account of the incident clearly indicates that their motive was to undermine both the Unionist civil authority and the Nationalist Party: 'If we could force the police to act against us we would be certain of an upsurge in sympathy which would further weaken the Nationalist grip on the area'.[47]

Given the opportunity to select a route for the demonstration on Saturday, October 5, the D.H.A.C. opted for one almost guaranteed to end in confrontation. McCann emphasises how the Belfast-based Civil Rights people, 'who knew nothing of Derry', were manipulated by the local radicals in agreeing to a route that would take them through the city walls. 'No one in the C.R.A. delegation understood that it was unheard of for a non-Unionist procession to enter that area.'[48] The 'decidedly socialist flavour' of the pre-march publicity disseminated by McCann is said to have alienated many 'respectable Catholics', according to White, leading them to regard it as 'a coat-trailing exercise'.[49] In his recent autobiography, *Straight Left*, the former Belfast M.P., Paddy Devlin, recalling events some twenty five years later, states that British Labour Party M.P.s were invited to attend the march because he and Gerry Fitt 'suspected that it would end in trouble. We felt we needed some Labour M.P.s there as independent observers, especially as the British media had long turned a blind eye to Northern Ireland.'[50] Devlin, however like other commentators from Nationalist backgrounds, stresses that the route was consciously non-sectarian - it involved a crossing 'from one

---

[47] McCann, p.34. For the impact of these events on Friel's writing, see Chapter Four.
[48] ibid, p.37.
[49] White, p.62.
[50] Paddy Devlin, *Straight Left: An Autobiography* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1993), pp.89-90.

side of the River Foyle to the other, symbolising that the marchers were not partisan' - and that 'the civil rights marchers represented both traditions',[51] yet others interpreted the meaning of the march differently. What many Protestants sensed was threat:

> They knew about marches. When Orangemen marched into, or alongside a Catholic area what they meant was that Catholics must accept the fact of *Protestant* domination. Now, if Catholics were going to march in Protestant areas, what they meant was that Catholic domination was coming. That was not what their slogans and their banners said, to be sure, but what they said did not matter. Catholics were tricky people, and in no position to show their hand.Their words did not matter. But the fact of Catholics marching in Protestant territory mattered very much indeed. It had to be stopped.[52]

Hearing that the Protestant Apprentice Boys planned a counter-demonstration, the Stormont Minister of Home Affairs, William Craig, banned both marches, yet this only had the effect of hardening the protestors' resolve, and uniting the diverse shades of political opinion behind the civil rights' march. Instead of the anticipated 5,000, about four hundred people gathered at the assembly point, only to find a line of policemen to

---

[51] ibid, p.89. Purdie, pp.123-5, 129-130, 149-151, stresses the important role of republicanism, and in particular the Wolfe Tone Societies in the founding of NICRA, and in influencing the direction it later took. He goes on to discount William Craig's charge that NICRA was primarily a 'Republican front', and provides evidence to show that neither republicans nor the IRA were in control of the organisation. Patrick Bishop and Eamonn Mallie, in *The Provisional IRA* (London: Corgi Books, 1988), report that IRA men served as stewards at 'every civil rights march of any size during the late sixties and early seventies', but that they constituted only a tiny minority, and were 'swamped by groups who were either ignorant, indifferent or hostile to them'(p.72).

[52] O'Brien, p.162. He is referring in the passage specifically to a period *after* the Derry civil rights march, and to how many Protestants responded to the socialist rhetoric of People's Democracy. Nevertheless, his reading of Protestant reactions can surely be allowed to apply to earlier events.

Purdie quotes Sarah Nelson's illuminating comments in *Ulster's Uncertain Defenders: Protestant Political, Paramilitary and Community Groups and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Belfast: Appletree, 1984), p.72, which emphasise the deep sense of affront experienced by many Protestants as they took in the implications of the civil rights' case:

> When the civil rights movement emerged a few Protestants were prepared to make a leap of trust and accept that Protestants must change both in their attitudes and their policies. A larger group felt that Catholics could never be trusted, that their demands must be fought to the end. The rest were to varying degrees unwilling to accept that Protestants had any major responsibility for Catholic inequality, for past bitterness or future reconciliation. Civil rights offered them no proofs of Catholic loyalty, and challenged their definitions at every point by putting the blame squarely on the majority. The movement also said;"You are not the sort of people you claim to be, fair and freedom loving: you are frauds or hypocrites." People's definitions of themselves were fundamentally challenged.

the front of them and a line to the rear. What happened next has been graphically recaptured in Paddy Devlin's memoir:

> The atmosphere was electric as the march moved slowly off in the direction of the line of policemen and tenders drawn across Duke Street.
>
> They were ready, as we knew they would be, and when we came face to face, the batons and blackthorn sticks, carried by officers, came out and they started hitting us. Head were split and groins were kneed as police and demonstrators engaged in running clashes. One of the first casualties was Gerry (Fitt), who was covered in blood gushing down his face after a blow to the head. ...The police then brought up a water cannon and I remember running away from the high-powered jets of water. The M.P.s, positioned behind the police, had a clear view of the events, which were recorded by Gay O'Brien of Radio Telefis Éireann, the only cameraman present...His pictures were flashed round the world that evening and when Harold Wilson saw them in 10 Downing Street as he watched the evening news bulletins, he was appalled.[53]

The day proved to be, as Heaney and others recognised at the time, 'a watershed in the political life of Northern Ireland',[54] and reactions to the beatings that left seventy-seven people in hospital soon gathered momentum.

The Wednesday following, 9 October, witnessed a protest march in Belfast involving two thousand students from Queen's University, and in Derry the formation of a Citizens Action Committee (DCAC). This was set up, according to Eamonn McCann, at the behest of more conservative elements within the nationalist community, who were determined to wrest control from his own DHAC.[55] The first occasion when the DCAC

---

[53] Paddy Devlin, pp.90-1. Of course, Devlin's account might be discounted as partisan, and flawed due to the lapse of time separating him from the events he describes.. Purdie, pp.146-7, suggests that the march organisers should share some of the blame for the breakdown of control, but concludes his analysis with the judgement of the *Times* that 'reports of police brutality and loss of self-control are too uncomfortably convincing to be waved away by Mr. Craig.' The Cameron Commission, set up by Captain Terence O'Neill in January 1969, concluded in its report, published in September of that year, that the police had indeed batoned people 'without justification and excuse', though 'subversive elements' amongst the Civil Rights marchers had aimed to stir up trouble on the streets'. Eamonn McCann has written, 'We had indeed set out to make the police over-react. But we hadn't expected the animal brutality of the RUC.' (*War in an Irish Town*, p.43).

[54] Seamus Heaney, 'Old Derry Walls', *The Listener*, 24 October , 1968, 522.

[55] McCann refused to serve on the new committee of the predominantly middle-class DCAC which included amongst its officers Ivan Cooper, a Protestant, shirt factory manager and Labour Party supporter as Chair, John Hume as Vice Chair, James Doherty, a Nationalist city councillor as

showed its strength and its self-discipline was a sit-down demonstration attended by 5,000 in Guildhall Square on Saturday, 19 October, which ended with John Hume leading the assembled company in the singing of 'We Shall Overcome', the anthem of the American civil rights movement.

In an article for *The Listener* published five days later, Heaney revisited the month's events with a mixture of outrage and jubilation. Following the 'intoxicating'[56]success of the Guildhall sit-down, 'the Catholic minority, if it is to retain any self-respect, will have to risk the charge of wrecking the new moderation and seek justice more vociferously'.[57] His comments reflect a common nationalist perception of the time that 'the initiative was in their own hands. Their enemies were divided among themselves. The friends their enemies once possessed were no longer to be relied upon'.[58] O'Neill could not afford to alienate the British Government by satisfying his own supporters and cracking down on the civil rights movement. However, what Heaney and other civil rights enthusiasts failed to appreciate was that the more 'vociferous' they became, the more imperilled the Protestant community felt themselves to be, and thus the more likely to retaliate. A far more experienced political voice speaking in the same issue of *The Listener*, however,

---

treasurer, and Campbell Austin, a Protestant store-owner as Press Officer. The aim of the DCAC was to present themselves as a 'broad-based, cross-community' organisation (White, p.64). In certain respects the political divisions within the nationalist community in the 1960s between a conservative constitutionalist right, heavily influenced by the Catholic Church, and a radical, Republican left, mirror those of earlier periods in northern politics. In *Northern Nationalism: Nationalist Politics, Partition and the Catholic Minority in Northern Ireland 1890-1940* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1994), Eamon Phoenix provides a vivid picture of the struggle for the soul - and votes - of Catholic Ulster fought out between the Redmondite Home Rule Party, which attempted to be pragmatic over the issue of partition, and the Sinn Fein movement which was prepared to take up arms rather than accept the division of Ireland. Although the hierarchy of the Church consistently supported the cause of constitutional nationalism, at times, such as in the election of 1918, they were prepared to broker pan-nationalist electoral pacts to keep the Unionists out.

[56] O'Brien, p.163. He refers here to the 'intoxicating sense of power' enjoyed by Catholic leaders, realising that O'Neill was in a cleft stick.

[57] 'Old Derry Walls', 522.

[58] O'Brien, p.163.

warned with chilling accuracy that the protestors' legitimate demands for social justice might end up releasing the contents of Pandora's box:

> Civil disobedience is non-violent, but everywhere it attracts violence. The two greatest modern apostles of non-violence, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, were both murdered. Non-violence, setting off the use of violence, effectively draws attention to a grievance, since the public wants to know why these people are willing to put themselves in a position where they will be clubbed by the police. The British public learned then that there was something peculiar about the situation in Derry; a Catholic-Nationalist majority was ruled over by a Protestant-Unionist minority, holding a near-monopoly of jobs and housing...So far this was a considerable reward for a limited act of non-violent civil disobedience. For the first time the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland seemed to have some prospects of achieving normal democratic rights.Yet the reaction of the minority to this change has not been one of unqualified rejoicing: it is more a case of bracing oneself against shocks to come. For these people know that much more is involved than the correction of an electoral anomaly: it is a question of changing historical relations between conqueror and conquered - something not likely to happen without violence. The subordination of Catholic to Protestant in Derry is a result of force and the threat of force. The condition of Derry may be thought of as one of frozen violence: any attempt to thaw it out will liberate violence which is at present static.[59]

Another interesting aspect of this self-same *Listener* article lies in its deployment of a literary analogy to 'read' the Northern situation and relate that narrative to other contemporary events. O'Brien sets up Creon as the embodiment of unyielding tyranny, which Antigone rashly challenges, thereby precipitating a terrible tragedy.[60]

---

[59] ibid, pp.157-8.

[60] Tom Paulin has attacked ferociously what he sees as O'Brien's distorted interpretation of *Antigone* in his essay, 'The Making of a Loyalist' in *Ireland and the English Crisis* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1984), and drawn attention to a revealing omission from the reprinted version of the *Listener* piece that appears in *States of Ireland*. The suppressed passage runs: 'Without Antigone, we could attain a quieter, more realistic world. The Creons might respect one another's sphere of influence if the instability of idealism were to cease to present, inside their own dominions, a threat to law and order' (quoted in Paulin, p.27). I read O'Brien's attitudes within his original piece as perhaps more ambivalent than Paulin suggests. The former is clearly highly critical of the paranoid Creon, who is unflatteringly compared with the Americans in Vietnam and the Soviets in Czechoslovakia. However, he also condemns the intemperateness of contemporary Antigones who fail to imagine the possible bloody implications of their just demands. Yet by placing so much blame on 'Antigone and her under-studies' for so many of the deaths that occurred, O'Brien is, as Paulin says, absolving many other guilty parties.

In contrast to the happy picture of widespread intercommunal moral solidarity Heaney depicts in his writing for a British readership - 'Catholic and Protestant, Unionist and Republican have aligned themselves behind the civil rights platform to examine the conscience of the community'[61] - in a comment for a local audience later that winter, he strikes an altogether more cautious note. Ominously, he warns of the dangers if the newly-formed group, People's Democracy,[62] fail to 'remember the real hinterland of prejudice which people on both sides are fighting and not lose sight of this reality in a fury of rhetoric.'[63]

After being summoned by Harold Wilson's government to London and ordered to begin the process of reform, Captain O'Neill on 22 November 1968 managed to persuade his reluctant cabinet to agree to a five-point package.[64] These concessions were welcomed by many in the nationalist community, including the NICRA, the DCAC and the Nationalist Party, who responded to O'Neill's passionate television appeal for peace on 9 December by declaring a truce and a halt to further street protests or marches.[65]

---

[61] 'Old Derry Walls', 522. O'Brien observes somewhat drily that though NICRA claimed to be 'non-sectarian', that term in Northern Ireland generally denoted 'Catholic-based with a few Protestant sympathisers'(p.154).

[62] People's Democracy was a student body, founded on 9 October 1968 at Queen's University, Belfast. The group, which comprised both staff and students, including a significant proportion of Protestants, had a six-point programme: 'One man, one vote; fair boundaries; houses on need; jobs on merit; free speech; repeal of the Special Powers Act.' (Paul Arthur, *The People's Democracy 1968-73* [Belfast, 1974], p.30).Amongst its leaders were Michael Farrell, Eamonn McCann and Bernadette Devlin. Purdie claims that PD was 'almost as hostile' to the traditional nationalist community leaders within NICRA 'as it was to the Unionist government'(p.198).

[63] The source of the quotation may have been an edition of the Queen's University magazine, *Gown*. It was sent to me as a cutting by a friend who had reported on events in Ulster for the Leeds University paper, *Union News*. It is interesting to note how in one piece 'vociferousness' is a positive, while in another 'fury' is a negative.

[64] Londonderry Corporation was to be replaced by an appointed development commission, which would aim to regenerate the city; a points system was to be introduced to ensure fairness in the distribution of housing; some sections of the Special Powers Act were to be repealed; an ombudsman was to be appointed to examine grievances arising from decisions made at local government level or by Stormont; universal suffrage for local government elections was to be considered, and companies would lose the right to vote in elections. (Bardon, p.657 and Paddy Devlin, p.92)

[65] Bardon, p.658. At the end of 1968, O'Neill's stock seemed to be soaring. He received a huge vote of

However, the whole reform policy antagonised further sections of loyalist opinion. The Minister of Home Affairs, William Craig, who had banned the October march, launched a blistering attack on O'Neill and the British Government, charging them with appeasement; not surprisingly, he was immediately sacked. The Ulster Protestant Volunteers, who attended each of the Reverend Ian Paisley's rallies, issued an emotive appeal to 'our loyal brethren, for the sake of God, our country and our children, to forget all petty quarrels and jealousies and defend our constitution and liberty.'[66]

Not everyone engaged in the civil rights protests was prepared to respond to O'Neill's call 'to take the heat out of the situation',[67] and when a second major conflagration blazed up at Burntollet less than a month later his attempts to extinguish the flames proved futile. Paddy Devlin, then chairman of the Northern Ireland Labour Party, for example, argued that O'Neill's changes 'did not go far enough to rectify the years of unionist abuse', and 'favoured keeping up the pressure' until 'fundamental and lasting changes in society'[68] were introduced, including the abolition of gerrymandering and the continuing discriminatory practices in making public appointments. This was a view shared by a group within People's Democracy - the Young Socialist Alliance - who on New Year's Day 1969 set off on a march from Belfast to Derry.[69]

---

confidence from the Unionist Party, was voted 'man of the year' by the Dublin *Sunday Independent*, and gained the support of over 150,000 readers of the *Belfast Telegraph*.

[66] ibid, p.657.

[67] O'Neill, quoted in Bardon, p.658. Bowyer Bell, p.75, informs us how three days after the reform legislation was passed, major violence was narrowly averted in Armagh by the RUC keeping apart 5,000 civil rights protestors and 1,000 Paisleyites. Paisley supporters attacked the press, damaged a BBC television camera, and 'exchanged stones with the civil rights people.'

[68] Paddy Devlin, p.93.

[69] According to Bardon (p.659) and Bernadette Devlin's *The Price of My Soul* (London: Pan, 1969), p.120-1, a large meeting of People's Democracy in December 1968 had voted to postpone the proposed march, but the Young Socialists decided to go ahead. Eddie McAteer and John Hume had both warned the leaders that 'the march would lead to sectarian violence', a view which was given further credence when Major Ronald Bunting, leader of the U.P.V. and commandant of the Loyal Citizens of Ulster, issued a statement on 27 December, threatening retribution if the P.D. people

At various stages on their seventy-five mile journey, they faced abuse, threats, enforced stoppages, and though they suspected 'we wouldn't finish the march without getting molested',[70] few could have predicted the level of violence that they would encounter before reaching Derry. Throughout Bernadette Devlin's near-contemporaneous, but naturally partial account of the events, she stresses the students' maintained commitment to 'our non-violent discipline',[71] yet just to the east of Derry, at Burntollet Bridge, on Saturday, 4 January, they were subjected to a brutal and totally unwarranted attack.[72] The ambush was

> a 'last ditch' operation to stop the march. Representatives from every loyalist area between Claudy and Derry were given instructions on what their role should be in the attacks. From early morning heavy quarry lorries carried loads of stones to hilltops along the route...Groups of men, totalling some two hundred or more, and including members of the all-Protestant auxiliary police, the B Specials, gathered along the road. They were armed with sticks embedded with protruding six-inch nails, police batons and iron bars.[73]

Many of the police detailed to protect the marchers stood idly by or even mingled with the attackers, according to various accounts emanating from the victims.[74] Amongst the

---

marched through loyalist territory. The organisers, however, were determined to 'break the truce, to relaunch the civil rights movement as a mass movement, and to show people that O'Neill was, in fact, offering them nothing... What we really wanted to do was pull the carpet off the floor to show the dirt that was under it' (Bernadette Devlin, p.120).

[70] Bernadette Devlin, p.120.

[71] ibid, p. 133, p.137, p.142. Bishop and Mallie, pp.80-1, report that one Catholic politician 'whose daughter was amongst the marchers', approached by telephone a republican solicitor, Kevin Agnew, whose home in Maghera was on the marchers' route. 'Later that day Agnew toured the South Derry countryside calling at the homes of old IRA men. A cache of revolvers hidden since the end of the border campaign was exhumed, stripped and cleaned...That night the IRA men kept a discreet armed watch over the marchers. When the attack came in Burntollet the next day, the middle-aged escorts could do little to prevent it.'

[72] On 3 January, Ian Paisley attempted to get the last stage of the march banned, without success, and that evening held a meeting at the Guildhall in Derry. A riot broke out, windows were smashed, and Major Bunting's car was set alight. Bunting claimed that a 'Civil Rights mob' was behind the riot, but the Cameron Commission later determined that 'it had nothing to do with any Civil Rights organization. It was random and largely drunken sectarian hooliganism, sparked by the mere fact of Paisley's presence' (The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, *Ulster* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972], p.65).

[73] Paddy Devlin, pp.94-5.

[74] Many of these are to be found in Bowes Egan and Vincent McCormack's *Burntollet*, (London:

eighty-seven marchers who ended up in Altnaglevin hospital was Paddy Devlin's daughter, Anne, who, after being beaten unconscious, fell into a river.[75]When the bloodied survivors eventually straggled into Derry, they were attacked again, this time with stones and petrol bombs at Irish Street and Spencer Road, but on reaching Guildhall Square found safety and a huge welcoming crowd.[76] That same evening a considerable number of RUC policemen went on a rampage in the Bogside, committing acts of 'assault and battery, malicious damage to property, to streets'.[77]

Sectarian passions in the wake of the march had clearly reached a new high, and were further excited by the government's reaction. In what O'Brien charitably refers to as an 'unwise' speech, and Bardon labels 'confused and ill-considered',[78]O'Neill in a television broadcast on 5 January blamed the marchers for Burntollet, and threatened to make more frequent use of the B Specials for 'normal police duties' in future:

> The march to Londonderry planned by the so-called People's Democracy was, from the outset, a foolhardy and irresponsible undertaking...Some of the marchers and those who supported them in Londonderry itself have shown themselves to be mere hooligans, ready to attack the police and others... Enough is enough. We have heard sufficient for now about civil rights; let us hear about civic responsibility.[79]

Interestingly whereas O'Neill and Faulkner attributed to the marchers a degree of calculation and political foresight they did not possess, Eddie McAteer and Frank

1969). Bardon, p.660, reprints several of these. The *Sunday Times* Insight Team wrote that, 'There was no chance that the police could protect the unarmed marchers against assault. They had watched the gathering of the ambush with staggering complacency, chatting with the B Specials as they assembled with their cudgels.' It is estimated that at least half of the Burntollet attackers were members of the Ulster Special Constabulary, the B Specials (*Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.66-7).

[75] ibid, p.95. The incident is referred to also by the *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.66.

[76] 'It is impossible to describe the atmosphere, but it must have been like that on VE-Day: the war was over and we had won; we hadn't lifted a finger, but we'd won.' (Bernadette Devlin, p.143).

[77]The Cameron Commission, quoted by the *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.68. See also Bardon, p.661, Paddy Devlin, p.95, Fionnuala O'Connor, p.113.

[78] O'Brien, p.165, Bardon, p.661.

[79] Bardon, p.661.

Gogarty, chair of NICRA, credited them with an innocence, an insouciance which, in the words of Bob Purdie, 'strains credulity'.[80] By commending the police for their firm and fair action, O'Neill intensified alienation amongst large sections of the Northern Catholic population, especially those in Derry; and thereafter confidence in both the RUC and the government's intentions slumped to an all time low.[81] Barricades went up in the Bogside; vigilantes began patrolling the streets; a gable-end declared 'You are now entering Free Derry'; Radio Free Derry took to the air.

O'Neill's announcement on 15 January that a commission was being set up to examine 'the causes and nature of the violence and civil disturbance on Northern Ireland' came hard upon the heels of riots at a civil rights march in Newry on Saturday, 11 January - evidence that control was slipping away from the moderates within the nationalist community.[82] Soon after a succession of blows undermined the Prime Minister's political authority and standing. One of the ablest members of his Cabinet, Brian Faulkner, the Minister for Commerce, resigned. A man with strong grassroots support, Faulkner criticised O'Neill's handling of the crisis, and claimed that the decision to establish the Cameron Commission was indicative of a general 'weakness', a tendency to submit to duress.[83] When, on 3 February, twelve Unionist M.P.s meeting at Portadown called for him to resign, O'Neill turned to the electorate for their support, calling a General

[80] Purdie, pp.215-17. The narrator's reference to the marchers as 'girls and boys', in 'An Ulster Landowner's Song', *CP Hewitt*, p. 135, could be taken as suggesting that he regards them as innocents.
[81] Bardon states that 'over the years the police had been remarkably successful in winning acceptance in all areas of Northern Ireland, but now the RUC's reputation collapsed in Catholic districts'(p.662). The *Sunday Times* Insight Team report, however, that policing in the Bogside had for a long time consisted solely of 'occasional armed patrols in Land Rovers'(p.68).
[82] Bardon reports how a group of young militants, some from Dundalk, disregarded Hume's attempts to calm them, attacked the R.U.C., overturned and set light to many police vehicles, and pushed others into the nearby canal.
[83] For details of the acrimonious Faulkner-O'Neill split, see the *Sunday Times* Insight Team, pp.69-70.

Election for 24 February. Although 27 out of the 39 Unionists returned were pro-O'Neill, and no Paisleyite 'Protestant Unionists' were elected, the Prime Minister had not achieved the ringing endorsement he had hoped for:

> In the twenty three constituencies where pro-O'Neill candidates were opposed by anti-O'Neillites and Protestant Unionists, O'Neill supporters won 141,914 votes and eleven seats, while their opponents got 130,619 votes and twelve seats.[84]

As Conor Cruise O'Brien points out, O'Neill had needed to attract 'enough Catholic moderates to compensate for the defection of Protestant extremists'.[85] In his own constituency he defeated Ian Paisley, but the margin of victory was relatively narrow; Bannside Catholics preferred to give their support to the People's Democracy candidate, the socialist Michael Farrell, not perhaps because they had all shifted suddenly and dramatically left-wards, but because of his status as a militant advocate of civil rights.[86]

Overall, the election results exhibited not only glaring disunity in the governing party, but also within the nationalist opposition. Support melted away from the Nationalist Party, which suffered key defeats in Foyle and Mid-Derry at the hands of civil rights moderates, Hume and Cooper, who were standing as Independents, while in South Down their candidate only hung on by 220 votes when challenged by a member of the People's Democracy. While socialist militants from within the Catholic community accused their opponents of fostering sectarianism

> the moderates charged the militants with perverting the civil rights movement in pursuit of the will o'the wisp of socialism and working class unity...Yet however distasteful and dangerous they found the views of the PD militants, the moderates were too divided among themselves by personal and local rivalries and past

[84] Patrick Buckland, *A History of Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1981), p.127.
[85] O'Brien, p.166.
[86] Owen Dudley Edwards is almost certainly correct in stating that O'Neill's majority over Paisley would have been considerably higher, had it not been for the 'intervention' of Michael Farrell. 'Catholics preferred to vote for a real, not a token advocate of civil rights.' See *The Sins of our Fathers: Roots of Conflict in Northern Ireland*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970).

> political commitments, and were too concerned lest they lose support, to present a united front and battle with the militants for leadership of the Catholic community.[87]

A succession of events in March-April 1969 accelerated the escalating crisis within Northern Ireland and inside both communities. The jailing of Ian Paisley and Major Bunting over their involvement in the Newry disturbances, and the rejection of their appeal on 25 March against their conviction, further antagonised the Protestant right. An explosion at an electricity substation at Castlereagh on 30 March causing £500,000 in damage, followed by further bombings on 20 and 25 April on pipelines providing Belfast's water supply, were at the time blamed on the IRA, but may well have been the work of loyalists intent on wrecking O'Neill and his credibility by convincing fellow Protestants that the civil rights movement was moving into terrorism.[88] Accepting the original assessment by the RUC that the bombings 'were caused by people working to an IRA plan',[89] O'Neill's reaction was to mobilise a thousand B Specials and to arm the police. Campaigning for her husband's release, Eileen Paisley claimed that the bombs were an inevitable consequence of the Prime Minister's policies: 'Captain O'Neill has sown the wind, now he is reaping the whirlwind.'[90]

Meanwhile the increasing sway of the militants within N.I.C.R.A prompted on 16 March the resignation from its executive of three of its moderating voices, one of whom, Betty Sinclair, had long opposed the policy of street demonstrations because of the sectarian

---

[87] Buckland, p.126.
[88] Paddy Devlin, p.102, Bardon, p.664, Bell, p.91. The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, writing in 1972, suggest that there is some uncertainty over the responsibity for the bombings, but report 'still persistent rumours, for instance, that disgruntled right-wing members of Ulster's security services were involved. And the role of several influential adherents of the Free Presbyterian Church is unclear' (p.79).
[89] Bardon, p.664.
[90] ibid.

violence they invariably unleashed.[91] As if to prove her point, a month later, on 19 and 20 April after a North Derry CRA. march from Burntollet to Derry had been called off, riots near and in the Bogside involving nationalists, loyalists and the police ended with 165 casualties in Altnagelvin, including 86 police officers. One of the civilian victims was a completely innocent bystander, Samuel Devenney, who, along with his family, was beaten by the police and subsequently died from a heart attack.[92] In Belfast late on the evening of 20 April the first petrol bombs were thrown.[93]

Three days earlier a by-election in Mid-Ulster with a 91.5 per cent turnout resulted in the victory of Bernadette Devlin, at twenty-one the youngest woman Westminster M.P. ever. Her election provided fresh testimony of the willingness of the Catholic community to put aside their traditional conservatism and their political divisions, and thus alarmed Protestants all the more. If indeed 'Her dramatic appearance in the House of Commons undoubtedly led the British Government to urge O'Neill to implement further reforms',[94] then that pressure finally took its toll. O'Neill's decision on 22 April to introduce 'one

[91] Betty Sinclair had a long history of involvement in Northern Ireland labour politics and was a long-time member of the Communist Party. Her experiences of sectarian violence in the 1930s conditioned her attitude to street marches, knowing that they not only left Protestants 'upset and angered', but also encouraged 'some less politically sophisticated Catholics' to interpret the strategy 'as a signal to become more aggressive and combative towards the police and the Protestant community' (Purdie, p.244).

[92] At 9.00 p.m. on 19 April Samuel Devenney had been at home in William Street with his wife and five children, when a group of Bogside teenagers, who had been stoning RUC officers, rushed through the open door and made their escape over a back wall. The police pursuing them burst into the house and proceeded 'to baton those inside unconscious, splashing blood over the walls and ceiling' (White, p.76) Devenney, who was forty three and suffered from a weak heart and had a record of TB, was badly cut around the head, and much later, in July, died in hospital. No-one was ever charged with the assault (The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.76). His death 'prepared the mood for the explosion of August' (O'Brien, p.174).

[93] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team state that these were not the work of the I.R.A., but of a group of Falls Road teenagers. They go on to establish a link between the young Belfast Catholics involved and the Bogside Catholics, suggesting that the former were attempting to relieve pressure on the latter by attempting to prevent police reinforcements being sent to Derry. Earlier that evening the Belfast CRA had held a meeting which further served to inflame passions. At the meeting a tape recording of one of the Devenney children was played in which she described the savage attack on her family. (pp.76-8)

[94] Bardon, p.663.

man, one vote' triggered the resignation from the government of his cousin, Major James Chichester-Clark,[95] and four days after receiving the grudging support of the parliamentary Unionist Party for the reforms - the vote was 28-22 - the Prime Minister himself resigned.[96]

Heaney makes reference to the failure of the O'Neill years in the first published version of 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing', which appeared in *The Listener*, in October 1971, not long after his return 'to winter quarters', after his year in America. Section three contains the stanza:

> Enter, in our Twenties, the great O'Neill.
> The Great O'Neill! Those 'two cultures' again!
> He might as well have never turned a wheel.
> The tone was raised and things went down the drain.[97]

This would seem to imply that O'Neill's 'liberalisation' policy was more a matter of image than of substance; only 'the tone was raised'. Granted, O'Neill did not slip often into the overt sectarian prejudice and rhetoric of Brookeborough, but he said nothing that fundamentally addressed such issues as discrimination in jobs and housing, gerrymandering, the cultural and social divisions in Northern Ireland. A change in tone had been enough to lift expectations, in particular those of the minority, but ultimately their hopes for equality of status had been betrayed when O'Neill proved incapable of

[95]James Chichester-Clark served as the M.P. for South Derry, and his estate, Moyola Park, lay close to the Heaneys' home at Mossbawn. O'Neill voted for Chichester-Clark as his successor, not allegedly from family loyalty or because he considered him the best man for the job, but because 'Jimmy had only been trying to bring me down for six weeks. Brian had been trying for six years. Childish, isn't it?'(The *Sunday Times* Insight team, p.87).

[96] It may well be that there is a connection between the acceleration in the political pulse at this time and the fact that during one week in May 1969 Heaney recalls having written in rapid succession 'about forty poems' (Interview with Harriet Cooke, *The Irish Times*, 28 December, 1973, 8).

[97] Seamus Heaney, *The Listener*, 14 October 1971, 496-7.

assuaging the fears within the Unionist community or of controlling its forces of law and order.

III

O'Neill's replacement, James Chichester-Clark, chosen in preference to Brian Faulkner by one vote, fared little better. Both John Hewitt in his poem, 'Prime Minister', and Paddy Devlin in his memoir, recognised that Chichester-Clark was 'a decent man', but prone to 'hesitations',[98] and soon shown to be 'out of his depth'.[99] Along with 'a minimal programme of reforms',[100] a general political amnesty was introduced on 6 May which resulted in the release of Paisley and Bunting, and the dropping of possible charges against Bernadette Devlin. With the summer marching season approaching, sectarian tensions remained high, as Paddy Devlin recalls:

> A trickle of Catholic families living in mixed areas began to leave their homes after threats or petrol bomb attacks...Clashes between rival crowds became a nightly occurrence and the heavy-handed policing, by a force that was now overstretched and exhausted, did little to calm the trouble. There were few nights that I was not being called out to ease fears, oversee families fleeing their homes.[101]

In order to try and keep the spark from the tinder, Devlin and a friend, Father Tony Marcellus, organised a 'pop for peace' concert on the southern outskirts of Belfast, attended by 7,000 youngsters who listened to local bands and joined together to sing John Lennon's 'Give Peace a Chance'.[102] As the organisers cleared up after the concert, they caught a news bulletin which reported fighting around Unity Flats, an isolated

[98] *CP Hewitt*, p.140.
[99] Paddy Devlin, p.102. Writing in 1972, O'Brien argues that Chichester-Clark's government gave the impression of being 'afraid *both* of militant Protestants *and* of militant Catholics'(p.175).
[100] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, p.589.
[101] Paddy Devlin, pp.102-3.
[102] ibid, p.103.

Catholic block at the mouth of the Shankill Road. Missiles and abuse had been exchanged. Catholics complained that the police had failed to break up the Orange crowd taunting them, Protestants that they had been attacked from the flats. Though not a major incident in itself, in its re-telling it became more so.

Far more serious were the events in Derry where between 12-13 July rioting resulted in injuries to 16 police and 22 civilians,[103] and in Dungiven where a Catholic crowd attempted to block the route of an Orange march on 12 July, and a newly-built Orange Hall was set alight. Trouble continued into the following day. Rather than deploy British troops stationed near Derry to help relieve his exhausted men, the Inspector General of the RUC, Anthony Peacocke persuaded the Minister of Home Affairs, Robert Porter, that the better course was to mobilise the B Specials in Dungiven. When the local RUC sought to protect the same Orange Hall that had been attacked previously - an action 'read' by Catholics as indicative of an alliance between the police and the Orangemen- a hostile crowd gathered. Two tenders bringing in police reserves were fired, and in response the police baton-charged the crowd; amongst those beaten was a seventy year old farmer who died from injuries the next day. In another part of town, meanwhile, the B-Specials had gathered near a dance-hall. When the mainly Catholic dancers emerged, they bombarded the B-Specials with stones and bottles; the latter replied by firing with rifles, revolvers and a Sterling sub-machine-gun. The *Sunday Times* team make the important point that Robert Porter had given instructions that the B Specials 'should *not* be armed', and concluded that 'Dungiven was the first terrifying example of the

[103]The *Sunday Times* Insight Team state that out of a total force of 3,200 men, 800 had become casualties by the end of the summer.

authorities' inability to control the very forces which Stormont was now nominally enlisting to preserve law and order.'[104]

As July wore on riots and fires in Belfast became nightly events. When fire engines turned up, they too were attacked. Paddy Devlin describes how Belfast's fire chief suffered appalling burns when his car was petrol-bombed, and how a senior Catholic officer in the RUC, Inspector Frank Lagan, was set upon by a crowd of his co-religionists and had to be smuggled away to safety.[105] Like the *Sunday Times* Insight reporters, Devlin believed that the disturbances in Belfast were in part orchestrated by 'Derry voices', eager to stretch police resources to the limit.[106] He records a meeting with James Chichester-Clark in which it was suggested that the police withdraw from the Bogside, where 'regular charges' by the RUC had raised hostility to new heights, particularly following the death of Samuel Devenney on 17 July. Yet Chichester-Clark chose to reject the advice of Devlin and his colleagues.[107]

As the date of the annual Apprentice Boys' Parade in Derry drew near, sectarian tensions in Belfast stepped up several gears. A frequent flashpoint was the area around Catholic Unity Walk flats. On 2 August, a march by Junior Orangemen resulted in a major confrontation between their supporters from the Shankill and residents of the flats. When, in an act of provocation, one of the residents began waving a tricolour from their window, enraged loyalists smashed all the windows on one side of the block. In an

---

[104] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team give a detailed account of the background to the Dungiven events, pp.98-100, but fail to explain why the B Specials had been deployed near the dance-hall. These events in Dungiven are worth citing since many accounts of the Troubles focus mainly on Belfast and Derry.

[105] Paddy Devlin, p.104.

[106] ibid.

[107] ibid, p.105. Barry White reports how John Hume travelled to London to warn the Home Office of the dangerous consequences should the parade proceed, but his fears were treated as 'alarmist'(p.79). Had the parade been banned, there would certainly have been Protestant outrage, followed by violence.

attempt to restore order some of the outnumbered police baton-charged the Protestants back towards the Shankill, others attacked the residents, beating unconscious a former British soldier, Emmanuel O'Rourke, and an elderly man, Mr Corry, who died, having received three skull fractures and five separate areas of brain damage.[108] When riots broke out on the Crumlin Road, the RUC found themselves trapped in a vice, 'stoned by Protestants and petrol-bombed by Catholics.'[109]

In Derry, meanwhile, preparations of various kinds were made for the Glorious Twelfth. Apprentice Boys representatives met a delegation from the Bogside, and an undertaking was given by the newly-formed Derry Citizens' Defence Association that they would not provoke violence.[110] As its name implies, the DCDA had been created in anticipation of a possible incursion by the police into the Bogside. By the morning of 12 August, barricades were built at entrance points to the Bogside; stocks of petrol bombs made ready; three first-aid stations were manned; the old and ill were evacuated 'from sensitive or dangerous areas.'[111]

Initially, the march along the city walls proceeded peaceably, until around half-past two in the afternoon. Half the parade had already gone by, when stone-throwing began, perhaps in response to the taunts of loyalists who allegedly threw pennies down into the Bogside, perhaps not.[112] A furious battle developed in William Street, and when a group of RUC attempted to dismantle a barricade at Rossville Street, in order to relieve pressure on their colleagues, a Protestant crowd followed in their wake. Many Catholics

[108] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, pp.106-7.

[109] Bardon, p.666.

[110] This was set up three days after the death of Samuel Devenney. Bowyer Bell, p.100, gives an account of the efforts made by Eddie McAteer, John Hume, Ivan Cooper and Sean Keenan (the Chairman of the DCDA) to instil a spirit of restraint and self-discipline.. The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, however, list details of the DCDA's thorough pre-planning in the event of a repeat of January and April's incursions. They go on to argue that 'Once such preparations are made...they almost inevitably generate a momentum which ensures that they will not be unnecessary'(pp.118-9).

[111] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.118.

[112] This is referred to by the *Sunday Times* Insight Team, pp.114-5, Bardon, p.666. Since there was 25% male unemployment in the Bogside, like the anti-Catholic songs and the march itself, it would have been a calculated insult. O'Brien and Bowyer Bell make no mention of the incident, nor does Bernadette Devlin, though she refers to attempts 'to goad the Catholics' from their homes.

feared that their homes were about to be attacked. To halt the police advance, a group of about twenty youths repeatedly hurled down petrol bombs from the roofs of the Rossville Flats, and the fifty-hour long 'Battle of the Bogside' settled into what would become a pattern. Police charges and petrol-bomb counter-attacks continued throughout the evening of the 12th. At midnight C.S. gas was fired at the rioters - its first use ever in the United Kingdom - but though they were driven back for a while 'the wind blew the gas towards the police.'[113]

By midday of Wednesday, 13 August, the conflict had spread to large areas of the city, and news of the crisis in the Bogside prompted Catholics in other towns on the nights of the 12th and 13th to take to the streets to prevent the RUC from sending reinforcements to Derry. Police stations in Coalisland, Strabane and Newry came under attack; riots flared in Dungannon, Dungiven, Armagh and many different locations in Belfast. On the evening of 13 August an unsolicited 'intervention' by the Irish Prime Minister in the form of a television speech added fuel to the sectarian flames. It may have raised the besieged Bogsiders' spirits, but to Protestant ears sounded as if Dublin was deliberately fomenting insurrection and the overthrow of 'their' state:

> It is evident that the Stormont Government is no longer in control of the situation. Indeed the present situation is the inevitable outcome of the policies pursued for decades by successive Stormont Governments. It is clear also that the Irish Government can no longer stand by and see innocent people injured and perhaps worse.[114]

[113] Bardon, p.667. The *Sunday Times* Insight Team report that 'within twelve hours the DCDA had produced leaflets on how to counteract CS'(p.120).

[114] Bardon, p.668. Bowyer Bell, p.105, informs us that Lynch's speech actually contained a reference to the Irish Government not being prepared to 'stand *idly* by', and though the word was missing from the teleprompter, many later claim that he had included the word 'idly'. Certainly it proved to be an idle promise, since his 'support' consisted of setting up field-hospitals near the border. Chichester-Clark was appalled by the speech, while Faulkner later referred to it as 'incredible', 'irresponsible' and 'treacherous'. Many of the more naive Northern Catholics, however, assumed their liberation by the Irish Army was imminent.

At 4.15 p.m. on the afternoon of Thursday, 14 August, in what was hoped would be 'a limited operation', eighty British soldiers from Prince of Wales Own Regiment were despatched towards Waterloo Place in Derry with the intention of helping 'to restore law and order'.[115]

Though the arrival of the troops brought a temporary cessation to hostilities in the Bogside, elsewhere mayhem continued, particularly during the evening of the 14th. In Armagh, after a civil rights meeting, a B Special patrol, suspecting they had been ambushed, opened fire on a Catholic crowd, wounding two, and shooting dead John Gallagher. In Belfast a new pitch of ferocity was reached, particularly around the Falls and the Shankill, and in 'mixed' areas such as Cupar Street, Dover Street and Percy Street. The most detailed account of that appalling night is given by the *Sunday Times* Insight Team, but Paddy Devlin's succinct, matter-of-fact summary conveys many of the key 'events':

> The police thought a full scale IRA-inspired uprising was under way and they put Shorland armoured cars, equipped with Browning heavy machine-guns, on to the streets. They fired hundreds of rounds throughout the night, killing two people at Divis Flats in the Lower Falls, including a nine year old boy. The crowds on the Shankill, frightened by the scenes on the Falls over the previous nights, feared for their lives. Crowds were organised early in the night and arms were brought in from rural areas and given out to some of the men. Local people who knew the streets daubed whitewash marks on the doors or windows of Catholic homes. These homes were then emptied of people and burned. As far as I could tell around 650 Catholic families were burned out that night. Five people lost their lives in exchanges of sniper fire. Police in uniform, covered in civilian coats, were recognised amongst loyalist attackers in Dover Street and I myself saw police armoured cars in Conway Street, standing by as mobs broke the windows of hastily abandoned Catholic houses before pouring petrol in to burn them.[116]

---

[115]James Callaghan, quoted in Desmond Hamill, *Pig in The Middle: The Army in Northern Ireland 1969-1984*, (London: Methuen, 1985), p.7.

[116]Paddy Devlin, pp.105-6. Bishop and Mallie, pp.105-15, give a vivid account of events in West Belfast. They refer to an incident in Leeson Street, where a World War II grenade was hurled at a police car, which then became the object of rifle-fire. 'The episode was to have important consequences', they

Many of these scenes would be re-presented or alluded to in literary texts soon after. In 'Elegy for a "Fenian Get"', Padraic Fiacc recalls the shooting of nine-year-old Patrick Rooney,

> shot dead
> By some trigger-happy cowboy cop
>
> Whose automatic fire penetrated
> The walls of the tower flat the young father
>
> Hid the child in out of a premonition![117]

The poem's outrage is directed not so much at the juvenile 'trigger-happy cowboy cop' responsible for the killing, as at the obscene and vicious bigotry that begat and sanctioned it. The elegy ends desolately with the next generation of little-minded children loyally intoning previous generations' cries, 'Burn 'im/ Burn 'im, Burn the scum, Burn the vermin!'. Such is the intensity of the poet's feeling that for him allusions to the trial of Christ and to the racist vocabulary deployed by the Nazis seem entirely appropriate.

The burnings-out of Catholic homes would feature subsequently in such short stories as Mary Beckett's 'A Belfast Woman' and Anne Devlin's 'Naming the Names',[118] but more immediately within many Northern Irish poetry collections published in the three years following these terrible events. Michael Longley's 'Letters' in *An Exploded View* (1972) speak of 'the burnt-out houses of/ The Catholics we'd scarcely loved', the 'blazing

assert, 'for it reinforced febrile RUC intelligence reports that the IRA were planning an uprising in Belfast, and led to a fatal police decision to mount high-velocity heavy calibre Browning machine-guns on their Shorland armoured cars to counter the threat'(p.105).

117 Padraic Fiacc, *Ruined Pages: Selected Poems*, ed. Gerald Dawe and Aodán Mac Póilin (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1994), pp.112-3. Bishop and Mallie give an account of the Rooney shooting, pp.110-1.

118 These stories can be found in Mary Beckett, *A Belfast Woman* (Swords: Poolbeg, 1980), and Anne Devlin, *The Way Paver*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1986). In 'Naming the Names', the burning-out of the home in the Conway Street which she shares with her grandmother provides one of the important 'motives' for Finnula's decision to help the Provisionals.

gable's/ Tell-tale' marks, 'The stereophonic nightmare/ Of the Shankill and the Falls'.[119] With its aptly-snapped final adjective, and its echo of Larkin's line in 'MCMXIV', Derek Mahon's germinally ironic 'Homecoming' at the outset of *Lives* (1972) voices a shared sense of displacement and guilt:

> we cannot start
> at this late date
> with a pure heart,
> or having seen
> the pictures plain
> be ever in-
> nocent again.[120]

Typical of Mahon is the subtle choice of words and rhythms, which can be seen in the final en jambement, which draws attention to that divided adjective, and its Latin origins, *nocere*, 'to hurt'.[121] In another of his poems, the opaque but appropriately titled 'A Dark Country', a defamilarised, defamiliarising narrator seems to offer a diagnosis of the province's ills, 'a waste/ Of rage, self-pity bordering on self-hate', but then appears to envisage little hope of remedy:

> With practice you might decipher the whole thing
> Or enough to suffer the relief and the pity.[122]

This sense of the North as a text which ultimately resists interpretation, defies closure, recurs in John Hewitt's 'Conversations in Hungary, August 1969' from *The Planter andthe Gael* (1970). Written in late October 1969, it recalls how an eager, abstract

---

[119] Michael Longley, 'Letters', *Poems 1963-1983*, pp.82, 84, 82. Mahon later challenged the attribution of such attitudes to him in a letter to the *New Statesman*, 10 December, 1971.

[120] Derek Mahon, *Lives* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.1. Philip Larkin's 'MCMXIV' from *The Whitsun Weddings* (London; Faber and Faber, 1964), p.28, similarly consigns future generations of the English to irretrievable loss, with its parting refrain 'Never such innocence again'. In Mahon's *Lives*, there are references to the 'scorched gable end' and 'scattered glass'('Rage for Order'), 'The twilight of metals/ The flowers of fire'('What Will Remain'), which could be taken on one level as a diagnosis that psychological origins, including overactive *super-egos*, are important elements within the Northern Irish problem.

[121] I am grateful to Dr Richard Greaves for drawing to my attention the etymology of 'innocent'.

[122] Mahon, *Lives*, p.18. Are these qualities of 'self-pity' and'self-hate' applicable to members of both communities, or intended to distinguish one from another?

discussion ranging from 'book to play/ to language, politics' suddenly acquired painful immediacy when their host interjected

> 'You heard the bulletin?'
> And added, with no pause for our reply:
> 'Riots in Northern Ireland yesterday ;
> And they have sent the British Army in.'[123]

Awkwardly, the narrator reaches for narratives, analogies, a rhetoric that will help explain to their foreign hosts 'the savage complications of our past', and to himself why 'tragedy/ close-heeled on hope'.[124] Like several other poems in *An Ulster Reckoning* (1971), it bears witness to the difficulty Hewitt faced trying to find a language to express 'the impact of the terrible days of August 1969'.[125] In another poem, 'The Iron Circle' the speaker admits reluctantly that the conflicting ideologies in the North are not simply the source and cause of the problem; rather they are simultaneously means by which inequities and control are sustained, and means through which distinct cultural identities define themselves:

> My friend, who followed coursing on this ground,
> and sought its lore and logic everywhere,
> suggested once, the Hare must need the Hound
> as surely as the Hound must need the Hare.
> In my mood now I fear that he was right:
> The chase continues with no end in sight.[126]

Given the scale of the collapse, the enormity of the violence occurring around him, where 'brandished gun demands a gun's reply; / hate answers hate', Hewitt's choice of final image - coursing - may well seem woefully inadequate, yet perhaps it effectively exhibits the problem other poets would face. With their lyric ground and private spaces invaded,

---

[123] *CP Hewitt*, pp.129-131.This poem belongs to late October 1969.

[124] In similar vein, Heaney in 'Delirium of the Brave', *The Listener*, 27 November 1969, talks of how in 1798 - as in 1969 - 'each element of nightmare...succeeded the dream of hope'(757).

[125] Foreword to *An Ulster Reckoning*, from *CP Hewitt*, p.593.

[126] ibid, pp.142-3. The friend addressed here is the poet and cleric, W.R. Rodgers, who died in 1969. This poem's first version is dated 26 August 1969.

the difficulty would be to find language, metaphors, which might begin to address, and redress.

Even when the British Army appeared in Belfast in the late afternoon of Friday, 15 August, they did not arrive in sufficient numbers to halt the bloodshed and arson. Earlier that afternoon confirmed reports that two gunmen had been allowed to take up position high up inside a Redemptorist monastery at Clonard infuriated Protestants from Cupar and Conway Streets. A fifteen year-old Catholic was shot and killed, and when the crowd finally reached the monastery grounds they were fired on and returned fire.[127] Later that evening virtually the whole of Catholic Bombay Street was torched, along with twenty-three Catholic houses in Ardoyne. Paddy Devlin repeats a commonly-held Catholic view that the British Army had merely stood idly by as Bombay Street burned, 'not raising a finger'.[128] The reporters from the *Sunday Times* dismiss such accusations, arguing that the paucity of the number of troops in the remote vicinity of Bombay Street and their utter bewilderment over 'which side was which' made intervention impossible.[129] Their account of 12-15 August concludes with the chilling comments of a Unionist senator at Stormont who seemed convinced as to whose side the Army was on. 'If only the bloody British Army hadn't come in', he complained, 'we'd have shot ten thousand of them by dawn.'[130] O'Brien cites Max Hastings's contention that 'without the army, the Protestants would have totally overwhelmed the Catholic area given a few more hours, and the police would have done little to stop them', but then corrects

[127] Bishop and Mallie identify him as Gerard McAuley, 'a member of Na Fianna Eireann, the youth section of the IRA'. He had been 'helping Catholics evacuate their homes in Bombay Street'(p.117).
[128] Paddy Devlin, p.107.
[129] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.141. Bishop and Mallie state that the Army 'misunderstood the sectarian geography of West Belfast', and anticipated disturbances would take place near the Falls, not in Clonard.(pp.116-7)
[130] ibid, p.142.

Hastings' misconceptions. 'The fact is that the police were *part* of the Protestant forces trying - as they saw it - to crush a Catholic insurrection that had begun in Derry and was backed by Dublin.'[131]

The grim statistics of the violence province-wide between July and August 1969, included: 10 dead; at least 72 Catholics and 61 Protestants wounded by gunshot; 745 suffering other injuries; 16 factories gutted; 170 homes destroyed, 417 damaged. Almost 84% of the damage had been inflicted on Catholic homes or premises. According to the Scarman Tribunal, of the 1,820 Belfast families forced to leave their homes, 1,505 were Catholic.[132]

The decision to deploy British troops was to prove a momentous one. Suddenly within the space of a few days, what O'Brien euphemistically terms Westminster's policy of 'benevolent non-intervention'[133] was at an end, and a key responsibility in the running of the state, the management of law enforcement, had passed out of Stormont's hands. In the coming months numbness and exhaustion gave way to growing demoralisation and disaffection amongst many in the Protestant communities. The publication first of the Cameron Report (12`September), a scathing indictment of Stormont's long record of discrimination, injustice and complacency, and then the Hunt Report (10 October), which recommended disarming the RUC, disbanding the B Specials, and shifting a significant measure of responsibility for policing to the Army, rankled deeply.[134] Coinciding with the

---

[131] O'Brien, p.181.

[132] Bardon, p.671. Paddy Devlin describes movingly the acute distress of the expelled families in what was, until Bosnia, 'the largest enforced movement of population since the end of the Second World War'(p.117).

[133] O'Brien, p.182. Others might find terms like 'culpable negligence' or 'criminal indifference' more appropriate.

[134] The Ulster Special Constabulary were replaced by a new part-time auxiliary force, the Ulster

publication of Hunt was the appointment as Chief Constable of London's man, Sir Arthur Young, to replace Anthony Peacocke, a local man. As a result, on the morning of Saturday, 11 October, loyalists on the Shankill rioted. When the RUC tried to stem their advance, they were fired on, and one officer, Victor Arbuckle, was shot dead, the first police fatality of the present Troubles.[135] Automatic gunfire and petrol bombs greeted the Army's arrival on the scene, to which they replied with deadly effect, killing two of the rioters and wounding dozens. The subsequent arms searches of Protestant houses in the Shankill - an action welcomed by Belfast Catholics, who had a long and bitter experience of such visitations themselves[136]- served as further humiliation, but were met without resistance.

Though many in the Catholic community originally responded with warmth and gratitude to the presence of British troops,[137] that presence all too soon triggered memories of earlier nationalist narratives, as Fiacc's, Heaney's and Deane's poetry and Friel's plays often reflect. Conor Cruise O'Brien is surely accurate in his assessment that even though the civil rights movement had always been at pains to stress their anti-sectarianism, the more they and their rhetoric leant leftwards, the more they polarised the two communities and their working classes.[138]

Defence Regiment, the UDR, which was to be under the control of the British GOC. However, as Roy Foster points out, the U.D.R 'became and remained Protestant and partial'(p.589). Hunt also recommended that policemen should no longer be members of the Orange Order as this might prove incompatible with 'the task of demonstrating impartiality at all times' (quoted in O'Brien, p.183)

135 'No policeman could surely die a more ironic death than to be killed by a mob protesting against the disarmament of his own force'(The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.165).

136 They feature in several of Padraic Fiacc's poems, including 'Son of a Gun'(p.87), 'The British Connection'(p.110) and 'Credo Credo'(p.141) in *Ruined Pages.*

137 See, for example, James Campbell's account of the reception of the Royal Green Jackets in Peter Taylor's *Families at War* (London: BBC Books, 1989), p.18, and Bishop and Mallie, pp.122-3. McCann reports how 'Bogside women squabbled about whose turn it was to take the soldiers their tea'(p.64).

138 O'Brien, pp.185-6. 'Their most decisive exploit - the destruction of O'Neill - set the two communities

IV

Everything up to August 1969 - and since - pointed to the need to address the fundamental problematics of Catholic-Protestant relations within Northern Ireland, and the necessity of evolving some constitutional arrangement to which both communities might give their consent. The British political and military re-engagement in the region, though certainly necessary at the time, problematised the situation further. One of the groups which would most benefit from this presence was the Irish Republican Army. Although many Unionists, including the Prime Minister, imagined that they were the men behind the civil rights' mask,[139] in fact their stock in several senses was at an all-time low. Confidential reports from the RUC and Scotland Yard - of whose existence and contents Major Chichester-Clark ought to have been aware - assessed accurately that the IRA had been incapable of taking a 'significant independent role' within the civil rights movement and on the streets because of shortages both in manpower and munitions.[140]

It is estimated by Bishop and Mallie that there were fewer than sixty IRA members in Belfast, most of them veterans of the border campaign, while Bardon claims that in May 1969 their arsenal in the city consisted of 'a machine gun, a pistol and some

on a collision course. They did not just spark off *one* "mass response". They sparked off *two*: a Catholic mass response, and a Protestant mass response'.

[139] Bardon, p.675, cites James Chichester-Clark's claim that the I.R.A. had been behind the fighting in Derry and Belfast with the aim of overthrowing the state. Bell, p.118, reports that Jack Lynch, the Taoiseach, also identified subversives as a responsible for much of the violence.

[140] ibid. The RUC report states that 'It would be absurd to say that the present situation has been brought about solely by the machinations of the Movement...the present situation in the streets has caught the IRA largely unprepared in the military sense', while a confidential Scotland Yard document asserted that the IRA 'is not organised or equipped to play a significant independent role' within the civil rights movement. (Hamill, p.20) Bishop and Mallie report how at a meeting in June Cathal Goulding, then head of the IRA, authorised the release of some machine-guns hidden in farmyard dumps for 'defensive purposes' in the north, but that they had not arrived by the time of the August riots. Interviewed by them in 1986, Goulding stressed that in summer 1969 the IRA 'were broke in every way...We just hadn't got the stuff, and we feared that the limited amount we did have would just produce the reaction that the attackers wanted - and they had more guns than us' (p.94).

ammunition'.[141] In large measure this state of unpreparedness was the responsibility of their Dublin-based leadership, and, in particular, their Chief-of-Staff, Cathal Goulding. Following his appointment in September 1962, six months after the end of the border campaign, Goulding had engineered a major ideological shift in the movement, by steering the IRA away from its traditional militarism and towards more conventional political activity, such as agitation over housing and jobs in the South, and collaboration with trade unions. Along with many of the leftward fringes of the civil rights movement, he espoused an idealised Marxist analysis of contemporary Ireland.[142] Non-sectarianism featured crucially within the new IRA thinking, but though many in the North were prepared to back the Goulding line, such as the Belfast commander, Billy McMillen, and his second-in-command, Jim Sullivan, others objected strongly to this revisionism, and when their argument in favour of 'better weapons, better training and new tactics'[143] was rejected, resigned.

However, as the crisis in the North in August 1969 took on an increasingly sectarian turn, traditionalists amongst the IRA, such as Ruari O Bradaigh and Sean Mac Stiofain,

---

[141] Bardon, p.675. The authors of *The Troubles* report that as part of the IRA's demilitarisation policy in the mid-1960s most of their arms had been sold off to the Free Wales Army (p.166).

[142] Of central importance to the development of Goulding's Marxist thinking were his friendships with Roy Johnston and Tomas MacGiolla. For details see Bishop and Mallie, pp.50-9. Goulding's plans, they comment, 'took little account of the historical realities of the North...sectarian barriers between the two communities would be broken down, enabling the proletariat to recognise their communal class interest. At that point a Sinn Fein political agitation in the South would transform the working class's ingrained conservatism into a progressive non-sectarian attitude'(p.52).

[143] Bishop and Mallie, p.53. Traditionalists' hostility towards the republican movement moving towards a constitutionalist position was in large part responsible for the ending of the 1994-96 IRA ceasefire. It is interesting that the present leader of Sinn Féin, Gerry Adams, should have been instrumental in the coup against constitutionalism in 1969, and yet apparently its advocate in 1994.

Philip Beresford in his thesis, *The Official I.R.A. and Republican Clubs in Northern Ireland 1968- 74 and their Relations with Other Political And Paramilitary Groups* (University of Exeter, 1979, p.212), draws attention to an ironic parallel between Ian Paisley and MacStiofain, the architects of the splits in Unionism and Republicanism. Both appealed to atavistic attitudes in their respective camps, and successfully portrayed the attempts of their political opponents to move out of a sterile sectarianism as betrayal. (Quoted in Bishop and Mallie, p.135).

returned with a vengeance. Within a few days attitudes amongst the minority population had been fundamentally transformed; 'an atmosphere had been created in which an armed, rebellious organisation could prosper'.[144] At one angry meeting in Ardoyne held after Mass on Sunday, 17 August, some of the locals, desperate to get their hands on guns, searched the houses of suspected IRA men, though without success. Their failure to offer protection when it had been most needed, led some in the nationalist community to claim the letters IRA stood for 'I Ran Away'.[145]

For a very short time ideological differences amongst Belfast's IRA veterans were buried, faced as they were by the common necessity of attempting to restore their credibility in the community. Though disaffected republicans, like Joe Cahill, were prepared to join forces temporarily with Gouldingites, like Jim Sullivan, in the effort to exhume and distribute arms, they recognised that the establishment of a substantial new power base depended upon their making a decisive break with the discredited Dublin leadership and its inflated rhetoric:[146]

> Four groups set off from the city to various parts of Ireland with the intention of meeting up forty-eight hours later in the Southern border town of Dundalk... Cahill scoured County Longford and County Westmeath, where he turned up 'the strangest collection of weapons you ever saw. Only a third of them were serviceable but we took the lot'. When they met up in Dundalk they had scraped together seventy five guns: a few Thompsons and stens, some .303 rifles and the rest shotguns and .22s...The same excavations were going on all over Northern Ireland and the border counties...Sullivan recalls that 'every Tom, Dick and Harry was looking for weapons - people who for many, many

144 ibid, p.117.

145 O'Brien, p.205, the *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.177, Bishop and Mallie, p.118.

146 Bishop and Mallie, p.119, quote from a press statement on 19 August by Cathal Goulding, the Dublin-based IRA Chief of Staff, in which he asserts that 'units of the IRA are active all over the north' and were 'ready to take every action in the defence of Catholics and the liberation of the North'. Dutifully Derry republicans pasted this statement onto the walls in the Bogside, only to have it quickly ripped down.

> years would have turned their heads away if you had put a collection box in front of them'.[147]

Elsewhere others were prepared to dip their hands in their pockets, but not to support the quasi-Marxist, areligious organisation the IRA under Cathal Goulding had become.[148] Barely a week after the arrival of British troops a new West Belfast-based grouping of IRA activists formed, one which included Joe Cahill, John Kelly, Billy McKee, Seamus Twomey and the young Gerry Adams.[149] Their determination to go it alone received fresh impetus following a meeting in Andersonstown on 14 September 1969, when a number of important Southern businessmen and a member of the Irish Army's intelligence unit, Captain James Kelly,[150] came to call. Funds would be found for northern defence requirements, the Belfast IRA were informed, provided that they set up a new northern command, which would 'stay out of politics and military activity south of the border'.[151] Some eight days later - while the Scarman Tribunal was beginning its

[147] ibid, pp.120-1. Jim Sullivan was one of the older Belfast republicans, and the founder of the Central Citizens' Defence Committee, whose function it was to co-ordinate matters behind barricaded areas. His moderate stance and later negotiations with the British Army to remove the barricades antagonised the new I.R.A. grouping that was emerging in West Belfast.

[148] Goulding's organisation also offended many nationalist sensibilities, North and South and in the United States, because of its distancing of itself from Catholicism. Bishop and Mallie pp.57-8. During a visit to the United States in early 1970, Paddy Devlin recalls being offered 'unlimited donations if we were to buy guns to use on the loyalists'(p..119). As Roy Foster points out, p.590, American money poured into the Provisionals' coffers once the conflict began to lend itself to the traditional nationalist interpretations, i.e. ruthless British Army versus innocent Irish Catholics.

[149] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.185, report that pro-Goulding northern IRA men boycotted the meeting.

[150] Along with two Fianna Fáil Cabinet ministers, James Kelly was later put on trial for his part in a conspiracy to supply arms to the North, and acquitted. The disclosure in court in 1970 of some of the alleged shenanigans involving Irish Government officials confirmed suspicions among Northern Protestants concerning the South's duplicitousness.

Kelly's involvement in the North began when during his annual leave he had visited Derry 'out of curiosity' the day before the rioting began. On returning to Dublin his superiors ordered him to maintain his connections with the northern republicans, and to pass on their requests. When some of those superiors, including members of the Irish government, realised that the weapons they had considered supplying might be used not for defensive purposes, but instead to mount a leftist anti-British insurrection, the plug was pulled on the plan. (See Bishop and Mallie, pp.127-131).

[151] Bishop and Mallie, p.126, Paddy Devlin, p.115. An Irish government-sponsored fund was set up, according to Kelly, in an AIB. account in Baggot Street, Dublin. Some of the £100,000 in this fund which was intended to alleviate the economic distress of the displaced Catholics in the North was siphoned off by the Belfast IRA to buy guns.

As well as providing covert economic aid, the Irish Government had also 'tacitly authorised'

proceedings into the causes of the riots of 1969 - the arrival of a group of sixteen armed men at a hall in Cyprus Street in the Lower Falls signalled the completion of the putsch against the Marxist leadership. Newly-released from prison, Billy McMillen, their man in Belfast, had called a meeting to gather his forces, but instead found himself outflanked, 'outgunned', and compelled into accepting terms. After stating their view that McMillen and his deputy had forfeited the right to serve and protect the local population, and hearing his defence, the sixteen agreed to allow him to retain his command on condition that 'Belfast would cut off communications with Dublin for three months' and that £3,500 in Belfast funds were handed over to them so that they could buy weapons.[152] And so the process was set in motion which would see in December 1969 the formal splitting of the IRA into two factions - 'the Officials', who maintained allegiance to Goulding, and the 'Provisionals', which was headed by Seán Mac Stiofáin.[153]

What 'united' the Official I.R.A. and the Provisionals, however, was their dismay over the popularity of the British Army in the Catholic ghettoes, and the recognition that their own advance, their acceptance as a defenderist force, depended upon breaking that affection and trust. Attempted incursions onto Catholic territory by enraged rioters from

---

their Army to offer training in the use of weapons to groups of Northern Catholics at a camp in Fortnaree, in Co.Donegal. When Dublin journalists began to probe what was happening there, these training sessions were halted.

[152] Bowyer Bell, p.148, Bishop and Mallie, p.125.

[153] Buckland, p.143, stresses the common goals of both wings of the IRA, however, and how the representation of the division as simply one of 'red' republicans (Official IRA) versus 'green' republicans tends to ignore the fact that both groupings contained members with a wide range of views on economic and social issues.

The rapidity of the Provisionals' rise to prominence owed more to the attitude of the Catholic Church on the ground in the North, than to the machinations of the distant Dublin Government. Bishop and Mallie draw attention to the involvement of considerable numbers of local clergy in the Central Citizens' Defence Committee in Belfast during the August riots (p.122). Given their traditional hostility towards left-wing politics, the evident failure of the Marxist IRA to protect Catholic communities, and the scale of the crisis, it is hardly surprising that many clerics, north and south, initially, naively, endorsed the PIRA, 'until the ugliness and immorality of what the Provisionals really stood for became clear'(Paddy Devlin, pp.122-3).

the Shankill in October 1969 and January 1970 had been met with robust resistance from the British troops, and it was not until the Spring and Summer of 1970, however, that a succession of incidents occurred that fatally discredited the Army in Catholic eyes.

The first of these occurred in the Ballymurphy area of Belfast on Easter Tuesday, 31 March, 1970, at the start of the annual marching season.[154] On their way home after a march which had taken them along their traditional route - a route which included the almost exclusively Catholic 'territory' of the Lower Grosvenor and Upper Springfield Road, and which the new, fraught situation rendered even more highly contentious[155] - a Junior Orange band was ambushed by an angry Catholic mob, who hurled stones and bottles. Immediately the Army attempted to intervene, in the person of seventy or so members of the Royal Scots Regiment, the soldiers themselves came under attack with stones and petrol bombs, injuring twenty-five. The following day saw widespread criticism of the Army in Unionist quarters for deploying so small a force against the rioters.[156] As a consequence, when hostilities resumed the next evening, the first of April, six hundred troops and five Saracen armoured vehicles were readied for action, and there was a new intensity on both sides. To intimidate the rioters, soldiers were ordered to blacken their faces and hands and to beat out a tattoo on their plastic shields, before launching themselves forward and grabbing the stone-throwers. Instead of deterring

---

[154] The events in Ballymurphy would have been likely to have had a particular impact on Seamus Heaney as this was where he began his career as a teacher in 1962, at St Thomas's Intermediate School, under the guidance of its Headmaster, Michael McLaverty. (See Parker, pp.29-30, 46). According to Bishop and Mallie, p.151, a significant number of the new recruits to the PIRA in 1970 were likely to have been educated at St Thomas's. The *Sunday Times* Insight Team provide a brief account of the area, p.202, which suffered from 20% unemployment, low incomes, and high levels of crime and delinquency.

[155] Paddy Devlin, p.123-5, describes the failure of attempts to persuade the Army and the police to re-route the march. Devlin claims that the Provisionals were behind the attack on the marchers, though this view, held also by the Army GOC, Lieutenant-General Sir Ian Henry Freeland at the time, is treated with some scepticism by the *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.204.

[156] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.203.

conflict, however, the presence of large numbers of troops in Ballymurphy drew resentful young Catholics from all over West Belfast, 'like moths to a flame'.[157] In the course of the fighting which continued for a further two nights, thirty-eight soldiers were injured, and, for the first time in Belfast, CS gas was fired into the rioters' ranks. The one hundred and four canisters of gas used left the narrow streets shrouded in smoke, not only 'choking rioters', but also scores of 'peaceful citizens in their homes':

> The Army never grasped how 'radicalising' in its effect CS was; but that first Ballymurphy riot ...was a classic demonstration of the fact. A weapon so general produces, inevitably, a common reaction among its victims: it creates a solidarity where there was none before. One knowledgeable local thought afterwards that those Ballymurphy riots gave the first great boost to the Provisional IRA recruiting campaign.[158]

What finally destroyed the confidence of the nationalist community in the impartiality of the British Army, however, were the events of the summer of 1970, in particular the arms searches and the imposition of an around the clock curfew in the Lower Falls during the weekend of 3-5 July.[159] The Westminster General Election on 18 June had brought to power a Conservative administration under Edward Heath, which quickly showed itself far less sensitive to the sensibilities of nationalists than its Labour predecessor. On taking up office as the new British Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling, announced that there would be 'no change of policy towards Northern Ireland',[160] but

[157] Paddy Devlin, p.125.

[158] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.204. Bishop and Mallie, pp.149-151, and Bardon, p.678, confirm the Insight Team's reading of events, and their contention that both the OIRA and the PIRA (initially) attempted to restrain the rioters. However, once the numbers of recruits steadily rose, the PIRA began to recognise 'the value of deliberately provoking confrontation with the army'.

[159] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.205, quote an unnamed senior civil servant who endorses the view that these two operations proved 'a turning point in our policy in Ulster'.

[160] This statement was made at a press conference during his whirlwind tour of the North on 1 July, 1970. The original recording appears in the documentary series, *The Troubles* (1980). Bowyer Bell, pp.176-7, argues that in fact Conservative policy in Northern Ireland continued that of the Labour Party: 'drift'. Bew, Gibbon and Patterson maintain that by 1970 a key element in the strategies of both Labour and Conservative governments was the 'necessity of avoiding a confrontation with the Protestants', because of 'its implication of greater military involvement'(p.183). Others, such as the makers of *The Troubles*, claim that from the outset the Conservatives 'embarked on a policy of coercion'.

such was the pressure of events that he soon found himself rushed into measures which only served to exacerbate the crisis.

The approach of another summer marching season in Northern Ireland presented Stormont, the RUC and the British Army, the new government in London, with a series of acutely difficult decisions. Planned for the weekend of 26-28 June were a number of Orange marches, which would pass close to the flashpoint spots of August 1969, such as Cupar Street and Bombay Street. The probability of there being major disorder and violence was high. At a meeting on 24 June, the case for an outright ban on the marches was put at the Joint Security Committee by the 'UK representative in Northern Ireland', Ronald Burroughs, and Arthur Young, the Chief Constable of the RUC, but their policy was opposed by the Northern Prime Minister, James Chichester-Clark, who felt certain such a ban would topple him from power and further de-stabilise the situation. Freeland, the Army GOC, recognising that his soldiers would be literally 'in the firing line' if confrontation did occur, urged the police to try and persuade the march organisers to re-route the parades. When those attempts failed, Burroughs desperately appealed to Heath and Maudling to go over the heads of Stormont ministers and to impose a ban, but all that was achieved was some minor adjustments to the routes.

As anticipated, violence did quickly flare up in Belfast on Saturday, 27 June, and by the end of the weekend, six people had been killed, 276 people injured, 1,600 rounds of CS gas were fired by the Army,[161] and half a million pounds' worth of damage done. Amongst the most serious collateral of these events in the long term, however, was the

[161] Bowyer Bell, p.177. Though inaccurate in his claim that this was the first time CS gas had been used by the Army in Belfast, p.211, he does illustrate effectively the link between the sharp decline in the popularity of the Army and the rise of the newly-formed Provisionals.

kudos gained by the PIRA. On the evening of 27 June, for example, they halted an attack by a Protestant mob on the small Catholic enclave of Short Strand, which left three Protestants and one IRA man dead, and Billy McKee, a brigade commander in the PIRA, wounded. The 'failure' of the British Army to defend this beleaguered community of 6,000 against Loyalist aggression that night,[162] gave credence to the Provisionals' representation of themselves as the only true protectors of the Catholic population.

In the wake of these events Reginald Maudling made his first lightning visit to the province on 30 June-1 July, but within days of his departure an already 'ghastly situation' deteriorated further.[163] Reviewing the previous weekend's violence, a meeting of the Joint Security Committee, attended by Chichester-Clark, came to the conclusion that

> trouble had spread...because the Army had not been tough enough when it first broke out. On this basis they decided future policy: what was required to restore the peace was a demonstration of force. The *very next* incident which sparked trouble in Belfast should be put down by the Army with maximum force.[164]

During the afternoon of Friday, 3 July, acting on information received, the Army searched a house at 24 Balkan Street on the Catholic Lower Falls - an area where the Official IRA held sway - and discovered a cache of arms and ammunition.[165] As the

[162] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.209-10. The Army did not turn up until some seven hours after the battle began as they were already over-stretched on the west bank of the Lagan. Freeland, the Army GOC, had in fact attempted to send a platoon to their assistance, the Insight Team report, but it was 'beaten back by the Protestants'(p.211). The Officials' stock in the Catholic community also declined in the face of the PIRA's successful defensive action, as Bishop and Mallie, p.158, point out.

[163] It was during this visit that Maudling allegedly described Northern Ireland as 'a bloody awful country' (The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.213, Bardon, p.679, Paddy Devlin, p.127). One of the British military leaders told the Insight Team, 'He seemed amazed at the ghastly situation'(p.213).

[164] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.215.

[165] This included fifteen pistols, a rifle, and a Schmeisser sub-machine gun without its magazine (Bardon, p.678, The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.213). Paddy Devlin, p.128-9, suggests that the Balkan Street raid was not simply a routine matter of seizing a number of illegally-held weapons. He reads events within the context of the larger struggles for authority between the OIRA and the Army, and the OIRA and the Provisionals. The local Officials had 'recently criticised army policy' and had warned the GOC that he should not set foot on their territory without permission. He argues that Freeland may have been seen the raid as an opportunity to remind the OIRA who was really in charge, and points out that the decision of the Officials to fire on the Army may have partly arisen out

platoon were about to depart in their personnel carriers, the soldiers found themselves hemmed in by a gathering crowd at either end of the street. When one vehicle in attempting to reverse crushed a man against some railings, stone-throwing began; when more troops were dispatched to extricate their stranded colleagues, they resorted to the use of CS gas. As this then drifted into neighbouring streets in the densely-populated Falls, incensed residents appeared on the scene which took a more serious turn by the minute. Less than an hour and a half after the original operation began, soldiers found themselves the targets of nail bomb and petrol bomb attacks. The Army's decisive response at 8.20 that evening was to pour into the area 3,000 troops,[166]backed by helicopters and armoured vehicles. These immediately came under fire from the Official IRA, prompting the British forces to reply in kind and with a new intensity; over 1,500 rounds were fired by the Army, three people were killed and sixty wounded. In the fighting, fifteen soldiers were injured.

At 10 p.m., in a determination to establish complete authority over the Falls and to avoid more bloodshed, Freeland imposed a curfew, that would stay in force for thirty-five hours, until 9.00 a.m., Sunday morning, 5 July. It was a decision which 'caused great hardship to those caught in its restrictions' and deep resentment: 'Many people ran out of food because they could not go for their usual Saturday afternoon shopping trips'.[167]

---

of a fear of losing face. Only a few days previously the Provisionals had proven their 'mettle' in the battle for Short Strand. Bishop and Mallie, p.159, quote one spokesman from the Officials present at the time, who claims that they were reluctant to fight, but 'The way we looked at it we were not going to put up our hands and let them take our weaponry. We didn't want the confrontation, but we couldn't surrender'. Devlin stresses that the OIRA recognised full well that the loss of guns in this and other subsequent raids might also leave them 'vulnerable to future attack from the Provisionals or loyalists'(p.129).

[166] Some of these troops, men from the Black Watch and the Life Guards, had only just disembarked in Belfast. The number of rounds they fired that night is perhaps indicative of their fear and panic, as the Insight team, p.218, suggest.

[167] Paddy Devlin, p.130.

In an endeavour to ease the effects of the siege, around a thousand women from Andersonstown brought in supplies of milk and bread, but soon after this delivery the curfew was reimposed. The length of the curfew enabled Freeland's men to conduct meticulous house-to-house searches, which netted a total of fifty-two revolvers, twenty-eight rifles, fourteen shotguns, 100 incendiary devices, 250 pounds of gelignite, and 21,000 rounds of ammunition, and eight two way radio sets.[168] As a consequence of these searches, which inevitably resulted in considerable damage to the homes of a large number of innocent people - furnishings, doors, walls and floorboards were often smashed and torn up - the Army's reputation amongst the minority plummeted to an all-time low. In his memoir, Paddy Devlin highlights the resentment felt towards members of 'the Black Watch, a Scottish regiment, which seemed to give most of its attention to breaking religious objects and symbols of the Glasgow Celtic football club, which enjoyed huge support among Belfast Catholics'.[169] Tim Pat Coogan, however, suggests that a secondary motive for the search was to remind 'the natives' who was in charge, and develops the colonial parallel by citing an Italian film producer, trapped in the Falls, who compares the British Army operation with what he had seen in Algeria.[170] Subsequently Freeland's replacement as G.O.C., Major General Farrar-Hockley, concluded that during the curfew there about sixty cases of unjustifiable damage to property and looting.[171] That there was a certain inevitability about the Army taking on 'an increasingly Orange colouration' is the view of Conor Cruise O'Brien.[172] However, once they did appear to empathise more with the Protestant population, the situation

[168] Bowyer Bell, p.178; the *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.219; Bishop and Mallie, p.160.
[169] Paddy Devlin, p.129. Bishop and Mallie, p.160 and Peter Taylor, pp.35-6, and Bowyer Bell draw attention also to the verbal abuse heaped on the Catholic population by the troops.
[170] Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1995 and the Search for Peace* (London: Hutchinson, 1995), p.109.
[171] The *Sunday Times* Insight team, p.220.
[172] O'Brien, p.245-6.

deteriorated dramatically. In the wake of the Curfew, in the period between July-December 1970, recruitment to the Provisionals increased eight-fold.

In one of his most strident, most passionately partisan poems from this time, 'Credo Credo',[173] Padraic Fiacc captures exactly that mixture of outrage and hurt defiance within the Catholic Falls at the violation that had occurred. (Bishop and Mallie note how the Falls curfew is sometimes referred to 'rather melodramatically, as the Rape of the Falls'.[174] Within the poem, Fiacc largely recycles received images derived from the past four centuries, of British military might attempting to grind down an enduringly resistant native culture.

> You soldiers who make for our holy
> Pictures, grinding the glass with your rifle
> Butts, kicking and jumping on them
>
> With your hob-nailed boots, we
> Are a richer dark than the Military
> Machine could impose ever.
>
> We have the ancient, hag-ridden long
> -in-the-tooth Mother with her ugly
> Jewish Child...
>
> It was our icons not our guns
> You spat on. When you found our guns
> You got down on your knees to them
>
> As if our guns were the holy thing...
> And even should you shoot the swarthy
> -faced Mother with her ugly Jewish Child
>
> Who bleeds with the people, she'll win
> Because she loses all with the people
> Has lost every war for centuries with us.

---

[173] Padraic Fiacc, *Ruined Pages*, p.141-2.

[174] Bishop and Mallie, p.161. O'Brien, in his entry for 6 July in 'A Summer Diary', Chapter 10 of *States of Ireland*, casts doubt on some accounts of the 'atrocious behaviour of troops', but acknowledges the widespread 'Shock and hysteria'(p.231) which cannot be simply attributed to the success of the republican propaganda machine.

Presented metonymically through references to 'rifle butts', 'bullets' and 'hob-nailed boots', the soldiery assert their dominance over the subject people by defiling their icons rather than by means of direct physical violence, though the latter is not ruled out. Action and allusion simultaneously link them with the iconoclasts of the Reformation, and with the Nazis - hence the stress on the Child as 'Jewish' - while the reference to the 'Machine' marks them as representative of a culture, which, though advanced in economic terms and in terms of military technology, remains crude, brutal and primitive in practice.[175] In describing how 'You got down on your knees to them/ As if our guns were the holy thing', Fiacc translates the soldiers' actions into a rite of obscene obeisance, and pits against these latter-day heretics the adherents of the Old Religion. Possessors of 'a richer dark', worshippers of the 'ancient, hag-ridden, long/ -in-the-tooth Mother',[176] they place their trust in a dubious paradox, their faith in a Pearse-like cult of failure. By deploying such words as 'swarthy' and 'ugly' to describe the Catholic mother and the child, the text momentarily and ironically mirrors colonial discourse, which typically fixes both the Other and their icons in these terms; Fanon, for example, talks of how the coloniser views the native as 'the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality'.[177]

[175] Brian Friel's representations of the British Army in *The Freedom of the City* and the characterisation of Captain Lancey in *Translations* similarly conform to traditional nationalist models. Later poems by Fiacc, however, look differently on the ordinary British soldiers and their presence in the North, and reflect some sympathy for their position.

[176] Clearly Fiacc is constructing a composite figure, uniting aspects of the Cailleac and the Virgin Mary, fusing Nationalism and Catholicism. For an informative feminist analysis of how male writers from the nationalist tradition have frequently deployed mythic representations of the 'feminine' in their work, see Elizabeth Cullingford's essay, '"Thinking of Her..as.. Ireland": Yeats, Pearse and Heaney', *Textual Practice*, 4:1 (Spring 1990) and Patricia Coughlan's 'Bog Queens: The Representation of Women in the poetry of John Montague and Seamus Heaney', *Gender in Irish Writing*, ed. Toni O'Brien Johnson and David Cairns (Milton Keynes, 1991), pp.88-111.

[177] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.32.

In its presentation of the Northern Catholics as an impenetrable text to outside readers, Fiacc's poem bears some affinities with Heaney's 'Broagh', with its '*gh* the strangers found/ difficult to manage'.[178] Heaney's poem, however, constructs an opposition between Britain and Northerners of both communities, and gestures towards reconciliation by drawing attention to shared words and sounds. Yet Fiacc's response to the Falls Curfew is perhaps more typical of its time, reflecting as it does that impulse within the Nationalist community to read the contemporary narrative merely as a continuation/ repetition of earlier 'history', and indeed several of Heaney's later poems in *North* come to similar, often fatalistic conclusions.[179] Their perception that the British Army was again being deployed as the coercive instrument of an illegitimate government had received further confirmation when the Criminal Justice (Temporary Provisions) Act of 1 July 1970 began to take effect. Framed by the Home Affairs Minister, Robert Porter, and the Attorney General, Basil Kelly, with the wholehearted backing of the Army GOC, it imposed a mandatory six-month prison sentence on anyone convicted of 'riotous behaviour', 'disorderly behaviour' or 'behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace'. In the course of the eighteen-hour debate on this measure in Stormont, which witnessed vigorous opposition from the Reverend Ian Paisley,[180] the Attorney General was forced to admit that 'inevitably' some of those arrested might suffer an excessive punishment for their 'offence', and that regrettably some miscarriages of justice might well occur, as a result of 'wrong convictions on the basis of mistaken identity'.[181] Since often the responsibility for making these arrests was placed in the hands of the military,

---

178 *WO*, p.27

179 One thinks, for example, of 'Ocean's Love to Ireland', 'Act of Union', 'Hercules and Antaeus', and 'The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream' (*N*, pp.46-7, 49-50, 52-3, 56).

180 The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.226, commend Ian Paisley's principled stand on this issue, describing him as 'one of the few men at Stormont with any sort of consistent record in opposing military excess and despotic law.' This fulsome praise is immediately qualified, however, in the next sentence when reference is made to what they term his 'grisly integrity'.

British soldiers faced additional hostility from the Catholic community, who already believed that Northern Ireland's judicial system discriminated against them.[182]

It was during this period that the leadership of the Provisionals came under increased pressure, particularly from many of their younger recruits, to take on the British Army. One volunteer, 'McShane', told Bishop and Mallie that following the Falls Curfew 'we wanted to go out and shoot Brits but we weren't allowed to.'[183] McKee and Cahill's reluctance to sanction such attacks was no doubt due to the Provisionals' military unpreparedness at this time and uncertainty over the extent of their support within the Catholic ghettoes. Their considered response, for example, to the Army's killing on 31 July of nineteen-year old Danny O'Hagan - shot through the chest in the course of a riot on Belfast's New Lodge Road[184] - was to murder twelve days later two RUC officers in Crossmaglen, far away in South Armagh.; they were blown to pieces while inspecting a booby-trapped car. Bishop and Mallie comment that, 'This act of revenge produced at least some equivocation in the minds of local people, for afterwards a crowd of some sixty Catholics knelt near the shattered car and recited the rosary'.[185]

---

[181] ibid, p.227.

[182] According to the *Sunday Times* Insight Team, pp.228-30, Catholics alleged that political bias was rife at all levels of the judiciary, and that Protestants were often treated much more favourably by the police and the courts. They cite a number of notorious cases involving the abuse of the Criminal Justice Act, point out how 'in Catholic eyes' it was 'the second most repressive piece of legislation (after the Special Powers Act) at the Unionists' command. *And the Army was the instrument which enforced it.*' It is also important to note how the new Act further diminished the role and powers of the R.U.C. Their head, Sir Arthur Young, was not even consulted about the legislation, and when he learnt of it 'was appalled' (p.226).

[183] Bishop and Mallie, p.173.

[184] Earlier in the year, following the Ballymurphy riots, Sir Ian Freeland had warned that future petrol bombers would be 'liable to be shot dead in the street'(Paul Bew and Gordon Gillespie, *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1993* [Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993,] p.26). McCann, p.80, describes how freshly-painted gable-ends in the Bogside exhorted the community to 'Remember O'Hagan'.

[185] Bishop and Mallie, p.168. These two were 'the only uniformed victims of the Troubles in 1970'.

While the joint authors of *The Provisional IRA* maintain that the Provisionals had at this point no 'long-term strategy',[186] they do go on to identify four main strands to their activities during 1970. The first of these was their bombing campaign, largely directed at commercial targets. As well as inflicting major economic damage, this strategy was intended to disrupt daily life within the province and thus to compound the pressures on the Stormont government, which they hoped to topple; another considerable advantage of this policy, from the Provisionals' point of view, was that it drew 'enemy' forces away from the very areas each side sought to control, the Catholic ghettoes. Although they disclaimed responsibility for an explosion on 16 July at the Northern Bank in Belfast's High Street July which injured thirty-one people - their press release went so far as to condemn it as a 'dastardly' act - they were certainly involved in a high proportion of the hundred and seventy bombings that occurred throughout 1970.[187]

Considerable energy was also expended on fund-raising and the acquisition of weapons. In August 1970, for example, a major consignment of Armalites was shipped over from the United States, as a result of the efforts of five Irish-Americans from Philadelphia.[188] In order to pay for such shipments of arms, the Provisionals mounted vigorous collection campaigns in Ireland and America, and later followed the example set by a small republican group called Saor Eire by organising what Bishop and Mallie term

[186] ibid, p.171.

[187] O'Brien, pp.233-4, is scathing about the RTE commentator who described this bombing as a 'daring and dangerous action'. In his diary entry for 20 July, he comments that the Provisionals' word 'dastardly' is 'a decenter description than RTE's "daring".' This commentator clearly has much in common with the fictional Liam O'Kelly from Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*.

[188] Patrick Buckland, p.145, draws attention to the involvement of such American groups as NORAID, and how 'Irish-Americans with their basic hatred of all things British were easily persuaded that the PIRA was a liberation army.'

'ideologically inspired robberies',[189] thereby providing some of their younger volunteers with some of the 'action' they craved.

Early on in their existence the Provisionals recognised that their success depended not so much on how ill- or well-funded, ill- or well-armed they might be, but rather on whether they could secure a wide base of popular support within the Nationalist community. From autumn 1970 onwards the struggle for 'hearts and minds' often took the form of intimidation:

> Housewives who persisted in giving out cups of tea found their homes daubed with slogans. Young girls foolish enough to socialise with off-duty squaddies had their heads roughly razored, the traditional punishment for *collaboration horizontalle*, and were tied to lamp-posts with badly-lettered placards announcing their crime around their necks.[190]

That 'women's bodies'[191] were now viewed as significant sites for the Struggle is exemplified by an editorial from the *Republican News* of October 1970. News that the British Army was to be involved in the running of a discotheque at Belfast's Paradise Club prompted the following diatribe, which clearly exposes some of the patriarchal, deeply puritanical strands within Provisional (and Nationalist) thinking:

> A discotheque they call it. A place of iniquity would be a better description. The blatant display of sex slogans - 'Viva Sex' being one, the life-sized paintings of scantily-clad girls...all these confirm that the Paradise discotheque is only following a long-established British Army practice of assuring its soldiers easy access to pleasure at the expense of local girls.[192]

In the aftermath of the summer's events, issues of self-determination evidently did not extend into the sexual sphere, where brothers tended still to see themselves as their

---

[189] Bishop and Mallie, p.170. The title character in Bernard Mac Laverty's *Cal* (1980) is involved in a number of such robberies.
[190] ibid, p.172.
[191] A phrase from Glenn Patterson's *Fat Lad*, p.154. See note 25.
[192] Bishop and Mallie, pp.172-3.

sisters' keepers.[193] Jimmy Jack Cassie's remarks to Maire at the end of Brian Friel's *Translations* can be seen as an echo of attitudes increasingly prevalent over this period as minority community-Army relationships sank under the accumulated weight of facts and fictions:

> Do you know the Greek word *endogamein*? It means to marry within the tribe. And the word exogamein means to marry outside the tribe. And you don't cross those borders casually - both sides get very angry...You think about that.[194]

Ironically, while they repeatedly urged Catholics not to fraternise with the 'occupying army', the Provisional leadership themselves - McKee, MacAirt, Leo Martin, and the Hannaways *père* and *fils* - kept up regular contacts with senior army officers up until February 1971, by inviting them into their own homes and meeting them in pubs.[195]

One of the most significant *political* developments of this period of the Troubles, however, was the formation on 21 August 1970 of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, which brought together constitutionalists from the nationalist community, determined to counter the militant politics espoused by People's Democracy and Bernadette Devlin, the appeal of the newly-created centrist Alliance Party,[196] and what they saw as the burgeoning and malign influence of the Provisionals. Like any other political grouping, it contained a broad spectrum of opinion, including Gerry Fitt (Republican Labour), Paddy Devlin (Northern Ireland Labour Party), Austin Currie

---

[193] Fionnuala O Connor, pp.209-10, quotes a letter from the Republican activist, Danny Morrison, who recalls remonstrating with his sisters during the summer of 1970 because of their serious, ongoing relationships with two British soldiers whom they later married. 'Their Irish history started only a few months before and I'm sure they hadn't a clue what I was talking about...I was appalled at how shallow their convictions were.' At the beginning of 1971, one of Morrison's brothers-in-law had to suspend weekend visits to his wife's home because of possible risks to his life and to the lives of her family.

[194] Brian Friel, *Translations* in *SP* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p.446.

[195] Bishop and Mallie, p.173.

[196] In the first major test of their political strength, the May 1973 District Council Elections, the Alliance Party (founded in April 1970) gained 63 seats, while the S.D.L.P. won 83. In the June 1973 Assembly Election, Alliance polled 9.2% of the total vote, as opposed to the SDLP's 22.1%.

(Nationalist Party), and three Independent M.P.s from the civil rights' campaign, John Hume, Ivan Cooper and Paddy O'Hanlon. Although initially motivated by the desire 'to head off the headlong charge towards tribal confrontation',[197] the intense polarisation of the early 1970s meant that in practice the SDLP soon came to be perceived as just another Catholic party.

October 1970 witnessed a shift of 'the centre of interest for politically-minded people in both parts of Ireland...from the North to the Dublin Bridewell'.[198] During that month two former Irish Government ministers, Neil Blaney and Charles Haughey, faced trial, charged with the smuggling of arms into the North. Both were acquitted, as was their co-defendant, a Belfast Provisional, John Kelly. The significance of Kelly's evidence to the court lies not merely in his suggestion that the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, was fully apprised of the gun-running operation, but also in the ominous rhetoric he employed in his defence. The Provisionals, he asserted, were the real heirs of 1916 and upholders of the National cause, and he concluded his defence by lamenting that proceedings should ever have been brought against him, and that

> these institutions for which so much was sacrificed, which had been gained by such nobility, should be abused in this manner. There is only an echo of sadness from the graves of the dead generations.[199]

[197] For two differing accounts of the formation of the SDLP and the tensions within it, see Paddy Devlin, p.135-142, and White, p.100-8.
[198] O'Brien, p.247.
[199] Quoted in O'Brien, p.257.

V

The next twelve months stand as one of the most calamitous periods in the history of Northern Ireland; it was a year in which the incidence of violence multiplied appallingly, and any hopes of an accommodation between the two communities and the powers governing them seemed to vanish completely. Rioting erupted again in the Ballymurphy area of Belfast in the second week of the New Year, sparked off initially when a group of youths began stoning local girls emerging from a film-show at the headquarters of the Second Royal Anglian Regiment. In order to help him contain these disturbances, which continued from 10-16 January, the Anglians' commanding officer, following a precedent set by his predecessor, enlisted the support of the Provisionals who went so far as to 'arrest' a number of the leading troublemakers. In the course of the riots, over forty petrol bombs and three bottles of sulphuric acid were hurled at the Army, and one soldier suffered gunshot wounds.[200]

Unionists, however, were outraged at the very thought of the Army in effect 'recognising' the authority of paramilitaries in Catholic areas, particularly at a time when explosions in the province were averaging one a day. Pressures on the Northern Irish Prime Minister, James Chichester-Clark, to reverse this state of affairs were also mounting daily. A week after Ballymurphy, 170 out of the 900 delegates to the Unionist Council called for his resignation and, though he survived a vote in Stormont on 27 January attacking the government's 'deplorable' record in dealing with 'the origins of subversion in the community' by 29 votes to 7, the omens for his survival were not

[200]According to the *Sunday Times* Insight Team, the January 1971 Ballymurphy riots were a minor affair involving only a few hundred teenage hooligans. They cite a number of pieces of evidence, including Army sources, which suggest that 'organised groups' were not behind the fighting.

good.[201] Some nine days previously, instead of meeting Chichester-Clark's desperate demands for the immediate deployment of 15,000 extra troops, the British Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling, fobbed him off with vague promises that the Army would shortly 'take the offensive'[202] against the PIRA. On 29 January the British Defence Secretary, Lord Peter Carrington, was despatched to Belfast to try to mend bridges between the Stormont cabinet and the Army Chiefs of Staff. Instead of defusing the tension, he is said to have lectured the Unionists on the need to 'help themselves and stop moaning'.[203] The response of one of his Cabinet colleagues on Carrington's return to London - 'Peter has dragged the Unionists a little way out of the nineteenth century'[204] - illustrates perfectly the patronising attitude of British ministers over the years towards the Northern Irish in general and to Unionist politicians in particular, their tendency to regard them merely as pathetic, forlorn relics from an earlier evolutionary stage, much given to crying wolf and to whingeing.[205] However, as Boyle and Hadden point out, the right wing of the Unionist Party's determined resistance to the introduction of the reform programme along with the heightened paramilitary threat compelled Westminster to intervene more and more frequently in key political decisions.[206]

---

[201] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.239, report that Chichester-Clark had himself threatened to resign on 16 January, the last night of the Ballymurphy riots. He had telephoned the Army GOC in Lisburn and told him 'I can't go on.' His reply was 'Why? We've won.'

[202] ibid, p.240.

[203] ibid.

[204] ibid.

[205] 'Progress - what progress? Talks - what talks? ...Anyone who imagined that there could be progress without movement was deluding themselves. Meanwhile down in the forest of Ulster politics, something important could be stirring, as unionism takes the first brave steps into a new political world. That noise you hear may even be the permafrost of 20th century Ulster beginning to break' (Editorial, *The Guardian*, 13 June 1996, 18).

[206] Kevin Boyle and Tom Hadden, *Ireland: A Positive Proposal* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p.65. Coogan, pp.119-20, draws attention, for example, to continuing inequities over housing allocation as a result of decisions by Unionist local councillors. A High Court action was brought in January 1971 in Dungannon after the council housed 43 Protestant families, but only five Catholic families.

Despite Maudling's assurances about an impending 'offensive', in fact contacts were maintained with the Provisionals up until Wednesday, 3 February, when troops were ordered into Clonard and Ardoyne to conduct house-to house searches. One of the principal objects of these searches was the recovery of documents containing details of the RUC Special Branch which had fallen into IRA hands.[207] (This decision initiated what O'Brien has identified as the 'third phase' of the conflict.)[208] Yet again the sudden appearance of large numbers of British soldiers in their midst antagonised the local Catholic population, and rioting broke out. In Clonard an already tense situation was aggravated by the arrival on the scene of a crowd of Protestants from the nearby Mackie's Engineering Works, who proceeded to bait the Catholics and to shower them with 'Belfast confetti' - ball-bearings, nuts, bolts and fragments of metal; instead of dispersing these workers, 'the Army and police ostentatiously turned their backs to the Protestant confetti-throwers and concentrated on the Catholics.'[209] If the Army's aim was to bring home to the locals and the Provisionals who was really in command of the streets, then the show of strength proved horribly counter-productive, and served to unite those they sought to subject.

The fighting that ensued over the next three days was the most ferocious the Army had yet experienced in Belfast, and left eight soldiers wounded. On 4 February, in the course of a press conference, Major Farrar-Hockley identified by name five leaders of the Provisionals who the army held responsible for the increasing number of terrorist acts,

[207] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.243.

[208] O'Brien's chronology is a useful one. He describes this third phase as 'more intense and more prolonged than either the first main phase (August 1969) or the second (June-August 1970). This third phase lasted until the moment when the introduction of internment without trial (in August 1971) opened a fourth phase, still more violent than the previous three'(p.259).

[209] ibid.

though he omitted to mention that for some time his officers had been working closely with these men. While the *Sunday Times* Insight Team maintain that it was this public exposure of their identities which prompted the Provisionals to embark on an all-out confrontation with the Army,[210] Bishop and Mallie suggest that in actual fact approval for a Provisional offensive had been given by the Dublin Army Council a month earlier.[211]

On the following night, Friday, 5 February, during rioting in Ardoyne, soldiers shot dead a Catholic stone-thrower, twenty eight year-old Barney Watts, after a Saracen armoured car had been set alight. In response a member of the Ardoyne IRA set off along the Crumlin Road to summon help first from the OC (Officer Commanding) of the Bone, James Saunders, then from the quartermaster of the New Lodge IRA, Billy Reid. A few hours later Saunders himself lay dead, shot by an Army patrol while engaging loyalist gunmen in the Old Park area. Reid, meanwhile, managed to obtain on loan a Sterling sub-machine-gun from another IRA unit, and, though completely inexperienced in its use, emptied its magazine 'more or less blindly'[212] at a group of soldiers on the New Lodge Road. Five soldiers were struck by bullets, one fatally. Robert Curtis, a twenty-year old Gunner in the Royal Artillery, died instantly from a single shot; Curtis 'thus became the first British soldier to be killed in Ireland since the 1920s and the treaty that was meant to take Ireland off the British agenda.'[213] Over the next few days, the Army

[210] One of the Provisional leader's response to the broadcast was that it constituted 'a breach of confidence'. The Insight Team point out how embarrassing the disclosure was for the PIRA, '*because their own followers did not know about the discussions and might have been outraged to learn of them*'(p.244).

[211] Bishop and Mallie, p.175. According to their version of events, Farrar-Hockley had been handed an intelligence report some days earlier indicating that 'at long last a full scale shooting campaign' by the Provisionals was about to begin.

[212] Tim Pat Coogan, p.112. (More detailed accounts of the incident are also given in Bishop and Mallie, p.176, and Bowyer Bell, p.188).

[213] ibid.

came under repeated fire as rioting intensified, particularly following an incident in New Lodge on Monday the 8th, where a five year old girl was struck down and killed by an Army scout car. The following day, twelve bombs detonated in various parts of the city.

One of the worst atrocities of this phase of the Troubles occurred just over a month later, on Tuesday, 9 March. On that night in Mooney's Bar, in the Belfast city centre, three Provisionals, one of who had formerly served in the British Army, fell into conversation with three young Scottish soldiers, John McCaig (aged 17), his brother Joseph (aged 18) and Douglas McCaughey (aged 23). After a few drinks in another pub, the Provisionals suggested to the three Scots that they might like to go to a party in Ligoniel, but instead drove them to a quiet spot on a hillside where they shot them in the back of the head as they were relieving themselves by the roadside. Horror and disgust at these murders swept the province, and the Provisional leadership felt compelled to deny their involvement. Although these assassinations had not been sanctioned and were in technical breach of the Provisionals' own 'rules of engagement', which precluded attacks on off-duty soldiers, the three killers went unpunished by the organisation, and their actions 'put down to an excess of enthusiasm.'[214]

The three young Highland Fusiliers would later be commemorated within Michael Longley's 'Wounds'.[215] Like John Hewitt in two poems from an earlier stage in the conflict - 'An Ulsterman in England Remembers'(August 1969) or in 'The Scar' (January 1971),[216] Longley attempts to find a way to address the appalling, bewildering present by invoking images of suffering from earlier history, a history which is both private and

[214] Bishop and Mallie, p.178.
[215] Michael Longley, *Poems 1963-1983*, p.86, first publ. in *An Exploded View*, 1973.
[216] *CP Hewitt*, p.133, p.177.

shared. The narrating voices in 'An Ulsterman in England Remembers' and 'Wounds' both begin by representing their own unhurt state:

> Here at a distance, rocked by hopes and fears
> with each convulsion of that fevered state
> ('An Ulsterman in England Remembers')

> Here are two pictures from my father's head ('Wounds')

There is a seeming separation in time, space, experience from 'the dead lad in the entry' in the Black-and-Tan War or 'the boy about to die' at the Somme. Quickly, however, the poems establish contiguities and continuities between images from the past, images in the present, as they engage in the retrieval of 'neglected shadows' and 'secrets'. For much of Hewitt's poem the focalisation rests with his younger self, as he revisits a world observable from the relative security of 'my bedroom window'. Deserted streets, burning houses, crouching soldiers, figures furtively or nervously sheltering in doorways, 'the beat of rapid feet/ of the lone sniper', 'the briskly striding, tall young man' with 'the rifle he thought well concealed', these are the sights and sounds that marked his boyhood, mar his old age.

Whereas for the sixty-two year old Hewitt, present history can be 'read' as the inevitable outcome of a previous narrative which he had himself witnessed and can now 'understand' - 'I had seen/ the future in that frightened gunman's eyes' - for Longley, a poet half his age, the text is more complex, unsettled and unsettling. The closing lines of 'Wounds', like the first line, foreground the fact that the only authority the speaker holds is by proxy, the only knowledge he has of war and guns is by report. What specifically provides Longley with a means of poetic access to the present nightmare is his father's experiences in the Great War, which he bequeathed to his son shortly before his death in

1960. At seventeen - the same age as the youngest Ligoniel victim - Richard Longley had queued up to enlist along with thousands of others outside Buckingham Palace in 1914, and, although not of Scottish extraction, had 'joined the London Scots by mistake and went into battle wearing an unwarranted kilt.'[217] Despite the huge differences in scale and degree between the organised, general slaughter of the Somme seen by his father and individual moments of butchery in contemporary Belfast received 'second hand', Longley successfully re-imagines these separate acts of killing and their locations, particularly by presenting recurring instances of young lives actually and metaphorically cut short.[218] A common obscenity - the obscenity that innocence has been violated, that the 'night light' has been extinguished 'for ever' - links the surreal 1916 'landscape of dead buttocks' to 1971 and 'Three teenage soldiers...their flies undone', their bellies incongruously 'full of/ Bullets and Irish beer', and the commonplace site of the bus conductor's murder, realised as it is through the precision of its domestic detail - carpet-slippers, supper dishes, television on. The 'shivering boy' responsible could be a demoralised descendant of the 'frightened gunman' exposed in the closure of Hewitt's poem; neither is condemned. Perhaps contained within the bathos of the ending of 'Wounds', and the gross inappropriacy/inadequacy of its apology,

> To the children, to a bewildered wife,
> I think 'Sorry Missus' was what he said.

is an intimation that ultimately in such circumstances poetry itself can never find the words, or express the survivor's guilt at having survived.

---

[217] Michael Longley, *Tuppenny Stung: Autobiographical Chapters* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1994), p.18. In his latest collection, *The Ghost Orchid* (London: Cape, 1995), Longley returns several times to his father's memories of war, notably in 'The Kilt' , 'Behind a Cloud' and 'The Camp Fires'.

[218] It is perhaps pertinent to note that Longley's father died when the poet was barely twenty, and 'too young to appreciate his strengths and weaknesses' (*Tupenny Stung*, p.28).

The callous murder of the three young Scots - itself an illustration of the growing intensity of Provisional violence - had a profound impact on the Protestant community, which was demonstrated two days after the bodies were found.[219] On Friday, 12 March, over four thousand shipyard workers downed tools and marched on Belfast City Hall and Unionist headquarters to voice their rage at the failure of security measures and to demand the introduction of internment for the I.R.A. Again Chichester-Clark's response to a crisis was to fly to London to request a further three thousand troops, but again he failed to persuade Heath and Maudling to accede to his wishes. On 20 March he finally resigned as Prime Minister, to be replaced by Brian Faulkner.

Even though the new Premier immediately proved himself far more imaginative than any of his predecessors, by including in his cabinet a non-unionist minister, David Bleakley of the NILP, and by introducing a nine-day arms amnesty to take weapons off the street, this had little effect on the security situation.[220] From late May onwards the Official IRA also began to target soldiers, and in one ambush killed a twenty-five year-old corporal in the Royal Green Jackets, Robert Bankier. Meanwhile, over the next three months, the PIRA bombing campaign continued unabated; April saw thirty seven major explosions, May forty-seven, June fifty. One reason for the Provisionals' increasing reliance on the bomb as a weapon lay in the risk and cost involved in exchanges of gunfire with the British Army. Another factor was the arrest in mid-April of one of their most important leaders, Billy McKee, who might have acted as a source of restraint, Bishop and Mallie imply. His replacement, Joe Cahill, they contend, was

[219] See Paddy Devlin, pp.152-3, the *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.250.
[220] According to *Troubled Times: Fortnight Magazine and the Troubles 1970-91*, eds. Robert Bell, Robert Johnstone, Robin Wilson (Belfast: Blackstaff 1991), over 1,000 weapons were handed in along with 100,000 rounds of ammunition.

> inclined to give the volunteers their head. The politicians who operated at the perilous conjunction between the Provisionals, the ordinary Catholics and the State had been able to do business with McKee. Cahill was something else. He appeared unreflecting, indifferent to the rapid escalation of violence.[221]

The Provisionals' 1971 offensive forced writers from the nationalist community to re-examine many of the ideological certainties they had inherited, which had largely been confirmed by the events of the previous three years. This is reflected in Padraic Fiacc's 'Kids at War'. Its first section contains his response to one particularly reckless attack on 25 May, when a suitcase filled with gelignite was hurled into the Springfield Road barracks. This injured twenty-two people and resulted in the death of a young British sergeant who saved several children's lives by throwing his body over the bomb. Fiacc's poem marks a significant shift away from the attitudes towards the Army displayed in 'Credo Credo', composed perhaps only ten months previously. Though a far slighter, far sparer poem than Longley's 'Wounds', 'Kids at War' similarly confronts the reader with examples of appalling brutality committed in the name of 'Ireland', as

> Irish kids sneer and jeer
> At, salute with cat
> -calls the dead body
> Of the young British soldier
>
> Gave up his life to save
> The Irish woman and kids
> Caught in the Spring
> -field Road barracks[222]

The poem's second part commemorates a second fatal act of kindness by a British soldier, a 'half-kid' shot while on lollipop duty as he went to buy ice-lollies for a group of Irish kids; amongst their number was his future killer. Like the best of Northern Irish

---

[221] Bishop and Mallie, p.179.
[222] Fiacc, *Ruined Pages*, p.121.

writing, such work demonstrates a compassion which transcends competing ideologies, and serves as a reminder that the taking of individual lives in the name of some exclusivist abstraction called 'Ireland' or 'Ulster' or in the interests of 'security' can never be morally justified.

Over the summer of 1971 overtly sectarian attacks by the PIRA became increasingly frequent. In one, the mother of John McKeague, the chair of the Shankill Defence Association, was killed in a blaze caused by a bomb; in another attack, on 24 May, a bomb wrecked a pub at the top of the Shankill Road, the Mountain View Tavern, inflicting major injuries to several of the locals. Despite the fact that traditionally non-sectarianism had always been a keystone of Republicanism and its philosophy, in practice this was not always adhered to, not even during the 1798 rebellion, as events at Scullabogue showed.[223] In more recent times, during the 1956-62 border campaign, the fact that 'legitimate targets' - i.e. people wearing uniforms - invariably happened to be drawn from the Protestant community was not dwelt upon.[224]

In a pattern that would be frequently repeated over the next two decades, a move forward politically was immediately followed by disastrous tragedy on the streets. On 22 June, the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Stormont parliament, Faulkner announced proposals which would in effect introduce for the first time a limited measure of 'power-sharing' in the province. Opposition politicians would be invited to serve on three new parliamentary committees, albeit in a consultative rather than an executive

[223] This was the scene of a massacre in 1798, when between a 100 and 200 loyalist prisoners were killed by being burnt to death, piked and shot in batches of four during the Wexford Rising. See Thomas Pakenham, *The Year of Liberty: The Great Irish Rebellion of 1798* (London: Granada, 1969), p.226-7.

[224] I am indebted to Bishop and Mallie for this point.

capacity. In return for this opportunity to 'participate in bearing the burdens of the state', however, the SDLP were informed that they would be duty-bound to support the Stormont Government in its efforts 'to mount a sustained opposition to terrorism'.[225] Just over two weeks later, hopes of progress on the political front derived from Faulkner's attempted *rapprochement* with the SDLP were to be dashed by the turn of events in Derry.

In the course of four days' rioting from Monday-Thursday, 5-8 July, British soldiers from the Royal Anglian regiment had repeatedly come under fire and been attacked with stones and petrol bombs, but had replied with only three shots. In the early hours of 8 July, an unemployed welder, twenty-eight year-old Seamus Cusack, was shot by a marksman from the Anglians in fiercely disputed circumstances.[226] Ignorant of the extent of his injuries, those with him drove him over the border to Letterkenny Hospital in Donegal, where he died through loss of blood; had he been transported immediately to a local hospital his life might have been saved. News of his death sparked off even more intensive and widespread rioting in Derry, during which Army vehicles and personnel were repeatedly attacked with petrol- and nail-bombs. At around 3.15 p.m., nineteen year-old Desmond Beattie was shot dead by a soldier from the Anglian Regiment, who initially claimed that the man he killed had first 'fired at him'. Witnesses with Beattie, including a priest, claim that he had not been involved either in shooting or in throwing bombs, and indeed subsequent forensic tests found no evidence on the body of

[225] Brian Faulkner, 22 June 1971, quoted in Tim Pat Coogan, p.124. Coogan suggests that the final phrase was 'code for internment', but that it was a message the SDLP missed at the time.

[226] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, pp.256-7, offer both the Army account of the incident in which Cusack had been seen 'carrying a rifle', and local opinion which was that he had nothing to do with politics.

contamination by explosives or traces of lead. In their account of the incident,[227] the reporters from the *Sunday Times* throw considerable doubt on the Army's version of events. At the inquest the soldier allegedly responsible for the killing contradicted his earlier testimony by stating that he had seen Beattie with an object resembling a bomb.[228]

The fallout from these killings was swift and dramatic. Following a rally addressed by Ruairi O Bradaigh of the PIRA and Sinn Fein's Maire Drumm in Derry three days later, the Provisionals enjoyed a surge in recruitment. John Hume, outraged by the murder of two of his constituents and fearful of the drift amongst Derry Catholics towards militant republicanism, summoned a number of leading players in the SDLP to the city over the weekend of 10-11 July. After the meeting, attended by Ivan Cooper, Austin Currie and Paddy O'Hanlon, a statement was issued threatening an SDLP withdrawal from Stormont and the establishment of an alternative assembly, unless the British Government announced an immediate independent public inquiry into the deaths:

> We have now been driven to the point where we have been faced with a clear choice - either to continue to give credibility to the system which in itself is basically unstable, and from which derives the unrest that is destroying our community, or take a stand in order to bring home to those in authority the need for strong political action to solve our problems and to prevent any further tragic loss of life which derives from the instability of our political institutions...Is it any wonder that we feel that the role of the military has changed from being that of impartial keepers of the peace to that of shoring up and supporting a particular individual in the office of Prime Minister? Has the British Government even yet faced the logic of its presence in Northern Ireland? What did that intervention mean other than that the Northern Ireland system itself had failed to produce the basis for peace, justice and stability? [229]

[227] ibid, pp.257-8.

[228] Given the level of stress and abuse faced daily by the military, and sometimes generated by them, it is surprising that there were not more such tragic killings during the earlier part of 1971.

[229] Quoted in White, pp.113-4.

Not surprisingly, the Irish Prime Minister, Jack Lynch was quick to endorse Hume's view that Stormont's day was clearly over, and on 11 July called on the British Government to announce its intention to end partition. On 15 July, two days after a minister at Westminster announced that there would be no inquiry into the Derry shootings, the SDLP leader, Gerry Fitt, and his supporters abandoned Stormont. Fitt had not been consulted over the ultimatum, and was vehemently against the use of abstentionist tactics since he believed that in the absence of parliamentary opposition the initiative would simply be seized by the Provisionals. Nevertheless, he complied with the decision that had been made without him.

The SDLP's walk-out and the temporary severing of their lines of communication with Westminster forced Faulkner to change direction. Without SDLP participation, his imaginative political initiative was stymied, but the way was clear for him to attempt to ameliorate the security situation, and in the process out-flank political opponents to his right. According to the Insight team, Faulkner's time as Minister of Home Affairs during the previous I.R.A. campaign had convinced him of the efficacy of internment as a weapon against the terrorists. Though he had long advocated its introduction in the present emergency, he had met with consistent resistance from the Army and RUC, because of the inadequacy of their intelligence - they simply 'did not know who to arrest'[230] - and because they did not think it would work. Writing less than a month after the introduction of internment, Tom Hadden, in a piece in *Fortnight*, threw doubt on Faulkner's reading of the 1956-62 I.R.A. campaign, arguing that the I.R.A. had been defeated not because of internment in the North, but because it had consisted largely of

[230] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.260.

incursions from the south which gained minimal support from the Northern Catholic population.[231] Even Faulkner's Cabinet meeting on 3 August 1971 - six days before the die was cast - concluded that internment could only work effectively if it was simultaneously introduced in the south.

Two incidents on 16 and 17 July, it has been suggested, finally tipped the scale.[232] In the first of these, four Provisionals, bearing white coats concealing sub-machine guns, marched into Ward 10 of Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital to rescue one of their wounded comrades, who they then whisked away by car. The second was the seizure by the PIRA of the *Daily Mirror* printing plant at Dunmurry; after ordering out the staff at gunpoint, they bombed the presses. On Sunday, 19 July, Faulkner rang Heath to seek his backing for the policy of internment which could only be implemented with the full co-operation of the Army. Four days later, in a dress rehearsal for 'Operation Demetrius', a force of 1,800 soldiers carried out dawn raids in ten towns throughout the province in a search for incriminating documents which would assist in the compilation of lists of 'suspects'. Further raids in early August enabled these lists to be finalised, but also had the effect of alerting the Provisionals of the imminence of the swoop.[233]

Internment was always likely to be a high risk strategy, and could only succeed if it was seen to be scrupulously 'fair' and targetted only those with a proven record of involvement in violence.[234] Whereas a joint Army-R.U.C. document recommended the arrest of between 100-150 people, this was deemed inadequate by Faulkner who was

[231] Tom Hadden, *Fortnight* 23, 3 September 1971, reprinted in *Troubled Times*, p.25.
[232] ibid, p.263. According to Bishop and Mallie, p.185, however, Heath did not finally agree to the the introduction of internment until 3 August.
[233] Bishop and Mallie, p.185.
[234] This is essentially Tom Hadden's argument in the *Fortnight* article already cited.

determined to take out a far broader swathe of the state's enemies. As Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs, his list took priority and comprised not only the 120-130 gunmen one might have expected, but also between 300-500 'sympathisers', and even more controversially 8-10 political activists, including the PD leader, Michael Farrell and the NICRA chairman, Ivan Barr. Despite the fact that Protestant paramilitary groups, such as the U.V.F. and U.P.V., had begun their own campaign of violence and already achieved a 'grisly prominence',[235] Faulkner refused British suggestions that terrorists from the majority population be included.

At 4.a.m. on Monday, 9 August, the operation to introduce internment finally got under way. British troops descended on Nationalist districts throughout the province, and arrested 342 men from a 'wanted' list of 452. Patrick Buckland's conclusion that the measure was both 'ill-considered and ill-executed'[236] is borne out by the evidence. Gathered in, along with some of the 'hard men', were 'ancient and long-retired republicans, youthful revolutionaries from the People's Democracy, trade unionists, respectable middle-class civil rights activists'.[237] There were a number of cases of mistaken identity, and within the next forty-eight hours over a third of those 'lifted' had to be released. Forewarned, most of the big fish in the Belfast IRA, Provisionals and Officials, escaped the Army net; in Derry, however, all but a handful of experienced PIRA activists were caught.[238]

[235] Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p.591.
[236] Buckland, p.149.
[237] Bishop and Mallie, p.186.
[238] Interviewed in 1984 by Bishop and Mallie, Major-General Kitson reflected that internment was brought in 'at the wrong moment in the wrong way for the wrong reasons...You've got to get the right people, but instead they arrested the people who weren't really important' (ibid, p.187).

Rather than curbing terrorism, internment exacerbated an already precarious situation, and fatally 'lent credence' to the Provisionals 'claims to legitimacy.'[239] As could have been anticipated, the worst rioting ever ripped large sections of Belfast and Derry apart. In the four days following internment, twenty-two people were killed, and 7,000 people, mostly Catholics, were made homeless in yet another terrible spate of sectarian arson attacks. Displaced families streamed into areas controlled by their co-religionists, thereby intensifying segregation and polarisation within the province. Protestants in the Ardoyne - forced to re-locate like Bosnian Serbs and Muslims under the 1996 Dayton Accord - set fire to their old homes rather than let them slip into hated hands. A rapid escalation in the number of bomb attacks on civilian targets, usually Protestant premises, fuelled old antagonisms, and 'by the end of the year Catholic-Protestant relations were worse than at any time in living memory'.[240]

Catholic alienation deepened when 'well-founded rumours of ill-treatment'[241] of detainees began to circulate widely. Buckland cites, for example, the interrogation methods adopted at the Hollywood barracks, where

> a number of suspects were subjected to what was euphemistically called interrogation in depth, a process designed to disorientate them and so break down their resistance. According to the European Court of Human Rights, the treatment was inhuman and degrading but did not constitute torture.[242]

One of Fionnuala O Connor's respondents, Ann, lucidly recaptures the sudden flaring of conflicting emotions within her .community, not only the spirit of 'communal

[239] Bishop and Mallie, p.189.
[240] O'Brien, p.275. Bardon, p.685, refers to explosions at the Four Step Inn on the Shankill and Red Lion on the Ormeau Road, which taken together killed five and left fifty-six people injured.
[241] Buckland, p.150.
[242] ibid. Tim Pat Coogan, pp.126-7, details the 'five techniques' to which many detainees were subjected. These involved 'hooding, sleep deprivation. white noise, a starvation diet, and standing for hours spreadeagled against a wall'.

insurgency'[243] that blazed abroad, but also the ashy aftertaste when she learnt what internment actually entailed:

> Internment, that really united all the people of Ardoyne. I remember the bin lids and the whistles, the automatic thing to do was to pull your jeans on and run out. You felt you had to go and look - and there was strength in numbers, you felt you were doing something to protest. All the women rushed to beat the police and the army away to get young fellas - and so many escaped like that. As it went on the women got hit back by the Brits. You weren't having any effect - and people were dragged out of their houses with nothing on them but a pair of trousers and beaten over the head on the way out. Then getting internment explained to you, that there was no trial, the news coming back into the district of the beatings in the holding centres, being hooded, helicopters dropping men. It was so frightening, as though your whole world was totally changed...But the togetherness of fighting it and the pride in who you were - that you were standing up to all this oppression by some means - and sticking together as a community very tightly: there was a real sense of excitement. You felt that you were part of a struggle or a revolution or change, part of history...There wasn't helplessness, absolutely not - which there had been initially, before the Troubles, and cynicism. Instead there was a great surge of going for it - the feeling, we're so united and so strong now that nothing can break this wall that we've built round ourselves.[244]

It was to this feeling of siege, and its accompanying seething and infectious sense of injustice, that Seamus Heaney returned in September 1971. Between 9 August and the end of the year, a total of 1,576 people had been interned, and an additional one hundred and forty-four lay dead.

---

[243] Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p.591.
[244] Fionnuala O Connor, pp.120-1.

CHAPTER TWO: TELLING TALES : BRIAN FRIEL'S

THE GENTLE ISLAND

> In a society like ours, the procedures of exclusion are well known. The most obvious and familiar is the prohibition. We know quite well that we do not have the right to say everything, that we cannot speak of just anything in any circumstances whatever. In the taboo on the object of speech, and the ritual of the circumstances of speech, and the privileged or exclusive right of the speaking subject, we have the play of three types of prohibition which intersect, reinforce or compensate for each other, forming a complex grid which changes constantly. I will merely note that at the present time the regions where the grid is tightest...are those of sexuality and politics; as if discourse, far from being that transparent or neutral element in which sexuality is disarmed and politics pacified, is in fact one of the places where sexuality and politics exercise in a privileged way some of their most formidable powers.
>
> (Michel Foucault, *Untying the Text*, 1971)[1]

I

The nets and networks of meaning within *The Gentle Island*, Brian Friel's eighth stage play, take shape primarily from the intersections of politics and sexuality, which function as both signifieds and signifiers, interactive subjects and metaphors. Within its play of narratives are inscribed crucial issues of Irish culture, questions about language and authority, about sexuality and gender, about how different generations construct conflicting narratives in response to disorientations and discontinuities - issues that changes in the South and the collapse of the North had brought into even sharper focus. It is useful to recall the contexts of its composition and first performance in late November 1971. This was a period which witnessed a major deterioration in the political and social situation in Northern Ireland, one which accelerated in the wake of the introduction of Internment:

[1] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', *Untying the Text*, ed. R. Young (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1971), p.52.

> From 1 January to 8 August 1971 34 people had been killed in the North; eleven British soldiers, four RUC men, and nineteen civilians. From 9 August (the date on which Internment came into effect) to the end of the year the figure was 139 dead; 32 British soldiers, seven RUC men, five UDR men and 95 civilians. Internment had turned a campaign of pin-pricks into an all out war.[2]

Yet rather than reflecting the steadily worsening British-Irish, and nationalist-unionist relationships in his work, at first sight Friel's play seems to be deliberately turning its gaze away, inward and westward. The central concern of *The Gentle Island* appears to be familial and sexual politics within a tiny, 'claustrophobic',[3] exclusively Catholic community on Inishkeen off the coast of Donegal. Its action is taken up with the tensions between a father, a daughter-in-law, and his two sons, exacerbated by the departure of the rest of the islanders, and the arrival of two outsiders, whose presence ignites the sexual, political tinder. In contrast to the minority population in the North in the early 1970s, 'remarkably united'[4] following such events as the riots in Derry and Belfast in August 1969, the Falls Road curfew of July 1970 and the Internment issue, the community Friel evokes is captured at the moment of its dissolution due largely to *economic* factors. Their democratic vote to abandon the island is a rejection of the myth of the rural Gaelic 'good life' successive Irish governments had fostered. According to the stage directions in the text, *The Gentle Island* is set in the present, yet the mass emigration with which it begins might have occured at any date within the previous two centuries.[5]

---

[2] Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London: Pluto, 1976), p.287.

[3] Brian Friel, 'Self-Portrait', *Aquarius*, 5, 1972, 20. His time in America in 1963, watching Tyrone Guthrie producing Shakespeare, he describes as 'my first parole from inbred claustrophobic Ireland.'

[4] Farrell, p. 330. However, the period and texts under discussion in this thesis are also marked by the beginning of what Edna Longley has termed an 'internal schism' within northern nationalist communities. For the generation benefitting from the 1947 Education Act, there were new employment opportunities, the possibility of greater social mobility and economic rewards. Catholic students and Catholic professionals - including the writers - became more determined to have their voices heard. (See Edna Longley, 'A Northern Turn', *The Irish Review*, 15, Spring 1994, 2-3).

[5] For a full account of how island life in post-independence Ireland was idealised, see Terence Brown in *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History: 1922-1985* (London: Fontana, 1986), pp.93-6. The subject of

To a superficial eye, the narratives, the situation and the location depicted in *The Gentle Island*, and, indeed in a lot of Friel's writing, might appear to be parochial, marginal, limiting, a wilful denial of those political realities facing the North. In fact Friel's plays are deeply engaged with issues, including political ones, affecting the whole of Ireland and far beyond in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period which saw rapid cultural, economic and technological changes worldwide. Friel's artistic enterprise, like Patrick Kavanagh's and Seamus Heaney's, locates itself in the parish, not as a secure, unchanging centre, but as a valid and validating locus for exploring the prevailing, interconnected concerns of the time.

Friel's dramatic fictions certainly are political to the extent that they reflect how external public forces and pressures affect and afflict individuals, families and communities, but they do not come equipped with a set of ideological prescriptions which will heal the national wound. Like Seamus Heaney's *Wintering Out* (1972), *The Gentle Island* brings together many of the factors that have contributed to the Troubles, but does not seek to impose an analysis, or proffer a remedy, for 'dramatists have no solutions. Furthermore, it is not their function to give answers'.[6] In his various occasional writings, such as the *Extracts from a Sporadic Diary*, Friel has expressed similar anxieties to Heaney's over allowing political concerns to overshadow aesthetic and artistic ones, yet the pressure of

emigration and its cultural, social and economic consequences, is obviously a highly charged one for an Irish audience. In *Our Country*, a Fianna Fail party political broadcast from 1947, it is referred to as the 'slow bleeding to death of our nation'. The historian, Joseph Lee, in one of his contributions to Fintan O'Toole's *Dancing at the Crossroads: A Portrait of Modern Ireland* (*The Late Show*, BBC2, 6 March 1995), describes how continuing high rates of emigration in the postcolonial period signalled 'a defeat for the ideal of Irish independence'.

[6] Brian Friel, 'The Theatre of Hope and Despair', *Everyman*, I, 1968, 21. In a letter to the author, Friel wrote in May 1987 that he had made a 'stern decision not to do interviews because I discovered that ...I was beginning to listen to myself formulating complete answers'.

public events at various moments during the past twenty-five years has often compelled him to address those very concerns, overtly in some plays, such as *The Freedom of the City* and *Translations*, and more obliquely in others, such as *The Gentle Island* and *Faith Healer.* Fintan O'Toole is surely right in drawing attention to 'the often anguished dignity of his work [which] comes from its demonstration of the fact that in a society where people are willing to kill for certainties and out of commitment, confusion, as Hugh puts it in *Translations*, "is not an ignoble condition".'[7]

Given political and cultural attitudes North and South of the border, not to mention the 'commercial theatrical set-up' in Ireland, Britain and America, the only way that the playwright felt he might be allowed in his plays to approach the critical, changing issues 'of his time' was by means of 'indirection', 'necessary caution', 'obligatory deviousness'[8] - a canniness, like Shakespeare's, which deceives some audiences, readers and commmentators, and perhaps sometimes even the writer himself, into underestimating the political import of his writing.

II

The Gentle Island, like *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*, is very much a play of and about narratives, about who controls the narratives and about the responses they generate. Threaded into and between the relatively few key actions on stage - the islanders' exodus at the opening, the proposition scene, the dance at the end of Act One, the card game at the start of Act Two, the indictment and the shooting scenes - are the drama's literally most telling points when characters disclose equally dubious versions of

[7]Brian Friel, 'Keeper of the Faith', *The Guardian*, 16 January 1992, 6.
[8]'The Theatre of Hope and Despair', 19.

themselves and events to each other, and to themselves, deploying 'fiction as a strategy of psychological survival'[9] Repeatedly characters use phrases which make reference to something called 'the truth' - 'that's the truth'(Shane, 32), 'the truth is' (Joe, 51), 'tell him the truth' (Sarah, 55), 'Is it the truth or is it a lie?' (Sarah, 69), 'Is it the truth?'(Manus, 70) - but the play seems to imply that there is no such thing; and there are only 'imaginings'[10] which they are prepared to pain, maim and kill for.

That time is out of joint, that past, present and future are blurred and undetermined, are immediately established in the unsettling opening scenes, and by the set itself. Although outwardly Manus Sweeney's cottage, comprising of a kitchen flanked by a bedroom on each side, and 'curragh, fishing nets, lobster pots, farming equipment'(11) against the gable wall - seems to belong to an earlier period of continuities, the siting of the central patriarchal character, '*sitting in an airplane seat, his back to the audience, staring resolutely into the fire*'(11), suggests a figure suspended between two worlds and times; while the airplane seat implies a connection with this century of rapid movement and widening spaces - as well as an ironic intertextual nod to *Buile Suibhne* and the legend of King Sweeney[11] - his fixed inward-looking gaze on the hearth signifies an attempt to suppress the present, a denial of external realities.

[9] Richard Kearney, *Transitions*, (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1988), p.130.
[10] *GI*, p.33. Sarah uses the words as a verb, but I am using it to allude to the mythic narratives about the other side that continue to circulate amongst paramilitaries from both communities.
[11] *Buile Suibhne* is a medieval poem telling the story of a King of Ulster, Sweeney, cursed by a cleric for a profane act, he is turned into a bird and forced into exile. The story was revitalised with comic effect by Flann O'Brien's *At Swim Two Birds* (1939). John Montague's *A Chosen Light* (1967) included a translation of one scene from the poem, and in the summer of 1972, Seamus Heaney began a modern-day translation of the whole poem which eventually appeared under the title *Sweeney Astray* in 1984.

Significantly the play opens with an act of narration, a sense of division. In contrast to his father's apparently unmoved, resolutely silent response to the disintegration of the island community, the audience witnesses his son Joe's excitement and amusement at the sight of two young locals trying 'pulling and tearing at'(12) the massive bulk of the aged Nora Dan on board one of the boats. By using Joe as the medium through which Nora Dan's resistance is viewed, Friel quickly sets in play the contrastive attitudes of younger and older generations towards exile, and the violence changes and perceived betrayals generate.[12] Manus's refusal to budge appears to have fixed his sons' futures, restricting Joe to a passive role as a commentator on others' actions. From an early snatch of conversation between Joe and Tom, one of his contemporaries leaving for a 'better life', the audience learn that Joe's brother, Philly, missed the islanders' farewell fling because he was working at the salmon, which might indicate an obsessiveness about his work, and/or that, like his father, he finds it difficult to accommodate change. When set alongside the crude, boisterous Bosco's comment, 'It's a buck like me Sarah should have got. Jaysus, I'd never rise out of bed except to eat'(12), the suggestion that all might not be well in the Sarah-Philly marriage directs the audience/reader perhaps to re-interpret their first sighting of Sarah - conventionally, 'femininely', '*sewing at the kitchen table*'(11), yet glancing out of the window like some confined nineteenth-century heroine at an outer world of alternative possibilities.

Conflict across the generations and between the genders is endorsed with the arrival of the next two figures on stage, Con and his daughter, Anna - the second in a procession

[12] See above, note 4. There is considerable evidence of conflict between the generations within the nationalist community in the period immediately prior to the Civil Rights campaign and subsequently. Hume, Farrell and People's Democracy were not only engaged in a struggle against unionist hegemony, but also with the attitudes of previous generations from their own communities.

of four pairs of characters who make just one brief entry. Whereas Bosco relishes the sexual freedoms that he imagines exile will bring - 'Get the knickers off, all you Glasgow women! The Inishkeen stallions is coming!'(12) - the drunken Con, in a moment of lucidity, recognises that all that he will gain in exchange for the ancestral home is 'One bloody room in bloody Kilburn'(14). His parting question, 'Do you think was the Flight of the Earls anything like this?'(14) and song

> My name is O'Donnell, the name of a king
> And I come from Tirconnell whose beauty I sing

should perhaps be read as sardonic comments not only on the unheroic Irish present, but also on the unreliability of mythic representations of the Irish past. From Anna's curt responses to Joe it is evident that an unsatisfying relationship existed between them, a situation, one learns subsequently, that parallels his brother and sister-in-law's emotionally and physically barren marriage. Sensing that he has 'missed the boat' with her, as well as with his friends, a growing desperation enters into Joe's promises and pleas for some kind of link beyond exile, clearly marked by his repetitions and clinging to the future tense. By contrast her last words to him already place her and her presence on the island in the past:

> JOE Anna, I'll write to you, Anna.
> ANNA You hadn't much to say to me when I was here.
> (*She goes off down left.*) (13-14)

This latest communication failure, which has the effect of intensifying Joe's acute sense of isolation and linguistic inadequacy - in the first quotation above he has admitted to being illiterate or, at best, semi-literate[13] - is followed by a shocking, ferocious outburst,

[13] This is one of many instances of Friel using disability as a metaphor. Within this play, Manus is missing his left arm, and Shane's spine is shattered; in *Translations* he gives Manus a limp and Sarah speech problems, and at the (absent) centre in *Aristocrats* is the father, a stroke-victim. For the use of this common motif in postcolonial texts, see *Postcolonial Literatures*, eds. Michael Parker and Roger Starkey (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p.6.

which again calls into question the island's epithet. Following on from the 'biting and spitting and butting'(12) accompanying Nora Dan's departure, Mary's (Sarah's mother's) request to 'put a shot'(15) in her dog, and the account of the farewell party at which two cats were tied together and scalded, Joe's misdirected rage anticipates subsequent acts of sadistic cruelty:

> Did you see Con, Father? Full as a bloody skin, the bastard. Jaysus, he hasn't sobered for nine days, that fella. Wants his head kicked in. That's what he wants. His bloody head kicked in.(14)

Much of the rest of Act One, scene one, and indeed much of the rest of the text, is taken up by different, contradictory 'readings' of the island, which, like Ireland, is imagined as a place of plenty, as a prison, as a paradise and spiritual haven, as a site of violence where emotional growth is stunted and sexuality repressed. The very name of the island is problematic and proves deeply ironic; embedded, embodied within its two elements is, one might suggest, a history of linguistic, cultural and political violence. Inishkeen[14] is an anglicisation of the Gaelic *Inis* ('island', a feminine noun) and *caoin* ('beautiful', 'pleasant', 'gentle'), though this latter element once anglicised has associations with sharpness, bitterness, loss and grief.[15]

---

[14] I am grateful to Professor Emrys Evans of the University of Manchester for his 'translation' back into Gaelic of the name, Inishkeen. The name is referred to in *The Annals of the Four Masters* as *Iniscaein*. Interestingly, there is an Inishkeen in Co. Louth, which possesses 'the scant remains of the early monastery founded by St Daig mac Cairill'(*The Shell Guide to Ireland*, eds. Lord Killanin and Michael Duignan [London: Macmillan, 1989], p.241), and is where the poet Patrick Kavanagh - a writer much admired by Friel and Heaney - was born and buried. Seamus Heaney's place-name poems in *Wintering Out*, similarly play with Gaelic etymology, and belong to the same period as *The Gentle Island*.

[15] The Hiberno-English word 'keen', the sound mourners make at a wake, comes from the Gaelic word *caoineadh*. The islanders' decision to leave may be linked to the process of anglicisation, to the hard economic facts that they must abandon their birthplace to 'enjoy' what is termed a 'decent living' in London or Glasgow.

III

The character who decodes the island's name for the visitors from the mainland - and, of course, for the audience/readers - is pivotal in the rest of the play's translations. Unknowable and unreadable, Sarah functions as a disturbing text, a richly ambiguous presence within the *The Gentle Island*'s meta-narratives and characterization. On a simple level, she serves as an agent or 'presence' who causes dramatic shocks, readjustments and transformations in the other characters. If, however, the play is interpreted as representing political, cultural and sexual dysfunction, Sarah could be read as an embodiment of those elements - within the state of Northern Ireland/ within the nationalist community of the North/ within 'Catholic Ireland'/ within any society/ within the human psyche - which, if repressed, excluded, silenced, are likely at some stage to blaze into violence. A feminist reading of the character might well emphasise her status as victim, abused and confused by male hegemony, subjected by Family, Church and State. A more traditional, perhaps less reflective reading and audience, however, might choose to view her as one of many victim figures in the play, a product of frustration, humiliation, and jealous anger.[16]

For the childless, now parentless and, in her eyes, virtually husbandless Sarah, Inishkeen is a 'nothing'(28), a place of constraint and constraining expectations, the mocking antithesis of the beautiful island of her memory, the Isle of Man.[17] That equally significantly-named island has acquired a mythic status in her selective recollections, which have edited out the drudgery of her time at the *Arcadia* Hotel, working 'from

[16] Like Ireland's, *The Gentle Island's* narratives are littered with casualties; Shane will become part of a line stretching back past the 'niggerman' (65-7), back to the monks (32-3). Friel's plays frequently deploy traditional nationalist motifs, but usually in order to challenge them.

[17] Again one suspects the choice of the name, Man, is not entirely accidental; it is a place she associates with physical, sensual pleasure.

seven in the morning till ten at night'(28-9), and foregrounded the 'forbidden' experiences, its comradely danger, its social and sexual excitement:

> And every night when the housekeeper went to bed, we slipped down the fire-escape and went to a dance...In the eight weeks I was in Douglas I was at fifty-one dances. I wore out three pair of shoes. I never had a time like it.'(29).

When she first encounters Shane, even though his only words in front of her have been asides to Peter, Sarah immediately sets about 'reading' him, connecting him with that lost other world of effervacious, desirable young men when she says of Man, 'You would like it...He would have crack'(29). The animation Sarah shows in these early exchanges with the outsiders, and eagerness to initiate narration and share 'memories', are in marked contrast to the dialogue that occurred between her and her husband a few pages earlier. These are characterised initially by a series of peremptory, mechanical questions concerning Philly's welfare and his catch, and contains a pointed reference to his father as the one person he is able to satisfy. However, when the marital conversation moves on to the islanders' departure, her mother's parting present, a cradle (23), and her own father's pathetic actions, Sarah's sentences lengthen frenetically, until finally her narrative drives her back to what she perceives as the major sources of her past, present and future unhappiness, her desperate sense of isolation and, above all, her 'failure' as a woman in the eyes of her mother, his father, their culture - all of whom long for her confinement, 'and she says they'll be back next summer for two full months or sooner she says any time at all she's needed she says'(23). Close to tears, but uncomforted by Philly, who '*watches her closely but makes no move towards her*'(24), apparently unmoved by her distress, she regains control and changes tack, speaking '*almost formally, choosing her words with care*'(24). Having got nowhere with the

coded reminder of his failure to fulfil his conjugal duties, she tries safer ground by repeatedly appealing to his sense of comradeship as a member of the same generation and by stressing the potential dangers of her loneliness:

> I want to go with them; not with my father and mother, but with all of them and you, all of us together. I'll go out of my head with loneliness, I know I will....We belong with the others. We should be with them....They're too old to change. But we're not. (24)

Her acute frustration with Philly's conservatism, materialism and imperviousness to her every word/desire is evident in the last of her exchanges with him before the arrival of Shane and Peter, and perhaps helps to 'explain' her later actions:

> SARAH Maybe if you spent less time on it [fishing] we might be better off.
> PHILLY Farming? Here?
> SARAH You and me.
> (Pause)
> PHILLY I'm tired.
> SARAH You're always tired when you're at home.
> PHILLY I was up all night, woman. When you and the rest of them were away drinking and dancing I was working.
> SARAH So you were. (25)

Sarah's contemptuous attitude towards Inishkeen, like her subsequent sexual advances towards Shane, are, therefore, very much bound up with her hostility towards Manus and what she views as the pernicious authority he exerts over her husband. She pictures her own narrative of neglect as a consequence of, and indeed repetition of that meted out by Manus on his wife, Rosie Dubh, his Dark Rosaleen[18] - an abuse leading to madness. Philly's sexual indifference and impotence are, according to her interpretation of psychological 'truth', the direct product of Manus's promiscuity and its aftermath,

---

[18] Given his strong sense of the intertextual, the literary dialogue going on within and between his own plays and those of the Irish dramatic tradition, it seems likely that Friel intends the absent Rose as a contrast to those idealised, distorted representations of Mother Ireland and Dark Rosaleen in nationalist mythology. Brian Moore similarly deconstructs these male-constructed, nationalist archetypes in his novel, *The Mangan Inheritance*, (London:Cape, 1979).

marital negligence, moral dereliction: 'Joe doesn't know the truth. But Philly does. And he'll never forgive you for it. And if he can't father a family, you're the cause of it'(57). Whether one accepts the authenticity of her later devastating 'disclosure' in Act Two,[19] or believe, as Joe would like to, that she 'could have made a mistake'(63), or regard her accounts as the fabrications of a vicious/unhappy woman, her actions and words prior to the two indictment scenes suggest that she has had enough of being authored by others and that she is determined to impose her own narrative on events.

Even before the strangers' arrival, it is apparent from Manus's speeches that his faith in the island, along with his sway over his sons, have been seriously undermined by their neighbours' departure. His first words (18-9) display an anxiety about the homeground and its ability to sustain life, but with the return of Philly, the beloved son (*filius*) in whom he is well pleased, these fears at first seem dispelled. His eldest's account of one splendid night's fishing sees the island transmuted into a place of confirmation and benison, as rich as the waters of Galilee, 'They were that thick in the water you could have walked on them'(20). For Manus, as for 'Bull' McCabe in John Keane's *The Field* or Michael Moran in John McGahern's *Amongst Women* and scores of past generations of Irish*men*, the land is held in a sacred trust, and the hallowed bond between a father, son and the ancestral soil of far more significance than marriage, women, or the lives of strangers.

[19]Her first disclosure to Peter of Manus's 'deceit' is partly to break up what seems to be the cosy alliance developing between the Sweeneys and the visitors, and occurs immediately after Manus has presented Peter with one of his 'acquired' treasures, and while Philly has stolen away with Shane. Her second, more devastating disclosure comes when she reports sighting Philly and Shane making love in the boathouse. Whether this is true or entirely her fabrication, the main targets for her rage or revenge appear to be Shane and Manus, rather than her husband. Certainly she regards both men as thieves of her happiness, and projects Philly's failings onto them.

For his two sons, however, the island - like the Irish state? - no longer functions as a secure ground, stable centre or transcendental signified, exerting an unquestioning faith and loyalty. Like the divided Gar in *Philadelphia, Here I Come,* who is also struggling to achieve a measure of individuation, Joe and Philly fluctuate between a scepticism about and deep attachment to 'home'. (An emblem of Joe's weakness and splintered state is the broken spade he carries.) Despite envy of those who have left - 'Whatever wind there is is with them'(17) - contempt for a life spent tending 'bloody cattle' and 'scrabbing a mouthful of spuds from the sand'(18), and angry scorn for Manus whom he names the 'King of nothing'(18), Joe abides until his father's spell is finally broken at the play's close. After his one and only overt confrontation with paternal authority, when ironically he accuses Manus of cowardice - 'You - you - you haven't even the guts to bid them goodbye'(18) - he almost bursts into tears when he is given leave to leave, according to Sarah. Part of him badly wants to trust in his father's words, and though one minute in an ensuing exchange on stage with Philly he dismisses Manus as 'the aul bastard'(21), the next he is faithfully recycling for his brother's benefit their daddy's comic and maudlin tales, his views on the exiles' future, and the terms of his will.

A gap in the text of both brothers' lives is clearly the absence of their mother, an absence which clearly strengthened their father's psychological grip on them. (In this respect their situation is analogous to Shane's.) In their only scene alone together, Philly shows some curiosity about what the 'Mouth'(21) had to say about her, only to be disappointed by another of Manus's blatant fabrications, this time on the somewhat touchy theme of marital togetherness:

PHILLY What did he say about mother?
JOE She had long fair hair. I never knew that, Philly, did you? ...And his job was to plait it every night before she went to bed. And you should have

seen his face when he was telling me.
PHILLY With one hand?
JOE One hand what?
PHILLY How did he plait it with one hand? (21)

Although it is Philly who presents himself as the more detached of the two, claiming to view the island merely as a convenient economic resource, it is Joe who eventually makes his escape. Under threat from Sarah in their first conversation, Philly strikes a utilitarian note - 'Stick it out until the end of the summer. I'll have made the most of £200 then. Then we'll pack up and off and bugger the lot', 'Any hard cash that comes into this house comes from the sea...And as long as I make money from it I'll fish it.'(24) - yet one suspects that these assertions and the promise of future release they contain may be simply a device resorted to when he seeks to deflect attention, hers and his, from the emotional and sexual pressures she exerts, and the absence that lies at his core.

IV

With the introduction onto the island stage of the outsiders, Shane and Peter, the highly 'schematic'[20] nature of the play becomes increasingly apparent. Within the text they perform a multiple function in terms of theme, characterisation and dramatic structure; generational conflict and issues of patriarchy are replicated and developed in their relationship; opportunities for retailing fresh readings of the island and re-telling self-justifying narratives are created; contrasts and collisions are set up between an urban, professional, technologically-skilled, geographically-mobile, anglophone Ireland and its rural, peasant, manually-skilled, 'static', marginally Gaelic Other. While at the outset the

[20]Elmer Andrews, 'Fifth Province', in *The Achievement of Brian Friel*, ed. Alan Peacock, p.34.

islanders seize upon the pair for the relief and diversion they might bring, their effect is to accelerate the processes of disintegration and change; Shane's 'presence', and Sarah's overt and Philly's ambiguous sexual reactions to it, will further destabilise an already fraught domestic 'political' scene.

Ironically, though their departure from Inishkeen sees the bonds of mutual dependency horribly strengthened, in our first encounter with Peter and Shane there is a strong suggestion that a parting is coming. They are dressed similarly '*in summer slacks and open shirts*'(25) and wrongly identified as 'Yanks' by Sarah, yet marked differences in their ages, personalities, perspectives and languages are quickly established. Even their names and occupations imply differences. Peter Quinn, the freelance music teacher/ piano tuner, like Shakespeare's Peter Quince, is a would-be director, a somewhat fumbling manipulator of men; 'Peter' also has associations with clerical authority, which is rarely represented favourably in Friel's plays.[21] The name of his travelling companion, Shane Harrison, the engineer, sounds distinctly Anglo-American, and connects him perhaps to the post-De Valera, multinational Ireland of the 1960s. Whereas the '*plump, balding, middle-aged*' Peter puffs onto the stage, Shane, '*twenty years younger*'(25), enters calmly peeling an orange, a symbolic fruit of youth.

Initially, and repeatedly as he becomes further enmeshed in his own myth-making, Peter reads the island awry, envisioning it in terms that anticipate Lieutenant Yolland's idealisation of Ballybeg in *Translations*, as 'heavenly', 'heaven'(25), 'lovely', 'beautiful'(28), a place of 'sheer delight'(40), where there is 'calm', 'stability', 'self-

[21] I am thinking in particular of Father Chris Carroll and Father Green in *The Blind Mice*, Archbishop Lombard in *Making History*, and Father Jack in *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

possession. Everything has its own good pace', 'everything's so...constant...part of a permanence.'(54) Significantly, and perhaps ironically considering his job as the music teacher, Peter cherishes most of all Inishkeen's exterior, visual qualities, its illusory 'clarity', and its absence of sound, picturing it as a summer and winter retreat where his relationship with Shane can achieve reaffirmation, away from suspicious and condemnatory voices.[22] Shane's reactions to the island, however, prove to be astute. Though at first his frenetic clowning seems a strategy to undercut his partner's narrative - Shane is resisting the Romance genre, by situating himself in Western territory - his dubbing of Inishkeen as 'Apache'(25), alien territory, as 'Sinister', 'Too quiet'(26), also serves to underscore the audience's awareness of its violent undertext; his playful glossing of its name as 'scalping island'(26) turns out to be both accurate and prophetic.[23] Many of the subsequent analyses and intertextual references he makes similarly show his gift for reading the signs, though like any other reader he can seriously misinterpret and undervalue some texts. By means of the allusions Shane makes to Nazi Germany and to the Pied Piper legend, for example, Friel may be suggesting that post-independence Ireland - and, equally, the patriarchal, Protestant-run northern state - had in fact translated itself into a 'country for old men',[24] which sought through its institutions to exercise an almost totalitarian control over the young,

[22]Although Friel typically does not make it explicit, most commentators seem to agree that Peter and Shane are homosexuals. Evidently they have lived together in economic partnership for some time(55). From the same conversation with Manus, we learn from Peter that they once taught in the same school until 'the principal and I had a row'(54). When Sarah interjects, 'About the engineer?', rightly divining the cause, Peter does not contradict her. From this one deduces that some aspect of his relationship with Shane caused the conflict, which resulted in his subsequent inability to gain another permanent teaching post. It is certainly significant that the true cause of the shooting is kept from the doctor (70), presumably to 'protect' Shane from a painful court case and possible prosecution. In *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922- 1985*, Terence Brown cites the attempt by David Norris in the early 1980s to challenge the two Acts in the Irish Republic's constitution which made homosexual acts and behaviour illegal. (349-50.)

[23]Long exposure to the island, and to the 'madness' of 'King' Sweeney, takes the heads off Sarah and Philly, and Rosie Dubh, before them.

[24]W.B. Yeats, 'Sailing to Byzantium', *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1933), p.217.

depriving them of choice and speech, or driving them into exile: 'They reach the mountain. A door opens. They all march through. Disappear. Door shuts. Then silence. Not a sound. Just like here.'(27)

Through Shane, the playwright decodes Manus's construction of the island text, recognising how its defining values, 'confining prejudices' and 'saleable images'[25] are rooted in an earlier phase of Irish cultural development, the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s. These decades, Friel's formative years, saw the heyday of De Valera's Ireland, at the centre of whose vision of Ireland was 'the small independent farmer, who had his land, who had his house, who had his family', 'a family society with every family having sufficient for its needs and not dependent on anybody else'.[26] Essentially Manus subscribes to Dev's dream of a future island/Ireland

> self-supporting and self-reliant; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children and the laughter of happy maidens; whose firesides would be forms for the wisdom of serene old age[27]

a cosy, rosy *Tir-na-Og*, from which no-one would dream of emigrating. Shane's analysis has much in common with Sean O'Faolain's critique of 'Silent Ireland' in *The Bell*:

> The old patriarchal, rural Ireland is slowly beginning to disintegrate. And it is disintegrating just at the moment when the classes who, as I have said, normally provide the intellect...can do nothing than wail for the past...dig their heads in the sand and try by repression to hold back the tide...If there once was an old association of the Peasant with Liberty it is all over. The romantic illusion, fostered by the Celtic Twilight, that the West of Ireland...is for some reason more Irish than Guinness' Brewery or Dwyer's Sunbeam-Wolsey factory, has no longer any basis whatsoever.[28]

[25]Seamus Heaney, 'After the Synge-Song', *The Listener*, 13 January 1972, 55.
[26]Joseph Lee, in *Dancing at the Crossroads*.
[27]Eamonn De Valera, in a speech from 1933, quoted in the above programme.
[28]Sean O'Faolain, 'Silent Ireland', *The Bell*, 6:5 (August 1943), 465, quoted in Brown, p.200.

Though scathing in his denunciation of the Synge-song, rugged, close-to-nature, *Man of Aran*[29] stuff served up to them, and merciless in his parodying of Manus's crude and dated stage Oirish *persona*:

> (*He slips his left arm out of his sleeve and tucks it into his belt.*)
> Be Jaysus, Shane boy, you're a quare comedian. You should be on the stage. Like me. Look at the act I have - the simple, upright, hardworking island peasant holding on manfully to the real values in life, sustained by a thousand-year-old culture, preserving for my people a really worthwhile inheritance(40)

at the same time Shane recognises the incipient threat posed by him should his tenuous faith in the 'Gaelic way' be disturbed. Unlike Peter, he detects an ideological subtext to Manus's hospitality, and perhaps how, like himself, he is a man rapt in a role. When Peter asserts that their host 'genuinely wants us back', Shane replies

> Of course he does. Because we give support to his illusion that the place isn't a cemetery. But it is. And he knows it. The place and his way of life and everything he believes in and all he touches - dead, finished spent. And when he finally faces that, he's liable to become dangerous(41).[30]

His trenchant attack is consistent with his initial uneasy response to the island, but needs to be seen also within its dramatic contexts. It follows hard on the heels of Sarah's sexual invitation (39), and Peter's proposition that they return at Christmas, the one disrupting the relaxed, settled rhythm he appears to have settled into, the other a plea for a continuation of their chafing relationship. As the exchange between the two Dubliners develops, Shane's anger switches from their island host to its real object, Peter and himself. Earlier in the same scene (Act One, scene two), in his fateful confidences with

[29]Fintan O'Toole and Angela Bourke, in *Dancing at the Crossroads*, expose the contrivances employed in the making of *Man of Aran* (1934), Robert Flaherty's classic film, which was received rapturously in Europe, America and Ireland, for its authentic representation of peasant life. Its 'timeless truths', O'Toole comments, turned out to be 'lies'. For its key scene, the shark hunt, American experts had to be flown in to teach the islanders a method for catching the fish that they had not used for the last hundred years. Angela Bourke points out that the film was deliberately shot on the rocky, unsheltered part of the island, and thus gave a misleading picture of life there.

[30] Shane's idea of the island as a cemetery echoes the central premise of Friel's satirical play, *The Mundy Scheme* (1969), in which there is a proposal to turn the west of Ireland into a giant,

Sarah, Shane had confessed to his frustration at what appeared to be turning into a life sentence, screwed by a 'spook called Obligation, *sired by* Duty out of Liability"(my italics) (37). The autobiographical, and, therefore, suspect sketch he presents to Sarah places him as one of ten orphans sent to Peter's school, but one in whom Peter had taken a special 'interest'(36). Although at first sight his grammar seems 'innocent' and many of his verb choices purely descriptive - 'bought me', 'kept me', 'released me', 'got me', 'sent me'(36) - in fact, like that word 'interest', they express Shane's sense of himself as victim,[31] as a subject-being turned object. Whether Peter really supplied him with fur-lined boots and leather helmets, or whether they are metaphors coined for the occasion, they form part of a pattern Shane is constructing to legitimise his escape from what he now views as Peter's obsessive, possessive, over-protective, -directive, more-than-paternal care. The psychological strategy he had developed to mask his anxieties about himself, his 'uncertain'(42) origins, and, almost certainly, his sexual orientation, which manifests itself in a constant need to 'perform', to lay claim to other voices, has now lost its value and validity. (He has reached a point where he is tired of putting on an antic disposition, playing Hamlet to Peter's leaden Polonius.) When Peter tries reassuring him, 'They all like you', his answer is significant, 'Which of me?'(41). This self-reflexive question heralds a brief, but crucial moment in the dialogue, in which Shane's speech ceases to be a 'tissue of quotations', to use Roland Barthes's phrase; it also marks a hinge-point in the plot. The combined effect of Sarah's advances and Peter's pleading drives him away from the house into alternative male company (Philly's), creating a 'separation' as momentous in its way as that effected by Iago

international burial ground.

[31] His reading of himself in these terms corresponds with Sarah's reading of herself, and helps to explain the fateful attraction.

between Othello and Cassio, Othello and Desdemona.[32] Resentment at his past dependency, at having played out the role of dutiful follower, mingles with a growing distaste for Peter, his age, his body, his language, his façade, his moral dubiousness.

Encoded within Peter's praise of Manus's consistent kindness(41) is a commendation of his own, under which lies, Shane now feels, a crass and crude materialism. His resistance surfaces in a series of acerbic, economic metaphors, references to Peter possessing 'the gauche subtlety of an insurance man', 'our lease', 'the ledgers', 'obligations...fully satisfied'(41-2). These finally tell on Peter, forcing him to adopt a similar *lexis,* and to admit this sullied aspect of their relationship, 'an understanding' contracted between unequal partners, a matter of capital, emotional and financial. Despite his denial that his interest is a material one, his diction clearly fixes Shane as a pensionable asset:

> 'I've got to a stage when I need *a - a - modest permanence*'
> 'I've never asked you for *a commitment*, have I? Just a *reasonable expectation*'
> 'You *owe* it to me, Shane'
> 'Love, Shane, love, love - all I have is *invested* in you - everything - for the best years of my life. There must be some *return.* It's not extravagant to expect *something*'(my italics)(42).

Outed unwillingly, his need exposed, Peter veers from temper to repentance, first making a humiliating allusion to Shane's illegitimacy, then abjectly apologising for it:

> Shane, I'm sorry - my God I'm sorry - I'm sorry, Shane - I didn't mean a word of it - I'm tired - I'm jittery - I'm jealous of Sarah, of Philly, of everyone - forgive me, Shane, please forgive me (42-3).

[32]Like *Othello, The Gentle Island* is a tale of betrayals, or rather perceived betrayals, a popular Irish theme. Both play variations on the verb 'to lie' (see *Othello,* III, iii, 410, 'I lay with Cassio lately', or IV, i, 33-38, 'Lie with her? Lie on her?'), and Sarah's account of what she saw in the boathouse could be seen as an ambiguous counterpart to the 'ocular proof' Iago offers. Later in *The Gentle Island,* Joe warns Sarah, 'Put none of your *poison* into my father's head' an image which Iago frequently employs, but also recalls Claudius' crime. There are many other Shakespearean echoes within the play, reverberations perhaps of Friel's intense experience in Minneapolis watching Guthrie's Shakespeare productions.

That Peter might be conceivably 'jealous' of Sarah can be explained from the fact that she has spent so much more of the day with Shane while he has been mending the radio and the gramophone. His jealousy of Philly at this stage, however, is harder to fathom, unless he means he is jealous of his youth, or of his future ownership of the island.[33]

Ironically, in the bizarre, violent scene that ensues, Philly's interest in Shane clearly awakened, and by its close Peter is given cause to feel displaced. The hurt Shane feels is stressed in his reverting to the manic, attention-seeking behaviour we witnessed earlier. According to Friel's stage directions, *'SHANE dashes into the kitchen. Searches feverishly...for a record...He speaks at an almost hysterical speed and pitch'*(42). His speeches contain three pointed, class-conscious references to 'Sir Peter'(43-4). Mockingly he throws back at Peter his own superlatives, and takes another swipe at the phoney Gaelicism of the Sweeneys.[34] He also makes what could be taken as a significant sexual reference to 'the barren island'(43), which may suggest an awareness that Sarah had not only sex, but conception in mind.

The scene which witnesses the restoration of music, dancing and clapping to the island, brought about Shane the engineer's skill,[35] culminates in deeper discord. Essentially

[33] Earlier, on his return from the turf-cutting, he had spoken admiringly of Philly's physical prowess and expertise, 'Sheer delight to watch him'(40). The subtext of these comments, if we assume that Peter and Shane are homosexuals, might be that he finds Philly sexually attractive. Peter no doubt finds Philly less verbally threatening

[34] Instead of an authentic, 'ancient Gaelic folk-song'(43), the first record he turns up is an American one, 'Oh, Susanna', attributed to Stephen Foster (1826-64), who acquired many of his songs from the black plantations. At the opening of Act One, scene two, Shane had briefly adopted a black slave *persona* - 'Ole Joshua he sure fix you' music box real good now'(34) - which re-emerges when later Manus draws analogies between Shane's 'crime' and that of the thieving niggerman (65-7). Northern Irish Catholics in the late 1960s commonly made comparisons between their plight as an underclass and that of the American blacks, most notably in the founding of their own Civil Rights Movement in 1967. See Seamus Heaney's comments in his interview with James Randall, *Ploughshares*, 5:3, 1979, 18-20.

[35]The three machines fixed by Shane - the radio, gramophone, the outboard motor - symbolise the

Shane's song-and-dance is a sexual display, and read as such by Sarah and Philly. Peter rightly interprets it as a piece of wounded defiance. The very qualities that Sarah found appealing in Shane - charm, wit, energy, dexterity, an apparent 'openness', vulnerability, parentlessness, unattachedness, which excited her desire and sympathy, quickened her acute sense of absence, and encouraged her to 'recognise' affinities between her plight and his - now in the wake of his rejection of her render him repellent. Previously she had spoken in praise of music and dancing on the Isle of Man, and laughed at Shane's slave *persona*. Now his choice of a plantation/ minstrel song, 'Oh, Susanna', with its reference to an abandoned, tearful, black woman, whose fate and name almost rhyme with her own, and his attempted cavorting with her,[36] she reads as a further humiliation, a mocking response to her offer of herself.

To convey the accelerating deterioration of relationships on the island - from frustration and paralysis through to violence - symbolic action is deployed. Shane's dance and fall, like the articulate blows that fell him, enact a move away from language and dialogue. Initially, especially for an audience, it is difficult to comprehend the causes of Philly's manic, sadistic glee. Almost certainly it is bound up with the often unverbalised contest between Sarah and himself. It could be that he feels his wife's dignity has been affronted by Shane's presumptuous gesture, that he is simply defending his 'possession', but equally it is possible that his actions originate in a more complex, contradictory set of motives. His repeated punches may be simultaneously an expression of an unconscious hostility/ subconscious sexual attraction towards Shane, a kind of initiation rite, a warning to Sarah, a further illustration of the endemic brutality on 'scalping island'(26).

---

already existing 'intrusion' of the external, industrial world on the mythic 'self-sufficient' Inishkeen.
[36] An attempt to repair the damage between them and/or to retaliate against Peter?

Significantly, once assured that 'aul Sean'(46), as Joe has rechristened him,[37] is 'unhurt'(46), and that he can accept punishment *like a man*, he invites him for a 'run'(46) on his boat to 'show you the caves'(46), dismissing Peter's prior claim and his excessive response to what after all was merely boyish horseplay. Peter's switching off of the record (and later smashing of it) is obviously an attempt to halt the beating Shane is receiving, but also suggests that he has learnt something from his afternoon experience with Philly. These actions challenge Philly's dominance, and can be seen as further examples of the older generation endeavouring to restore their hegemony and control. Philly's hostile, derisive attitude towards Peter may be partly because he looks upon him as another pitiable, yet empowered father-figure, but also because he is so obviously a 'townie', and thus lacking the genuine *male*, physical attributes. From Joe's comments it emerges that earlier in the day Philly had been amusing himself sadistically at Peter's expense, while he was attempting to keep up with him at the turf. ('You're a bugger, too'(47), exclaims Joe).

The Act ends, as it began, with more uncertainties over identity. When yelping breaks out, initially it is unclear whether the source is Shane or Sarah's maimed dog, an ominous blurring. By imitating the dog, Shane colludes with the cruelty, *machismo* and deceptions on the island; by failing to enlist his better judgment, to act on his intuitions, 'Single yelp shatters fragile peace. Acute unease on paradise island. War thought imminent. All men over seventeen report for military service'(50), he connives unwittingly in his own diminution to the status of casualty.

[37] Tired of the role-playing involved in living with Peter, Shane finds himself re-cast by the islanders. His manual dexterity and technological skills have made him acceptable, hence his new life as 'Sean'.

V

The opening of Act Two initially dwells on the two patriarchs' attempts to reconstruct their pasts for external consumption, appearing to offer each other their 'innocent outspread hands'[39] For a while the threat of physical violence is suspended, in favour of the ritualised combat of the card game, which in its turn gives way to a genial swapping of narratives, until Sarah takes a hand. The contest pitches the older against the younger generation, and, anticipating the play's outcome, shows the senior partners, Manus and Peter, finding it difficult to submit to defeat gracefully; if they lose, it must be because their opponents are playing with marked cards. (It is Manus who gives this reason for their defeat. Peter, always quick to ingratiate himself, is swift in endorsing his host's words. Ironically in the larger contest of the play, it seems that it is the old who have marked the cards of the young.) During the game of *solo* - another apt choice on Friel's part - Sarah has to be advised as to which card to play, the Jack.[40] Any illusion of domestic integration around the hearth is undermined by Manus's churlishness, Joe's boyish triumphalism, and, more importantly, Sarah's distractedness and Peter's anxiety over the absent pair. Further evidence of Philly's reluctance to return home (and indifference to his wife and her needs) comes from Joe's unreassuring comments to Peter that 'He'll probably leave Sean off at the far slip and head out again by himself. He'll hardly come up here'(53), and prompt a second,

[39]'Self-Portrait', 22. Friel voices here an almost Shane-like distaste for the 'exhibitionism', 'ostentation', 'parade', 'swagger of the first person singular', his suspicion of his own rationalised, sanitised, heavily edited autobiographical snatches.

[40]Definitions of 'Jack' in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* include 'one who does odd jobs' (I.4), 'the knave of trumps in all-fours'(I.5), and a Shakespearean usage meaning 'a mad-cap ruffian'(I.6). In mining, a 'jack' is 'a wooden wedge used to assist in cleaving strata' (II.6b). The phrase to 'play the jack' means 'to play the knave', which would fit what Sarah does if one assumes that she is guilty of slandering Shane. The unresolved question at the end of the play is the identity of the 'Jack' - Sarah, Shane or Philly?

melancholic allusion to the Monks' tale, that narrative of thwarted sexual longing, which reaffirms the petrifying authority of the old over the young.

PETER I imagine, if you could see them, they're trying to escape now.
MANUS Who?
PETER The monks and the girl.
MANUS Them. Hah! They're wasting their time. They'll make nothing of it. (54)

Peter's recalling of the legend from the first day of his stay, like his subsequent eulogy to the island, indicate how far he has been drawn into its fictions. Unsatisfied, if not unsatisfiable, the two older men voice their envy of each other's imagined security, and then slip into heavily edited confidences, whose primary purpose is to elicit sympathy rather than elucidate the past. However, whereas Peter is able to maintain control of his narration, and draw back under Sarah's close questioning of gaps in his text,[41] Manus is more exposed. Quietly observing the increasing warmth her father-in-law shows to Peter, symbolised in his gift of the clock and the gift of his narrative, Sarah intervenes to debunk his account of how he lost his arm in the copper mines of Montana. Denied the consummation (pregnancy) she had wished for, she determines to shape his closure; her aim in seizing the role of principal narrator of *his* story is to dig beneath his self-belief, to deflate Peter's vision of him, to confront him with absence, with what should be spoken. Although prepared to tolerate his projection of himself as Inishkeen's answer to Tiger King,[42] she cannot stomach his presenting of *him*self as a martyr. In Sarah's eyes and in her account, it is always, as in Hardy's *Tess*, the woman who pays; for her, the principal victim in the Sweeney history and household was 'a gentle young girl called Rosie Dubh'(56). In place of the anticipated cowboy adventure Manus would have served up, Sarah provides a change of genre.

[41]Once again Sarah's questions are unanswered. cf. her appeal to Shane earlier (39).
[42]The heroic farmer-fisherman of *Man of Aran*.

What begins lyrically, with many of the linguistic features of a fairy tale ends a grotesque, grim parody of one. The innocent young heroine is first glimpsed trapped between two wicked uncles, 'that *never* spoke and *never* washed and *never* lit a fire'(my italics)(56), caught in iterated negation. Like the nun in the Monks' tale, she is an object contested by two men; like so many Irish women she is divided, 'starved and repressed'[43] by domestic and religious patriarchies. Instead of a hero appearing to rescue Rosie from the two ugly (animal-like, non-articulating) brothers, a different kind of beast arrives on the scene, a 'buck', 'a smart buck', 'smelling about the back of the hill'(56), a beast on heat. Sarah's choice of signifiers collectively stresses a predatory sexuality, which, she implies, disgusts her, and emphasises Manus's attractive outward appearance, his intelligence, his knowledge of a wider world, America, where smart bucks make smart bucks. The irony, of course, is that the characteristics she singles out apply equally to Shane *as she conceived him earlier*. Unlike Shane, however, Manus used his ability 'with the tongue' to get 'Rosie Dubh pregnant'(56).[44]

While in Sarah's version of what happened next, Manus simply abandoned his victim, in his he indeed went to London, but returned twelve months later with 'the wedding ring in my pocket'(57) to marry her. Rather than suffering the loss of his arm when a mine-face collapsed, as he first claimed (56), both subsequent accounts have him mutilated by Rosie's uncles and their herring knives. For Sarah, in her self-appointed role as Justicer and Truth-Teller, it is a justifiable punishment for taking advantage of a girl's honour, for an abuse of hospitality; for Manus, the brothers' attack on him was

[43]Edna Longley, *The Living Stream*, p. 173.
[44]A further irony, of course, is that her tongue and Manus's gun will cripple Shane for life.

unmerited and cowardly, and 'truth', like fiction, a complex question of angles and audiences: 'There's ways and ways of telling every story. Every story has seven faces. And there's things shouldn't be said before a stranger'(57). Unfortunately in *The Gentle Island* the seventh face is missing. The dead Rosie Dubh, like the dead in *The Freedom of the City*, suffer violence a second time when their narratives are misappropriated to service 'the needs and the demands and the expectations'[45] of the living.

What is not in dispute in Friel's play, or in recent Northern history for that matter, is the outcome - loss. Manus does not challenge Sarah's stark description of his wife's disappearance, 'a month after her second son was born she went out for a walk along the cliffs on the east side and was never seen since'(57). As Hugh points out in *Translations*, however, 'it is not the literal past, the "facts" of history that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language'.[46] In Sarah's 'imaging' and imagining of the past, the case against Manus is incontrovertible. What is more, for her his criminal neglect *provides the explanation for* her husband's sexual indifference, the fruitlessness of her own marriage. These 'facts' are clearly at the forefront of her mind as she leaves for the slip to see Philly and Shane.

In the fragmented, 'authorised' history of his marriage Manus recounts to Peter after Sarah's departure, he attempts to absolve himself from some measure of the guilt. In one sentence he mentions the whores in the camp in Montana, then backs away from that topic which might confirm Sarah's picture of him as a womanizer. Part of the

[45]Brian Friel, *Making History*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p.16.
[46]*Translations* in *Selected Plays of Brian Friel*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p.445.

attraction of Rosie Dubh, one surmises, was not so much sexual, as a matter of power and class; he enjoyed her awe, her submissiveness, her innocence. Poignantly, pathetically, he delights in the memory of her calling him *Mister* Manus. The fact that he makes no reference as to having contacted her or her uncles to announce his 'honourable intentions' prior to his return to Inishkeen throws doubt on his claims, but at least he does recognise a connection between his reappearance and her death, when he avers, "It might have been better to leave her be"(57). In his interpretation of the text, his missing arm, rather than functioning as an apt metonym for his absence or reminder of his betrayal, is proffered as a *cause* for the failure of their relationship and her later suicide(58). He tries to impose a satisfactory closure on this painful scene of disclosures by asserting the one thing he is, or rather would like to be sure of, that Philly 'holds nothing against me'(58). He designates his account as 'the whole story'(58), but if every story indeed has seven faces, how can there be a 'whole story'?

That Manus has been profoundly destabilised by Sarah's assault becomes evident when the audience witnesses his desperate efforts to persuade Joe to marry in order to secure the succession. The tenuousness of the island's economy, its uncertain fertility is again confirmed in a snatch of gendered dialogue in which Joe complains 'you'd get more milk from a billy-goat than that aul heifer'(58). The departure of Joe's companions has clearly loosened the 'grip of irregular fields', and, like Patrick Kavanagh's *persona* Maguire, he is no longer convinced of the wisdom of making the 'field his bride'.[47] However, despite his scepticism about the quality and viability of life on the island, he again succumbs quickly to the force of his father's will, which would

[47]Patrick Kavanagh, *The Great Hunger*, in *Collected Poems*, (London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1972), p.35.

marry him to it forever. Hardly has the glue had time to dry on the envelope bearing *his father's* proposal to Anna, before Sarah re-enters bearing a text which trumps theirs, to return to the card metaphors from earlier.

Whether from righteous anger or cynical calculation, Sarah proves herself again an adept at story-telling and narrative craft. Instead of informing Manus immediately what she has allegedly seen, she maximises his discomfiture, prolongs the suspense by inviting him to witness something that begins as 'your son'(61), but then gets translated and lost in a mocking succession of suggestive metaphors associated with fertility and power(61),[48] and rhetorical questions. Even when she finally abandons these devices, and approaches in a series of subordinate clauses the critical 'fact' in what she has 'witnessed', she shows a reluctance at naming the appalling deed:

> MANUS: What are you trying to say?
> SARAH: That he's down there in the boathouse at the far slip, your Philly, my husband. That he's down there with that Dublin tramp, Shane. That they're stripped naked. That he's doing for that tramp what he couldn't do for me. And that if you're the great king of Inishkeen, you'll kill them both - that's what I'm saying.

VI

No longer silently working at her sewing or furtively looking up towards the window, as she was at its outset, in *The Gentle Island*'s penultimate scene Sarah stands assertively in its frame, empowered with and by the authority of narration. That fundamental changes in the politics of the family have occurred is further indicated by the placing of the two other characters. An ironic repetition from the play's opening

[48] 'Bull', 'sire', 'prince', 'hero', 'apple', 'barren', 'womb', 'crop', 'seed', 'waste', 'sterile', 'king'.

sets '*MANUS is in the airplane seat, facing upstage*'(62), but even this physical metaphor, like all metaphors, offers only an illusion of similarity. Manus is once more at a loss, but the loss is of a different order. Whereas Act One, scene one, had seen the play springing into 'action' with Joe's rushed, impassioned entry, this later scene situates him inside the house, '*his head in his hands*', '*sitting at the kitchen table*'(62), domestically contained as Sarah had previously been.

Again the present tense is deployed to heighten dramatic tension, though this time it is in anticipation of an arrival. Sarah's narrative stresses the provocative ease with which Shane progresses towards his *peripeteia* and the family home he has (supposedly) violated. Such is her assuredness that neither father nor son rises to verify its accuracy. From her description, Shane appears simultaneously as the man she wanted him to be, a figure who might have just stepped out from a romantic film or advertisement - 'He's coming. He's alone. He has his jacket across his shoulder and his shoes in his left hand...He's stooping down. He's picking up something. A stone. He's skimming it across the water"(62) - and the man she wants them to believe him to be, smugly indifferent to their hurt. Her confidence in her ability as a 'reader' of others can be seen when she assumes that she is privy to his thoughts, 'He's saying to himself, "My God, it's heavenly"'(62), yet, as the audience are aware, such an exclamation is much more typical of Peter. Joe's appeal to Manus to think rationally and act justly, 'Two's to blame or no one's to blame', is unable to compete with her rhetoric. Skilfully manipulating her father-in-law by appealing to his belief in the interconnectedness of narratives and narrative continuities, through her question 'What about the herring knives, Manus?'(62), she relates the present 'crime' against him to his past experience

of summary justice at the hands of Rosie's brothers, when he was both guilty and victim. (Manus, of course, is no stranger to traditional Catholic thinking on sexual transgressions, which classified them as 'mortal sins', and, as such, deserving of the severest punishment.)

Though again reluctant to name the obscenity and its 'engineer'(63), Sarah alludes to it overtly and covertly in her references 'the buck', lost 'in the hollow'(62-3). Her 'technique' as a teller resembles Iago's to a certain extent, in that having provided 'ocular proof' confirming the worst fears of her hearer, she then appears to question her own testimony, admitting 'I could have made a mistake, Manus', 'How could I be sure in the dark? What do you think, Manus? Is there doubt in your mind?'(63). She promises a restoration of manliness, potency, authority, if only he will 'act'. For Manus the gun offers an escape from numbness, a way back into being. Appalled that for a second time ancestral pieties have been spat upon - 'People have lived here for hundreds of years, thousands of years', 'There were people here before Christ was born'[49]- he is in no mood to listen to his son's increasingly desperate attempts at damage limitation. Dismissed once more by his father, Joe rushes off in search of a substitute, a responsible adult figure, Peter. Perhaps, as Sarah implies, he is also looking for a chance to 'escape'(64) witnessing the seemingly inevitable outcome of her narrative. His departure is dramatically necessary since it leaves the unsuspecting Shane isolated on stage with his adversaries; at the same time, it presents Sarah with a further opportunity to goad Manus, by playing on his name and contrasting Joe's boyish cowardice with his own potential 'redemption' through violence. By taking up

[49]These two lines may seem non-sequiturs, but in fact reflect Manus's shocked acceptance of the plausibility of Sarah's evidence and his own evident sense of betrayal.

the gun, taking on the role of justicer, his own past crimes against Rosie and his present shame can be annealed: 'For a while there *he* didn't know how *he* was going to escape, did he? But *he*'s only a *boy*. This time *you*'ll be a *man*, *Man*us. This time'(my italics) (64).

Immediately on his return from the expedition with Philly, Shane reveals his new-found receptiveness to Gaelic language and culture, yet this very familiarity proves his undoing; to his accusers it seems another blatant act of expropriation. His speeches prior to his indictment are heavily larded by Friel with unconscious ironies, usually in the form of allusions to the alleged 'crime' and future 'punishment' - 'far away hills look green', 'Purest Donegal', 'untouched by human hand', 'your worthy husband', 'the Stags'; 'jolly gruesome', 'where the tanker broke up', 'the broken ford'(64). Necessarily in view of the impending dramatic climax, the character is recklessly unaware of the extent to which he is further antagonising his stage audience with his verbal ostentation, his flip 'translations'. What had been represented in the previous scene as 'more entertainment for the young people than the instruments he set going again'(55), the Dubliner's playfulness with language, is now read by Manus, in the light of Sarah's narrative, as evidence of moral degeneracy. Even Shane's 'admission', uncovered though Sarah's interrogation, that up until 'half an hour ago' he and Philly had been swimming 'in the moonlight'(65) is made to appear deviant behaviour. Would normal people go swimming 'In the dark?'(65)

Although twice picking up on Manus's uncharacteristic taciturnity - like his host, Shane prefers talking to listening - he singularly fails to recognise the warning signals

implicit within that silence, or in the narrative which breaks it, or in Sarah's directorial manner. Several times she intervenes in Manus's narrative in an effort to maintain control over the situation, 'Listen'(65), 'Quicker, Manus', 'That's what happened. What do you make of that story, engineer?', 'Savages! Listen!'(66). Six times Shane interrupts Manus's parable with interjections, which seem to confirm to his accusers his wanton contempt for them and their values. Although in his first aside he rightly identifies a potential analogy between the itinerant 'niggerman'(65) and himself, in his second he wrongly anticipates, following the mention of 'holy pictures'(65) and the bent, rheumatic old couple, that the tale will be about faith-healing, miraculous cures. By the time of his third interjection, 'All niggers is thieves, man'(66), one suspects that he has concluded that essentially this is a racist narrative, a story about the inherent cupidity and deceit of strangers, which indeed it is. However, as the audience are aware, Manus's parable is about possessions and the vulnerability of the old; the five gold sovereigns function not only as a metonym for financial security, but also subtextually as an objective correlative for Philly, the son who will provide for him.[50] Even before Manus has reached the nub of the story, the closure he has been driving towards, Shane feels he has heard enough, as his sardonic comment, "I'm breathless"(66), indicates.[51] Manus's aims as a narrator are to illustrate the dire penalties awaiting those who transgress laws of ownership and decency on Inishkeen, to induce a confession, and to serve as a prelude and prompt to executive action. To Shane, however, the narration is an obscenity, another example of the sadistic cruelty on 'scalping island'(26). What appals him is not only the unquestioning assumption of

[50]Like Peter remonstrating with Shane (41-2), Manus resorts to economic metaphors in describing his relationship with his son. As Sarah recognises, Manus is more concerned with the devaluation of his property - 'He robbed you, Manus'- than with her loss.

[51]The not-uncommon gulf between authorial/narratorial intention and narrative reception is manifest here.

the black man's guilt, but also Manus's obvious approval of 'lynch law', and the savagery meted out on both the accused and an entirely innocent animal:

> MANUS Bound as he was, they harnessed him to an old donkey. Then they pumped linseed oil down into the donkey's ears. And for a full day, sir, until it dropped dead, the mad donkey dragged that niggerman across the length and breadth of this island...But I'm thinking ...that it was a fair punishment for a thief. (66)

Whether stemming from an urban, liberal education, or the product of his own experience as a figure on the margins (due to his illegitimacy and/or homosexuality?), Shane's outrage takes the form of a bitter, insulting riposte, 'So what's the moral? Don't attempt to peddle religion to savages?'(66). This has the effect of further infuriating Sarah and dragging Manus towards the deed he had wished to avoid and the deed he cannot bring himself to name. Maddened by Manus's repeated retreat into the evasions of metaphor - 'you did *a worse thing*', '*five gold sovereigns* was a small enough thing, *sir*', 'you *robbed* me, *sir*', 'you *stole* my son'(my italics) (66-7) - his continuing deference, and, above all, his failure to enforce his authority by means of the gun, Sarah finally explodes. Her words are hardly more explicit than Manus's, but are backed up by the gun:

> I seen you - in the boathouse - you and Philly stripped - I seen you - I watched it all - with my own eyes - you and him, you dirty bastard - I seen it all - you dirty, dancing bastard.(67)

At last realising the deadly seriousness of the situation, Shane's defence is not to explain what had happened between Philly and himself, but exclusively centres upon persuading Manus of the unreliability of the witness:

> For God's sake you don't heed her, do you?
> *She* wanted to sleep with me
> I wouldn't have her. That's what's eating her
> Look at her for Christ's sake! She's insane!(67)

When, however, he attempts leaving to fetch Philly to corroborate his account that nothing 'dirty' occurred between them,[52] Sarah swiftly blocks that narrative-route, 'You've had enough with Philly, engineer'(67).

In the melodramatic scene that follows, five times she calls on Manus to shoot, but though he raises the gun he does not fire. Taking advantage of this moment of indeterminacy, Shane dashes out into the street, shouting out to Peter for his salvation, only to be brought down by a shot from Sarah, who almost immediately freezes, then '*begins to lament*'(68). Although at the end of Act Two, scene one, Sarah had demanded that Manus kill both Shane and Philly, throughout scene two her will has been wholly focussed on the destruction of the engineer. She succeeds in leaving him broken like the black man in Manus's story, maimed like the dog, that other object of her need. When the stage directions talk of how '*Very softly*' Sarah '*begins to lament*' and to make '*an almost animal noise*'(68), the moment seems an echo of the ending of *The Playboy and the Western World*, with its '*wild lamentations*'.[53] Both Sarah and Synge's Pegeen Mike create icons of the men they briefly love, yet later maim the objects of their fictions.[54]

[52]He might be attempting either to prove that the sexual encounter described by Sarah is a complete fabrication, or, if one accepts the reading of Shane and Philly as homosexuals, that it was an act between two consenting adults.

[53]J.M. Synge, *The Playboy and the Western World*, (London: Unwin, 1968), p.77.

[54]Jose Lanters, in 'Violence and Sacrifice in Brian Friel's *The Gentle Island* and *Wonderful Tennessee*', *The Irish University Review*, 26:1, Spring/Summer 1996, 163-176, argues effectively that Shane functions as a scapegoat, as a 'a perfect surrogate victim', and not only for Sarah. 'When Sarah shoots Shane, she resolves the question of who was responsible for the family crisis, so that the family's sense of unity can be restored'(166). Once the rite of violence has been enacted, however, the Sweeney family - like 'Ireland' or 'Ulster' - is no closer to 'unity'.

VII

The Gentle Island's concluding scene returns to the narrative which has haunted Irish social life throughout Friel's lifetime and long before, the seemingly unremitting process of emigration. In contrast to the mass exodus of the opening, the play closes with a single figure passing into exile, and a newly cold hearth. It begins intruding into the mind of an increasingly solitary, confused old man, a far cry from the resolute, enthroned patriarch of Act One. Appropriately, given his sons' resistance to or inability to produce heirs, Manus is presented symbolically located '*huddled over a dead fire*'(69). According to the stage directions, he has '*aged a lot*', lost '*the assurance from his bearing*'(69) after the shooting, and drifts uncertainly between past and present. One minute he is twenty years back in time addressing the dead Rosie and bemoaning the burden of a baby, the next - somewhat unconvincingly in my opinion - he is fully alert, summoning Sarah as he pumps an exhausted Joe for information about the strangers. Showing neither pity nor remorse at the news of Shane's condition, 'Even if he lives he'll never walk again. His spine's shattered'(70), Manus is more concerned about the legal repercussions of the incident.[55] Once assured that there will be none, he determines, like Sarah, to delete the whole episode from his memory, hence his request to her to keep from Philly the previous night's events, and his own lies about the real circumstances of the Dubliners' departure. Having lost the younger, Manus strives to maintain control over the elder son by placing a taboo on the most recent of narratives.

[55] A curious gap in the text is introduced at this point as to why neither Shane nor Peter inform the doctor or the police as to the real cause of his injuries. Sarah's apparent indifference to Shane's condition is matched by Manus's.

Another clear indication that a definite power shift has occurred within the Sweeney family lies in Joe's changed attitudes, in particular towards his father and to the island which is now a tainted place. The animated boy narrator of the first scene, eager to engage his father's attention, now '*walks briskly past*'(69) Manus on his final entry, and responds curtly to his questioning. The combined effect of having his pleas ignored in the previous scene and of witnessing at first-hand the shattering, perhaps fatal consequences for a young body of his father's and sister-in-law's folly, has hardened him. No doubt he is sickened also by Manus's attempts at deflecting guilt: from himself - "It was a sorry day Red Doherty brought them in among us', 'They cankered us! They blackened the bud that was beginning to grow again!"(70) - and from Philly. None of the tactics Manus employs to persuade Joe to stay weakens his resolve to abandon Inishkeen; imperatives ('Put that away, boy'), cajoling ('Wait a month. Wait a week. Wait till you're settled'), physical restraint ('*He grabs JOE's arm. JOE stands rigid. The grip is relaxed*'), emotional blackmail ('It doesn't matter to you that your father's handicapped') are all to no avail. Under the pressure of the latter, however, he does offer his father the chance to escape too. Still clinging for dear life to his 'phoney dream' of his sons' success, like Arther Miller's Willy Loman, Manus is unwilling to rid himself of the fictions he has made to mask his failures. Desperately he tries to will Joe's departure and his defeat into a future victory, by constructing a London-marriage-children-grandchildren scenario, but his younger son can no longer be bought off with bribes or promises. By way of answer, Joe takes only the money he needs to get to Glasgow, rips up and burns the proposal to Anna Con, and finally throws down the key to her abandoned house. Like Gar in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, he has by now had enough of

> All this bloody yap about father and son and all this sentimental rubbish about 'homeland' and 'birthplace' - yap! Bloody yap! Impermanence - anonymity - that's what I'm looking for.[56]

In the encounter with Sarah that follows, Manus fares little better. She also declines to offer Manus any consolation, either by commiserating with him over the loss of Joe - rather she endorses the wisdom of the decision to emigrate - or by retracting her account of Philly's activities in the boathouse. Her reply to his tentative suggestion that she might have mistaken what she had 'seen' is also to walk away; she has no intention of restoring his idealised image of his son to him, of envisioning a re-vision. To do so would be to admit her moral responsibility for Shane's crippling.

From her final exchanges with Manus and Philly one might imagine that nothing had changed substantially within her. The night before she had exposed her husband's alleged sexual deviance to his father and brother, called for his immediate death, and shot a man. The morning after she expresses her quiet content with her memories of Man, and shows wifely obedience preparing food for Philly, kneeling at his feet and helping him off with his thigh-boots, asking how the salmon were. Seemingly all her anger is spent, and she slips back as so many Irishwomen have over the years into the resignation they have been encouraged to live by. Her final words, 'We'll get used to it'(77), refer not only to the quiet of the house without Joe, but also to the life sentence she has received - a future of endlessly deferred gratification.

[56]*Philadelphia Here I Come!*, in *Selected Plays*, p.79.

IX

George O'Brien opens his remarks on *The Gentle Island* in his valuable study of Friel's work by setting a distance between it and the political satire of *The Mundy Scheme.* The later play, he asserts, 'contains nothing of cultural commentary. Its central figure is a woman. And it has a remote rural setting'.[57] On the contrary, as this essay has sought to prove, *The Gentle Island* in fact is a play with a very substantial cultural and political charge. The fact that its 'central figure is a woman' is also of great cultural and political significance; Sarah's 'presence', along with Roisin Dubh's 'absence', are means through which Friel can raise issues about power and gender in Ireland, and expose the repressive status quo on both sides of the border.

Although *The Gentle Island* clearly can be read in terms of its treatment of interpersonal relationships, as D.E.S. Maxwell read it in 1973, 'as a parable of human groping after communion and permanence, and the elisions of contact that frustrate it',[58] its concern with the psychic and spiritual paralysis of its characterisations should not lead one to ignore the deep political and cultural watermarks it so evidently bears, or the contexts in which it was composed. Earlier in this pioneering study of Friel's drama, written before the text of *The Gentle Island* was finally published, Maxwell makes the important point - one which Frank Ormsby would reiterate some twenty years later in his introduction to *A Rage for Order: Poetry of the Northern Ireland Troubles* - that often 'the Northern situation' operates as 'a kind of subterranean presence in works that ostensibly have nothing to do with it'. He goes on to cite Seamus Heaney's comment about 'The Last Mummer', a poem whose composition is

[57]George O'Brien, *Brian Friel* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989), p.71.
[58]D.E.S. Maxwell, *Brian Friel* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1973, pp.99-100.

Gentle Island - 'I didn't mean this to be a poem about Northern Ireland, but in some way I think it is'.[59]

The Gentle Island belongs to a period when, like his dramatic art, Friel was heading in 'a completely new direction',[60] and when Ireland faced the greatest turmoil since the War of Independence and the Civil War. During the years immediately prior to its composition, the late 1960s, Friel had shifted ground literally by leaving one state, Northern Ireland, for another, the Republic, when he moved from Derry, where he had lived since 1939, to Muff in County Donegal, a partly practical, partly symbolic re-location, like Seamus Heaney's move to Glanmore, towards country and the margins and away from an explosive urban centre. Some two years previously - in 1966 or 1967 - he had also severed a longstanding family connection with the Nationalist Party, which he felt had lost initiative and impetus.[61] Both *The Mundy Scheme* and *The Gentle Island* bespeak a gathering and profound disillusion with both states of Ireland, North and South, and a determination on the part of the forty-year old author to re-view the ideological baggage he had inherited.[62] As a child and as a young Northern Catholic, no doubt, he may have been encouraged to regard the Twenty Six Counties as a kind of dream locus, a home for heroes, a place of coherence, an equivalent perhaps to Sarah's vision of the Isle of Man. His 'sense of frustration' with the corrupt, 'tight', seemingly 'immovable Unionist regime'[63] did not blind him to the stifling 'moral

[59] ibid, p.29.
[60] Brian Friel interviewed by Des Hickey and Gus Smith in *A Paler Shade of Green* (London: Leslie Frewin, 1972), p.222.
[61] ibid, p.221.
[62] Together these plays set up a pattern which I see as a recurring tendency in Friel's work from the 1970s onwards. The composition of an overtly political play (*The Mundy Scheme, The Freedom of the City, Volunteers, Translations*) is generally followed up with a much more oblique one (*The Gentle Island, Living Quarters, Aristocrats* and *Faith Healer*).
[63] Hickey and Smith, p.221.

authoritarianism'[64] and venality within Southern public life. Coming three years after the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising, *The Mundy Scheme*, with its sub-title, 'May We Write Your Epitaph Now, Mr Emmet?' - like the reference to the Flight of the Earls in *The Gentle Island* - draws attention to the gulf between the idealised, heroic fictions of Ireland past and the present political scene, with its narratives of sordid self-interest and duplicity. Not surprisingly given the events of the following three years, 1969-72, motifs of betrayal surface prominently in his next two plays.

While continuing and developing Friel's existing preoccupations with language and authority, with the price of exile and the cost of staying on, *The Gentle Island* marks an interesting departure from his previous work in the attention it pays to 'thwarted sexuality'[65] as a force within 'interpersonal and family dynamics',[66] but this too functions at least in part as political metaphor. It is perhaps not entirely fanciful to characterise the play's younger generation, particularly Sarah and Shane, as 'the rebellious oppressed',[67] to use Elmer Andrews's phrase, and their aspirations for radical change in the quality of their personal lives as bearing some affinity with those of the young people who thronged to the Civil Rights movement, like those he depicts in *The Freedom of the City*.

Having emphasised at every opportunity throughout this essay the possible political and historical subtexts operating within this important, underestimated, transitional play, it

[64] Edna Longley, *The Living Stream*, p.14.
[65] D.E.S Maxwell, 'Figures in a Peepshow: Friel and the Irish Dramatic Tradition', in *The Achievement of Brian Friel*, p.55.
[66] George O'Brien, p.76.
[67] Elmer Andrews, 'The Fifth Province', in *The Achievement of Brian Friel*, p.34.

play, it is perhaps appropriate to end with something of a counter-view. In a recent essay, entitled 'Marking Time', Fintan O'Toole offers an appropriate and persuasive corrective, however, to those who *over*-politicise Friel's work, as he suggests Seamus Deane has tended to do:

> Because his work deals in the stuff of history, it is tempting to understand him as a fundamentally political writer.In his introduction to Friel's *Selected Plays*, his friend and Field Day collaborator feels it necessary to point out that Friel's work is not 'wholly political in its motivations and obsessions', (which implies, of course that it is largely so)...History and politics...may well floor Friel's house, but they do not contain the drama that happens in that house. [68]

Although one respects the obvious legitimacy of reconsidering an author's earlier texts in the light of subsequent work, since 'when a new work of art is created...something happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it'[69] there can be a danger in trying to impose a single coherent narrative on an author's work, in constructing a retrospective fiction, just as there can be drawbacks in interpreting *solely* by reference to its contexts, social, political, cultural or intellectual. My contention remains, however, that *The Gentle Island*'s position in Friel's work should be seen as analogous to that of *Wintering Out* in Seamus Heaney's, permeated as they are by the intensely politicised 'climate and condition'[70] of their time. Both texts reflect their authors' increasingly urgent search for forms, parables, images, symbols, a language 'adequate to our predicament',[71] as things fell apart, and earlier hopes of the possibility of a 'liberating breakdown of order'[72] were dashed.

---

[68] Fintan O'Toole, 'Marking Time: From *Making History* to *Dancing at Lughnasa*', in *The Achievement of Brian Friel*, p.205. This is a very well-written essay, focussing largely on more recent developments in Friel's career.
[69] T.S. Eliot, 'Traditional and the Individual Talent'(1919), in *Twentieth Century Poetry: Critical Essays and Documents*, ed. Graham Martin and P.N. Furbank (Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1975), p.80.
[70] 'The Theatre of Hope and Despair', 18.
[71] *P*, p.56.
[72] O'Toole, 'Marking Time', p.207.

CHAPTER THREE: EXPOSURE: SEAMUS HEANEY'S *WINTERING OUT*

> His first stroll along the street littered with glass from bomb-shattered windows shakes his faith in the naturalness of his world. (Czeslaw Milosz)[1]

> I can hear the many voices gone, the many voices now living, the many voices to come, all singing to me in whispers. At times like these I feel I am just about to catch the tune, the rhythm and theme of the music I have always longed to write. But it drifts away, carried on the waves of the wind. (Ngugi)[2]

I

The composition of Seamus Heaney's third book, *Wintering Out*, like Brian Friel's play, *The Gentle Island*, coincided with a period of profound destabilisation and accelerating violence in Northern Ireland. The impact of the crisis compelled writers from all traditions to become increasingly self-conscious in their scrutiny of language and the positioning of their art. In such a volatile situation as that pertaining in the North between 1969 and 1975, political and moral imperatives changed rapidly. Artists struggled to identify appropriate forms and strategies to address the crisis, and often found themselves caught between a desire to maintain a judicious 'fault-on-both sides tact'[3] and the expectations of their community of origin which demanded words and images which would voice their particular suffering. To ignore the stricken in one's own community would be deemed 'an abdication',[4] an act of callous betrayal; to be attentive to them left the writer open to the charge of surrendering to atavism, of sustaining sectarian division.

[1] Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p.26.
[2] Ngugi, *Devil on the Cross*, first published in Gikuyu by Heinemann (East Africa) Ltd, 1980; English edition translated by the author (Oxford: Heinemann, 1982)
[3] Seamus Heaney, 'An Afterwards', *Field Work* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p.44.
[4] Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p.xii.

As private individuals both Heaney and Friel took part in a number of Civil Rights marches between 1968 and 1972, yet initially in their literary responses to the political narrative they opted for tentativeness, obliqueness, a justifiable caution.[5] When during a symposium for *the Irish Times* in February 1970, Brian Friel was asked whether a playwright could or should stay 'detached' if 'caught up in something such as happened in Derry' in August 1969, in his reply he took pains to stress the importance of perspective, the value of time in coming to a rational reflection on contemporary events:

> I don't thing I can write about this, about the situation in the North. Because first of all, I am emotionally much too involved about it; secondly because the thing is in transition at the moment. A play about the civil rights situation in the North won't be written, I hope, for another ten or fifteen years.[6]

In an interview later in the same year, Friel continued to assert that in his opinion the writer's position 'is better as a sideline one',[7] and yet, as Chapter 2 has illustrated, his plays of 1970 and 1971, *The Mundy Scheme* and *The Gentle Island,* reveal an increasing suffusion of political concerns and colourings, and a shift towards allegory as a means of diagnosing the nature of 'the peculiar spiritual, and indeed material, flux that this country is in at the moment.'[8] However, such was the force of the larger narrative over the next eighteenth months following the introduction of internment and in the wake of Bloody

---

[5] The charges of 'evasion' levelled by Heaney himself through the Colum McCartney persona in 'Station Island', VIII, and in such articles as Robert McLiam Wilson's 'The Glittering Prize' (*Fortnight* 344, November 1995, 23-5), are unjust. That such attacks on Heaney's 'record' are nothing new is implied in Edna Longley's 1972 review of *Wintering Out* for *Phoenix*, 10 (Winter 1973), pp.86-9, 'Heaney's Hidden Ireland', where she comments that for Heaney 'head-on confrontation has never been a congenial or rewarding strategy'. Lest in retrospect those terms, 'congenial' and 'rewarding', might be interpreted negatively, it should be added that she goes on to praise 'the real agony and involvement' reflected in 'A Northern Hoard', and concludes that book is both 'a very powerful, but also a very beautiful volume'. I have responded to McLiam Wilson's attack in 'Levellling with Heaney', *The Honest Ulsterman*, 103, Spring 1997, 101-5.

[6] Brian Friel, 'The Future of Irish Drama', *The Irish Times*, 12 February 1970, P.14

[7] Brian Friel in 'The Northern Writer's Crisis of Conscience' by Eavan Boland, *The Irish Times*, 12,13,14 August 1970, quoted in D.E.S. Maxwell, *Brian Friel* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1973), p.28.

[8] 'The Future of Irish Drama', p.14

Sunday that strategies of indirection and allusion could no longer suffice. For a brief period - the period of *The Freedom of the City* (1973), and of *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975) - it seems that both writers were prepared to place their art in the service of collective resistance. However, while their chosen mode of resistance took a *cultural* form,[9] other powerful and persuasive voices urged a resort to guns and bombs as the only means of combatting what the Nationalist community perceived as the twin threats posed by loyalist violence and increasingly hostile British presence. Repeated acts of atrocity carried out by the Provisionals in the community's name were not only in themselves morally indefensible, but also proved counter-productive, effectively undermining a crucial element in the Northern Nationalist identity - its continued sense of its position as victim.[10] And, as a consequence, like other writers from the Nationalist tradition, Friel and Heaney were forced to re-assess many long-cherished ideological assumptions, and to recognise their status as problematic:

> While the Christian moralist in oneself was impelled to deplore the atrocious nature of the I.R.A.'s campaign of bombings and killings, and the 'mere Irish' in oneself was appalled by the ruthlessness of the British Army on occasions like Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972, the minority citizen in oneself, the one who had grown up conscious that his group was distrusted and discriminated against in all kinds of official and unofficial ways, this citizen's perception was at one with the poetic truth of the situation in recognising that if life in Northern Ireland were ever really to flourish, change had to take place. But that citizen's perception was also at one with the truth in recognising that the very

[9] An analogy might be drawn between Heaney and Friel's responses to the crisis and that of Friel's character, Manus, from *Translations.* Manus rejects the idea of a physical force option against the English, and instead intends to maintain a commitment to his cultural origins through his work at the hedge-school. Though tempted to commit violence (*SP*, p.432), he contains his rage. In his final speeches, he announces his intention to re-found himself by undertaking a journey westward to his *mother*'s past, before continuing his mission to maintain Irish cultural identity on Inis Meadhon.

[10] Only retaliatory acts by the security forces could restore to the Provisionals the semblance of moral justification for their violence. Recruitment and support soared in response to gross misjudgements on the part of Stormont and Westminster politicians and the Army, as Chapter 2 has already shown. The Falls curfew, internment, Bloody Sunday, the imprisonment of the Guildford Four and the Birmingham six, the H-block hunger strikes, the Gibraltar killings, all could be credibly presented by the PIRA leadership as evidence of British brutality and contempt for justice.

> brutality of the means by which the I.R.A. was pursuing change was destructive of the trust upon which new possibilities would have to be based.[11]

These comments could be dismissed as rationalisations made long after the event, were it not for the fact that Heaney's writings of the time frequently themselves articulate contrary positions.

Quite rightly commentators have drawn attention to the plethora of victim-figures peopling *Wintering Out* and *North,* whether in poems dealing in myth, history or private experience. However, too much recent Heaney criticism has paid scant attention to the contexts in which he was writing, and too often displays a tendency to reduce a multiple range of responses in the poetry to easily attackable formulae.[12] Repeatedly the positions presented in individual poems by their personae - favourites are 'Tollund Man', 'Bog Queen', 'Punishment' 'Act of Union', 'The Strand at Lough Beg' - are read as if they were not provisional, as if they were not the product of a complex and plural identity, shaped by a diversity of influences, perspectives and traditions. Edna Longley, in the review of *Wintering Out* already cited, characterises Heaney's 'self-presentation' as 'protean'; it is a quality Heaney has retained by means of his continuing, intense and enriching dialogue with the work of other poets.[13] In an as yet unpublished article, 'Terms of Engagement: Literature and Northern Ireland', Richard Greaves stresses how aware

---

[11] Seamus Heaney, *Crediting Poetry*, the Nobel Lecture (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1995), pp.16-7

[12] I am thinking in particular of David Lloyd's 'Pap for the Dispossessed' in *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Postcolonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), and Patricia Coughlan in '"Bog Queens": The Representation of Women in the Poetry of John Montague and Seamus Heaney', in *Gender and Irish Writing,* eds. Toni O'Brien Johnson and David Cairns (Milton Keynes, 1991). I discuss Lloyd's analysis in 'Levellling with Heaney', and Patricia Coughlan's essay in Chapter 5 of this study, pp.268-270.

[13] At the time of *Wintering Out,* colloquies with his fellow Northern Irish poets were perhaps of the greatest importance, though mentors and influences from beyond Britain and Ireland were assuming a increasingly significant role.

Heaney is 'of the contrary pulls on the poet which are there because identity is always, however paradoxically, plural and not identical with itself.'[14]

Certainly the effect of recurrent failures on the part of British and Irish governments and local politicians on Heaney's and Friel's writing, both in the early 1970s and subsequently, was to generate an ever more acute sense of their cultural particularity as Northern Catholics, but that is not to say that their work simply or slavishly endorsed traditionalist nationalist perspectives. At the outbreak of the conflict the task they set themselves was to map its origins and hinterland, but all too soon a more urgent narrative presented itself, which required that they interrogate the given past in the light of present darkness.

Wintering Out, therefore, marks a critical turning point in the development of Seamus Heaney's poetry, and reflects his ambivalent and complex response to the 'politics of polarisation'[15] and to his responsibilities as a poet and citizen in time of civil war. Whereas his first two collections exhibit relatively little trace of feelings of 'race and resentment'[16] - the only overt forays into political territory, North and South, consist of 'At a Potato Digging' and 'Docker' in *Death of a Naturalist* and 'Requiem for the Croppies' in *Door into the Dark*- what he later termed 'the agony and injustice'[17] of

[14]This was delivered as a paper at the University of Aberystwyth, July 1996. Later in what is a highly informed and informative discussion of poetry's potential as a source of ethica and political illumination, he concludes that Heaney's

> position in the Republic, touching upon the North, is the detached position of the poet, observing and alluding to reality, but striving for the freedom of its imagination to be different from it, no matter the possibility that this freedom is illusory; feeling also the tie to community embodied in ritual and the sense of identity, but in its imaginative expression of this, critical of its constrictions.

[15] O'Brien, p.173

[16] *P*, p.30.

[17] ibid.

events accentuated the tensions in his writing, rendering even more problematical the act of writing itself.[18] In a frequently-cited interview from 1977, Heaney proffers a retrospective account of his own poetic development, talking of how 'the slightly aggravated young Catholic male' part of him '*went underground*' (my italics) after his early attempts to confront 'the Northern sectarian problem.'[19] A reading of his prose pieces - such as 'Out of London: Ulster's Troubles' and several of his articles for *The Listener* - leads one to wonder whether in this case the water metaphor and intransitive verb are entirely appropriate; and many critics - perhaps partly writing with the benefit of history and hindsight - have drawn attention to the insistent imagery of violence within the early work; Eileen Cahill, for example, writes that Heaney's 'explosive language shapes a poetic subtext which quietly pronounces the political violence of contemporary Belfast.'[20] Instead one suspects that Heaney may well have consciously suppressed feelings of sectarian anger from his poetry between 1963-69 in an endeavour to keep faith with his friends and to contribute to that spirit of generosity and tolerance which he identified within Belfast's artistic community.[21]

---

[18] Bernard O'Donoghue in the opening paragraph of *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p.vii - like Morrison (p.24) and Parker (pp.2, 64) before him - cites some revealing comments on writing from Heaney's interview with John Haffenden in *Viewpoints* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), p.63:

> Some part of me....is entirely unimpressed by the activity, that doesn't dislike it, but it's the generations, I suppose, of rural ancestors - not illiterate, but not literary. They in me, or I through them, do not give a damn.

Others, such as Lloyd, might regard such professions of indifference with scepticism, and view as self-mythologising his continuing, tenuous claim to kinship with those 'rural ancestors'.

[19] Seamus Heaney, 'Unhappy and At Home', interview with Seamus Deane, *The Crane Bag*, I:1, 1977, p.61

[20] Eileen Cahill,'A Silent Voice: Seamus Heaney and Ulster Politics', *Critical Quarterly,* 29:3, 57. Blake Morrison, Terence Brown and Douglas Dunn make similar observations in their analyses of *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark.* The 'explosive language' is a matter both of substance and style. It is worth recalling the important *literary* influences behind Heaney's imagery at this time, particularly that of Gerald Manley Hopkins and Ted Hughes.

[21] The creative rivalry and camaraderie he shared with Michael Longley and Derek Mahon, and, to a lesser extent, John Hewitt, were extremely important to Heaney at this time. See the concluding paragraphs to 'Out of London: Ulster's Troubles', Chapter 1, pp.12-13.

II

The politicisation of Heaney's poetry in *Wintering Out, Stations* and *North* was the result of a number of interconnected factors. Of these the most telling must have been the course of events in the North between 1969 and 1971, and though Irish history may not have been 'the author of Irish writing',[22] it refused to do the decent thing and withdraw from the room. A valuable corrective to my own focus on Northern Irish politics and history in a previous chapter, however, is provided by Eamonn Hughes, who warns of the danger of viewing the 'tightly-enclosed province' as if it

> belonged to a category of one...a consideration of Northern Ireland in the 1960s and since must acknowledge that there was an awareness of broader social, cultural and political issues than simply those operating within Northern Ireland...borders are fragile phenomena, but...people's need for them remains strong.[23]

Changes wrought in Heaney's poetry and perceptions by the impact of the local political narrative were undoubtedly confirmed and extended by his experiences in the United States between the autumn of 1970 and September 1971, where he took up the post of guest lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley. This was a period in which university campuses throughout the States were deeply politicised as a result of their government's military involvement in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Only a few months before Heaney's arrival, four student demonstrators at Kent State University were shot dead and eight were wounded by the Ohio National Guard during rioting in reaction to President Nixon's decision to send troops into Cambodia.[24] Between November 1970 and

[22] Edna Longley, *The Living Stream*, p.27

[23] Eamonn Hughes, introduction to *Cultural and Politics in Northern Ireland* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), pp.1, 3.

[24] George Brown Tindall, David Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1993), p.928. Amongst the immediate responses to the killings were the Neil Young song, 'Ohio', and 'America's Children' by Stephen Stills. Both are to be found on the Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young album, *Four Way Street*, and were recorded at live concerts between June-July 1970.

April 1971 one of the major stories dominating the news was the trial of Lieutenant William Calley, charged with ordering the murder of 200 Vietnamese civilians at My Lai, an event commemorated in Robert Lowell's harrowing poem, 'Women, Children, Babies, Cows, Cats':

> 'We had these orders,
> we had all night to think about it -
> we was to burn and kill, then there'd be nothing
> standing, women, children, babies, cows, cats...
> I remember...as we was coming up upon one area
> in Pinkville, a man with a gun...running -this lady...
> Lieutenant LaGuerre said, "Shoot her." I said,
> "You shoot her, I don't want to shoot no lady."
> She had one foot in the door...When I turned her,
> there was this little one-month-year-old baby
> I thought was her gun. It kind of cracked me up.'[25]

Although Calley was finally convicted at the end of March 1971 of the crime of killing at least twenty men, women and children, and imprisoned by a military tribunal, he was granted parole by Nixon only a week later.

Interestingly in the one contemporaneous account of his time at Berkeley, Heaney only briefly alludes to South East Asia. After a relatively lightweight opening - quiet amusement at a 'waifish hippy girl', Hare Krishna devotees and a witnessed shop-lifting - 'Views' dips its toe into the political water:

> Up in Sacramento Ronald Reagan is presumably dreaming of a Right Christmas. And farther east so is James Chichester-Clark and Jack Lynch. We read of London's electricity emergency, the threats of internment in the Republic, the desultory spluttering of the Belfast fuse. [26]

Repeatedly sentences from hereon in end with the weight and pull of home. Whereas the 'revolutionary language of America' is characterised as extreme - in particular he

[25]Robert Lowell *Notebook* (1970), reprinted in *Robert Lowell's Poems: A Selection,* ed. Jonathan Raban (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p.141.

[26] Seamus Heaney, 'Views', *The Listener*, 31 December 1970, 903.

highlights the 'grotesquely violent' rhetoric of the Black Panthers - 'the revolutionary voice of Ireland still keeps a civil tongue in its head', he claims. And yet

> While Berkeley shouts, Belfast burns. Very little property has been destroyed here, even at the height of campus violence...Nobody, to my knowledge, has lost a home and far fewer lives have been taken in the upheavals. It has been the police versus 'the people'; establishment versus emergence. But in Belfast the unproductive blood continues to be spilled and the heraldic oppositions hold. Something must give...[27]

From the allusions to Yeats's apocalyptic poem, 'The Second Coming', in the final paragraphs of 'Views', one deduces that Heaney already has in mind the possibility of imitating Yeatsian strategies as means of addressing the renewed Troubles, and in particular perhaps the use of myth.[28]

In later, retrospective accounts of his time in America, Heaney is similarly preoccupied with analogies and contrasts between guilts and victims on each side of the Atlantic. In the interview with James Randall (1979) he recalls how, in the wake of Martin Luther King's long campaign for black civil rights, other ethnic groups were 'demanding their say' in American society

> and that meshed with my own concerns for I could see a close connection between the political and cultural assertions being made at that time by the minority in the north of Ireland and the protests and consciousness-raising that were going on in the Bay Area.[29]

In an interview from 1981, the American poet, Jerome Rothenberg similarly stresses the confluence of political and cultural changes at this time, and describes how the new

[27] ibid.

[28] In *Celtic Revivals* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), Seamus Deane has stressed the crucial role of myth within Heaney's development at this time: 'When myth enters the poetry in *Wintering Out*, the process of politicisation begins' (p.179). The impetus for this strategy may well have come from his reading of Yeats, though, as has been illustrated, the emphasis on myth within the work of Glob, Snyder, Bly, Kinsella and Montague almost certainly had a significant effect.

[29] Seamus Heaney, interview with James Randall, *Ploughshares*, 5:3, 1979, 18-9.

confidence entering 'Black poetry, Black culture, Black identity' had 'a catalysing effect' on other nationalities 'submerged within America.'[30] Amongst the most vocal and visible of those groups were the Hispanics; while their leaders, such as Cesar Chavez, were engaged in a struggle to improve wages and conditions for Californian farm labourers, Spanish-American writers increasingly turned their attention on what Rothenberg terms 'ethnic self-investigation', an examination of the tensions operating between 'self, ethnic variation and state.'[31]

In his 1975 interview for *The Irish Times*, Heaney characterises this period as one in which 'There was a terrific nostalgia and a compulsion to reverence the primitive kind of life',[32] yet at this very time the U.S. government was laying waste lives, cultures and rural economies in South East Asia. Underneath the fascination for all things 'native' amongst middle-class white Americans - 'Every undergraduate wanted to be a Red Indian'. Heaney wryly observed[33]- lay a desire to make reparation:

> Two conditions combined to make Indian rights a priority: first, white Americans felt a persistent sense of guilt for the destructive policies of their ancestors toward a people who had, after all, been here first; second the plight of the Indian minority was more desperate than that of any other minority group in the country. Indian unemployment was ten times the national rate... and the suicide rate was one hundred times higher than that for whites. If blacks in the 1960s had extracted a deserved promise of compensation for past injustices from whites, Indians felt that they had an even more compelling claim on white consciences.[34]

---

[30] Jerome Rothenberg, *Interviews* 4, ed. Gavin Selerie (London: Binnacle Press, 1984). p.20

[31] ibid. Chavez's victory came in 1970 when employers agreed to negotiate with the union he had founded, the United Farm Workers.

[32] Seamus Heaney, interview with Caroline Walsh, *The Irish Times*, 6 December 1975.

[33] ibid. In Geoffrey Summerfield's poetry anthology, *Worlds: Seven Modern Poets* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), there is a photograph by Larry Herman in a room full of books, which has a poster of an Indian chief, probably Sitting Bull, on one of the walls.

[34] Tindall and Shi, p.924

1970 saw the publication of Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*,[35] and the premières of two films whose aim it was to revise the national narrative. Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* and Ralph Nelson's *Soldier Blue* were both deeply sympathetic to the American Indians, portraying them as victims of white American political and cultural supremacy. Penn's film tells the story of Jack Crabb, the sole survivor of the Battle of Little Big Horn, while Nelson's *Soldier Blue*, according to Shohat and Stam, 'appropriates the 1864 Sand Creek massacre of Cheyenne and Arapahos to allegorize the My Lai massacre in Vietnam.'[36]

It is entirely feasible that attempts throughout the American cultural scene to 'weigh in' against the dominant discourse, to counter its representations would have struck deep chords with Heaney. Many times in *Wintering Out* - in 'Servant Boy', 'The Last Mummer', 'A Northern Hoard', 'The Tollund Man' - and later in *North* he himself deploys historical analogies alongside myth to provide commentary on contemporary events, which, as the crisis intensified, became less and less oblique.

Some have argued, however, that comparisons between the colonial experience in Ireland and that endured by North American Indians and blacks distort, rather than illuminate. Liam Kennedy, for example, asserts that 'The specificity of the historical experiences of different countries must be respected. Even when there are forma similarities in

[35]Wounded Knee was the site of a massacre on 28 December 1890, of 250 Miniconjou Sioux and their chief, Big Foot, by the 7th U.S. Cavalry. The Sioux had broken out of a reservation on the Cheyenne River, after attempts had been made to crush their new Ghost Dance religion. Through dance, song and prayers, the Sioux invoked the spirits of their dead ancestors and their earlier way of life, but the government and army interpreted these practices as hostile in intent.

[36]Ella Shoat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.119.

phenomena across space or time, *differences of degree* may be all important.'[37] Such was the extent of the alienation, anger and hurt in the North during the period under examination that for Northern Catholics and Northern Protestants the invoking of what Kennedy terms 'superficial parallels'[38] did not appear fanciful or over-inflated. As bombings, sectarian assassinations, burnings-out, killings of and by the Army and RUC familiarised themselves in the local experience, understandably writers sought metaphors and analogies to broach the enormity.

The politicisation of Heaney's poetry in the early seventies had much to do also with his encounters with the American poetry of the time, which had itself been radicalised as a consequence of the Vietnam War. Already an adept at attuning himself to 'diverse traditions' and voices, and yet remaining 'for the most part, independent of each',[39] Heaney describes himself as becoming 'very conscious of the poetry of Gary Snyder'[40] during his year in Berkeley. Like three of the other writers Heaney cities as important to him at this time - Robert Lowell, Robert Bly and Robert Duncan - Snyder was not only deeply involved in the anti-war protest movement, but also engaged in changing emphases and directions within American poetry. Inspired by American Indian culture and Buddhist thought, fired by the example of Blake, Snyder was visionary poet, whose aim it was to address the malaise, alienation and violence in contemporary culture by making it face up to a crisis that had been 'building up for a millennium',[41] an ecological

---

[37]Liam Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland: Postcolonial Society or Postcolonial Pretensions', *The Irish Review*, 13 (Winter 1992/3), p.117.
[38]ibid. p.119.
[39]Hart, p.105.
[40]Randall, p.19. During John Montague's residency in Berkeley between 1964 and 1966, teaching at the University of California's Poetry Workshop, Snyder and Robert Duncan had been frequent companions. See below for a fuller discussion of Heaney-Montague 'connections'.
[41]Gary Snyder, 'Plain Talk' from *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions, 1974), p.106.

and spiritual crisis brought about by man's abuse of nature, 'the great goddess'.[42] This was a motif he shared with Robert Bly, who frequently in his readings from 1970 and 1971 dwelt upon the importance of 'the Great Mother', and of the need for poetry to promote a restoration of what he termed 'feminine consciousness', since unbridled 'masculine consciousness' - which he associates with Protestantism and capitalism - had proved so destructive.[43] An advocate of 'ethnopoetry', Snyder imagined myth as the means to restore to consciousness insights drawn from the marginalised and despised:

> As a poet, I hold to the most values on earth. They go back to the late Palaeolithic: the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals, the power-vision in solitude, the terrifying initiation and rebirth, the love and ecstasy of the dance, the common work of the tribe. I try to hold both history and wilderness in mind, that my poems may approach the true measure of things and stand out against the unbalance and ignorance of our times.[44]

Poems such as 'Prayer for the Great Family', 'Front Lines' and 'The Call of the Wild' are in many ways representative of Snyder's work. The first, a delicate, Edenic lyric, finds Snyder in celebratory mood, and retrieves a Mohawk prayer by rendering it into English; the poem gives thanks to the sources of all goodness, beginning with Mother Earth, and then addressing other sentient forces in the universe - Plants, Air, Wild Beings, Water, Sun, the Great Sky and Grandfather Space. When Snyder turns to face the world as it is in the present, however, the poetry darkens; 'Front Lines' laments the fate of the world's remaining forests, subjected to rape by 'landseekers' who say 'To the land/ Spread your

---

[42] ibid., p.107.

[43] Bly, 'The Masculine versus the Feminine in Poetry', an interview from Spring 1970, reprinted in *Talking All Morning* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1980), pp.207-12. Heaney's positing - in 'The Trade of an Irish Poet', *The Guardian*, 25 May, 1972 - of a quarrel between 'the masculine strain' (English influences) and 'the feminine strain' (Irish traditions) in his poetry may thus have had American 'sources', though it is perhaps more likely to have been in part a product of ideas drawn from Ted Hughes's essay at the end of *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), pp.181-200. There, Hughes reads Shakespeare's writing as repeatedly exhibiting the collision between two cults and ideologies - one, matriarchal, derived from Celtic and medieval Catholic perceptions of divine and regal authority; the other, the new, male-centred, Puritan religion.

[44] Gary Snyder, quoted in *Contemporary American Poetry*, ed. A Poulin, Jr (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971; second edn, 1975), p.454.

legs', by bulldozers 'grinding and slobbering/ Sideslipping and belching on top of/ The skinned-up bodies of still-live bushes',[45] while 'The Call of the Wild' weaves together bitter elegy and unsubtle satire, as it anticipates the silencing of the coyote's song, and then decries the American Government's waging of war on the earth, since 'the ground/ is pro-Communist. And dirty./ And the insects side with the Viet Cong.'[46]

Clearly one may recognise some degree of affinity between Heaney's 'primitivist' tendencies - the ante- and post-diluvian 'lore' of such poems as 'Bog Oak', 'Anahorish', 'Land', 'Gifts of Rain' and 'Tollund Man' - and the mythic universals and anthropological concerns of Snyder and his contemporaries. However, whereas the Heaney of *Wintering Out* and *North* is content still to operate within a Christian frame of reference, while experimenting with possible alternatives, Snyder regards that tradition as irredeemably tainted. For him, as for Bly, the dominant religious ideologies in the West are too profoundly implicated in capitalism, which he views as characterised by

> a priapic drive for material accumulation, continual extensions of political and economic power, termed 'progress'. In the Judaeo-Christian world-view men are seen working out their ultimate destinies with planet earth as the stage for drama - trees and animals mere props, nature a vast supply depot. Fed by fossil fuel, this religion-economic view has become a cancer: uncontrollable growth.[47]

Yet even as he strives to transcend it by developing his own secular ritual and liturgy, Snyder finds himself still at times replicating its language and symbols; in 'The Bath', for example, the simple acts of washing his son, Kai's body, of contemplating his wife's body

[45] Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.18.
[46] ibid, p.22.
[47] ibid, p.103.

- '*is this our body?*'/ 'This is our body' - are translated into an intimate, private eucharist.[48]

Having acknowledged the debt he owed to the work of Snyder and Bly in opening his mind up to new poetic strategies, Heaney would later confess in his interview with James Randall to having found their approach 'too programmatic', a charge that would be levelled against his own writing in *North*. His use of the word 'doctrine' in connection with these writers implies that he felt that their verse was in danger of becoming the hostage of its own ideology, its own moral certainties.

Yet Heaney's later assertion that his experience in Berkeley developed in him 'an awareness that poetry was force, almost a mode of power, certainly a mode of resistance',[49] may well owe something to Snyder's vision of poetry as a repository of energy, 'the power within', 'our source when coal and oil are long gone, and atoms are left to spin in peace.'[50] Indubitably, for a while Heaney became convinced that his duty was to create a poetry responsive to present imperatives, to the needs of 'people alive in my time.'[51]

---

[48] ibid, p.12. This poem might be interestingly compared with Heaney's later poem, 'La Toilette' in *Station Island*, p.14, which continues to link the erotic with the hieratic.
[49] Randall, p.20.
[50] Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.114.
[51] Bly, quoting from William Carlos Williams, in *Talking All Morning*, p.74. An accusation that Heaney may have taken to heart can be found in Bly's 'An Argument about *Universal* versus *Political Art*', an interview from Spring 1970. Here Bly attacks what he regards as the obsessive concern with 'universality' amongst English departments, which, he maintains, results in 'the student poet ending up writing only about his childhood', imagining himself 'above all local conflicts' (p.81).

Not surprisingly as the 1970s advanced, Heaney would find himself attracted to more riven literary exemplars, such as Robert Lowell, whose work similarly dramatises the difficult negotiations between the poet and his public persona. Ian Hamilton's biography of Lowell offers a number of telling, contrastive cameos of the poet at the time of his involvement in the anti-war movement, which may partly explain why Heaney might seek to emulate the stance of such a man. At one moment, in October 1967, he would take his stand on the steps of the Department of Justice and speak out on behalf of draft-resisters, and demonstrate his solidarity at a sit-down protest in front of the Pentagon; at another, his response to being hailed at a Harvard poetry reading as 'the great poet of the Revolution' by a man in a red arm-band, would be

> to read a poem he had written to his daughter Harriet...from time to time a voice from somewhere in the audience would call out for "Che Guevara, man, let's have the Che Guevara!" But Cal kept on: a new poem for Allen Tate, an older one for George Santayana, something from *Life Studies*, but no poem for Che Guevara... not a single political poem...He had turned a radical protest meeting into a poetry reading. He had fulfilled his commitment to read but he had not been used.[52]

At times some of Hamilton's descriptions of Lowell might almost seem applicable to Heaney and the unease he felt about *his* political stance. Lowell was 'vehemently opposed to the war, but equivocal about being identified too closely with the "peace movement"; there were many views he did not share with the more fiery "peaceniks".'[53] In his portrait of Lowell in *The Armies of the Night*, Norman Mailer, according to Hamilton, depicts a 'strangely wounded spirit, a man of high, aristocratic guilts and sorrows, disdainful of the swirl of opportunism and radical overeagerness in which his ideals have, for the moment, trapped him - but determined, nonetheless, to see the whole thing through.'[54]

---

[52] Ian Hamilton, *Robert Lowell: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), pp.362-3.
[53] ibid, p.362.
[54] ibid., p.363. Heaney, it might be objected, is not derived from aristocratic stock, and words such as 'disdainful' hardly accord with the Irish poet's persona; all comparisons, like metaphors, are partial.

Heaney's period in California not only heightened his sense of the ideological function of poetry and of the potency of myth, but also affected the forms he would adopt. Bernard O'Donoghue has recently suggested that important formal changes were already under way in the poetry well before his departure for Berkeley, citing 'Bogland' as evidence,[55] but Heaney himself has directly attributed the 'signs of loosening'[56] within *Wintering Out* to his experience of American free verse, and in particular the deep images and rhythms of William Carlos Williams. In place of the decasyllabic lines, traditional forms, and copious use of rhyming and half-rhyming that one generally tends still to find in *Door into the Dark*, *Wintering Out* and *North* frequently deploy what Blake Morrison has termed the 'artesian stanza', 'compressed, mostly two-stress lines',[57] in which rhyme becomes more of a rarity; for a darker time, a sparer, leaner form was perhaps deemed more appropriate. This is made immediately apparent in *Wintering Out's* opening poem, 'Fodder', where Carlos Williams's technique of setting curt 'heavily stressed lines that thrust' against 'more lightly stressed lines that receive that thrust'[58] is effectively utilised. By offering alternatives to contemporary English practice, and the restrictedness of the Movement to which previously he had tended to be deferential,[59] American models set up the potential for poetic (and political) transition.

---

[55] O'Donoghue, pp.52-5.
[56] Randall, p.20.
[57] Morrison, p.45. Heaney's use of the two stress-line - the staple of William Carlo Williams's verse - can be seen in such poems as 'Bog Oak', 'Toome', 'Broagh', 'The Backward Look' and 'Traditions'.
[58] Philip Hobsbaum, *Metre, Rhythm and Verse Form* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.115.
[59] Jonathan Allison makes a similar point in 'Beyond Gentility: A Note on Seamus Heaney and American Poetry', *Critical Survey*, 8:2, 1996, pp.178-85. There is no consensus as to which American writer exerted the most significant influence on Heaney's poetry at this stage, though Allison opts for Louis Simpson (p.182) and Hart for Roethke (pp.109-11). Michael Allen in 'The Parish and the Dream: Heaney and America 1969-1987' (*The Southern Review*, 1995, 726-38) offers an interesting overview of Heaney's complex relationship with America, but chooses not to explore thematic or stylistic connections between Heaney and American poets except in a very general way. Snyder is briefly mentioned in passing.

III

Even before his sojourn in the States, Heaney had been opening up to a widening range of cultural influences, and to the politics of myth. Heaney's 'discovery' in 1969 of P.V. Glob's *The Bog People*, an archaeological study of Iron Age Jutland, marked a major turning point in his literary development. Tracing the interconnections between history, religion, landscape, violence, *The Bog People* presented the poet with a series of startling images and potential narratives, opening up new possibilities for his art, which in the coming years would increasingly concern itself with questions of moral, artistic and political responsibilities; it supplied him not only with analogues with which to view the painful matter of contemporary violence, both close-up and at a distance, but also a mythology with which to interpret it. In his interview with James Randall, Heaney went so far as to claim kinship with the Tollund Man, who 'seemed to me like an ancestor almost, one of my old uncles, one of those moustachioed faces you used to meet all over the Irish countryside.'[60] And, yet as Neil Corcoran points out, the face in the photograph is 'not very obviously moustached' and not particularly avuncular. What Heaney is endeavouring to do is to translate this 'much younger and more elegant'[61] figure into an archetype, the Victim, which can both admit and exhibit violence, but also transcend it, as he hoped his poetry might do. In his later explanation of the significance of this image for him, he resorts to the language of devotion, to metaphors consonant with marriage and vocation:

> When I wrote that poem I had a sense of crossing a line really, that my whole being was involved in the sense of - the root sense - of religion, being bonded to something. I felt it a vow; I felt my whole being caught in this. And that was a moment of commitment not in the political sense but in the deeper

[60] Randall, p.18.
[61] Corcoran, p.77.

sense of your life, committing yourself to something. I think that
brought me to a new possibility of seriousness in the poetic enterprise.[62]

The moment is rendered in retrospect as a spiritual epiphany, rather than a purely aesthetic or merely political experience, and yet Heaney in the spring and summer of 1969 would have been much preoccupied by the violence being inflicted upon his community. This is reflected in 'Summer 1969', a poem from Part Two of *North*, where the first person narrator, who is on holiday in Spain, repeatedly encounters images which serve as bitter reminders of home.[63] Although the poem opens asserting distance, identifying difference,

While the Constabulary covered the mob
Firing into the Falls, I was suffering
Only the bullying sun of Madrid

quickly the new context in which he finds himself is made familiar, and similarly afflicted. Despite being, or rather *because* he is cut off by an alien language like the persona at the end of 'The Tollund Man' - 'The air a canyon rivering in Spanish' - the speaker assimilates the smells and sights before him into his own cultural and spiritual landscape. Not surprisingly, given that he is under the influence of 'the life of Joyce', his journey back is prompted by a pungent odour, 'stinks from the fish-market/ Rose like the reek off a flaxdam'. Heaney's reference to his reading-matter, 'the life of Joyce', may seem at first pretentious, self-regarding even, but in fact is particularly apposite; it emphasises that though the narrator is abroad, he is immersed in his native culture, and already reflecting upon an iconic presence. Yet, there is also an obvious irony in his talk of sweating over a literary biography, which hardly ranks as comparable to the experience of being fired

[62] Randall, pp.18-19.
[63] In this respect the poem has affinities with Louis MacNeice's, *Autumn Journal, VI*, 'And I Remember Spain', *Collected Poems*, p.110-12. Eamonn Hughes in 'Representation in Modern Irish Poetry', in *Seamus Heaney*, ed. Michael Allen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp.87-8, links the poem with Yeats's 'Municipal Gallery Revisited'.

upon. The allusion also, of course, draws attention to the narrator's role as an artist/ communicator, and Heaney's own ambivalence towards that role.[64]

As Spain reasserts itself, other, increasingly sombre and/ or sinister images accrue - 'A sense of children in dark corners', 'Old women in black shawls', the deadly gleam of the Guardia Civil and their leather-wear - compelling the narrator to abandon the streets for the 'safer' world of art-objects. Instead of the hoped-for, cool, aesthetic encounter, he walks into a wall and an accusing image, Goya's 'Shootings of the Third of May'. The painting, depicting a rebel, arms outstretched in a Christ-like pose, about to be shot by the representatives of an occupying power, contains an obvious charge for a traditional Irish Nationalist. However, rather than confining himself to that one confirmatory likeness, the poem's numbed 'I' moves on to even more disturbing texts, which, by analogy, implicate both Northern communities in a grotesque failure to rise above sectarian 'stupidity and reaction, cruelty and oppression':[65]

> 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.

Clearly here we are far removed from the repose of the preserved head at Aarhus, and very much again in Yeatsian territory, as Heaney anticipates the second coming of civil war, envisaged as a war without prospect of liberation.[66]

[64] Whereas Heaney's narrator is transfixed, numbed by the news from the 'real' world, Goya, the painter he contemplates, is revealed as totally, physically and emotionally, 'engaged' in the discord of what happens.

[65] Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, p.384. He is discussing Goya's prints.

[66] There is an obvious allusion in the image of 'Chaos turning his brute hips' to Yeats's beast in 'The Second Coming', which 'Is moving its slow thighs' before bringing nightmare to birth. John Unterecker, in *A Reader's Guide to W.B.Yeats* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), stresses

'Foreign' narratives have been a key feature of Heaney's poetry from *Wintering Out* onwards, but initially were employed as sources for new angles on what he, and indeed others in the nationalist community, came to read as the old matter of and with Ireland. However, their presence is also indicative of a conscious effort on Heaney's part to enlarge the scope and scale of his poetic programme. Patrick Kavanagh had proved and would continue to be a valuable exemplar, but undoubtedly Heaney recognised that if his artistic project were to progress a translation must occur; his attention to the parish and to traditional forms was a strength, but one that was in danger of becoming a shortcoming, especially when set alongside the more ambitious, cosmopolitan vision and voicing and allusion within Mahon and Longley's early work.[67] Heaney's strategy for extending his range was necessarily a complex one, and involved not only the cross-cultural 'imports' already referred to - insights from contemporary American poetry, material from North European culture and history since the Iron Age - but also a close scrutiny of shifts in the body poetic and politic of the North and South of Ireland. It is perhaps no mere coincidence that these extensions in Heaney's imaginative territory to embrace the whole of Northern Europe occurs at exactly the same time as the Republic of Ireland entered into membership with the European Economic Community.[68]

---

how Yeats's poem exhibits 'an archetypal pattern', and connects it to the system envisaged in *A Vision*, but fails to identify the contexts of its composition, January 1919. That month saw the shooting at point blank range of two RIC men by IRA Volunteers at Soloheadbeg in Co. Tipperary. Michael Collins welcomed the killings, arguing that 'The sooner fighting is forced and a general state of disorder created throughout the country, the better it will be for the country' (quoted in Robert Kee, *Ireland: A History* [London: Abacus, 1982], p.180).

[67] Gerald Dawe, in his essay, '"Icon and Lares": Derek Mahon and Michael Longley', from *Across A Roaring Hill: The Protestant Imagination in Modern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1985), eds. Gerald Dawe and Edna Longley, emphasises how both poets, because of their Protestant origins and upbringing, felt drawn towards displaced and secular voices within Irish Literature, such as MacNeice and Beckett, and exemplars from further afield; whereas the English-born, more pastorally-inclined Longley looked to Edward Thomas and John Clare, Mahon's tastes tended towards the more modernist and austere, and included Pound, Cavafy, Pasternak and Brecht.

[68] 1972 represented a turning-point in both states of Ireland; like their poets, the two states were

Heaney's receptivity to the poetic possibilities of myth and history was further quickened by the work being produced over this period by two of Ireland's foremost poets, Thomas Kinsella and John Montague.[69] 1969 saw the publication of Kinsella's translation of *The Táin,* the eighth-century Irish epic telling of Queen Medb's bid to seize the great brown bull of Cualinge from the men of Ulster. Whereas in his introductory comments Kinsella appears to downplay the significance of the book which had taken him six years to complete - 'The making of this translation has been very much as aside to other things'[70] - in his review of *The Táin* Heaney is at pains to stress the political and cultural ramifications of this artistic act, which revealingly he links with Yeats's project and that of the earlier literary revival:

> A venture like this indicated large ambition in a poet, and for Kinsella it represents a stage in his development towards a more public stance, a conscious and explicit relating of the self to the community. His own poetry has tended to be personal, elaborate and strenuous; yet more and more it involves itself with what one might call 'the condition of Ireland' - the Ireland of boardroom and tourist-board and hard-riding cabinet ministers. Yeats could use Cuchulainn as a kind of hard-riding country gentleman *manqué,* an image of the terrible and gay Ireland he imagined, a forerunner of men like Major Robert Gregory, 'our Sidney and our perfect man'; he could re-mythologise the myths and insist on heroic possibilities for the country...The whole undertaking is clearly an effort to

---

engaged in the process of re-defining their identity. One might see the republic's admission into the E.E.C. as a natural conclusion to the movement Lemass had initiated during his premiership, in which the separist policies of the De Valera era were finally abandoned. In the North meantime, the introduction of Direct Rule in 1972 convinced many in both northern communities that new constitutional arrangements were on the cards; while Nationalists welcomed the prospect of the North moving into a closer relationship with the Republic, and saw Direct Rule as and admission by the British Government that the six-county 'solution' had not worked, Unionists were vehemently opposed to any re-definition of their status as citizens of the United Kingdom.

[69]The debt Heaney owes to many of his fellow Irish poets has yet to be examined in any great detail. Declan Kiberd makes a useful contribution, however, in *Inventing Ireland: the Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Verso, 1996) in his discussions of Kinsella and Montague (pp.584-8, 591, 599); Henry Hart finds space only for three passing references to Montague, two of which are quotations from Heaney. Neither poet is mentioned in the latest book on the poet, Andrew Murphy's *Seamus Heaney* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1996).

[70] *The Tain,* translated by Thomas Kinsella (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1969), repr. by Oxford University Press, 1970), p.vii.

> bring a literate Irish public into meaningful contact with its earliest literature; a conscious entry into the tradition of translators like Douglas Hyde and Lady Gregory.[71]

According to Heaney's reading of literary history, the Ireland of the late 1960s and early 1970s - like the Ireland of the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth - seems once more at a crossroads. Again the energies of its artists, he implies, may prove a decisive force, enabling the peoples of Ireland to choose a new direction, and to renew themselves in the 'common ground'[72] of a shared, imagined Gaelic past. Heaney does not dwell on the fact that the Ireland(s) that emerged after the earlier national struggle was (were) far removed from the state envisaged by Yeats and his Anglo-Irish collaborators, or that previous attempts to enlist *linguistic* and *aesthetic* means to heal the 'divided consciousness' and deep rifts within Irish culture and society emanating in large part from the long colonial encounter, had not enjoyed conspicuous success.[73]

---

[71] Seamus Heaney, 'King Conchobor and his Knights', *The Listener*, 26 March 1970, 416.

[72] The final phrase from 'Gifts of Rain', *WO*, p.25. According to Richard Kirkland's analysis, however, the elevation of Northern Irish writers to the role of *representatives* of their communities was not something thrust upon them, but self-created, and in part achieved through the offices and patronage of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. (See Kirkland, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965* [London: Longman, 1996], pp. 57-64).

[73] See Terence Brown, pp.47-67, 188-196. In a comparatively recent interview, the Belfast poet Medbh McGuckian gives voice to a typically northern nationalist longing to-reconnect herself with lost 'Irish' origins, but also to the recognition that through such a return may be rehearsed in poetry, it may never be realised politically:

> 'I'm not English, but I write in English. I don't hark back to any Irish poets who were writing in Irish...The fact that I spell my name in Irish is significant, because it's a re-Gaelicized version of what was previously anglicised. In a way I'm an English poet, trying to reverse into an Irishness that is an impossible dream' (Medbh McGuckian, interviewed in *Sleeping with Monsters*, ed. Gillean Somerville-Arjat and Rebecca E.Wilson [Dublin: Wolfhound Press], 1990, p.5).

McGuckian's comments may be taken as casting doubt on the possibility of a spiritually whole, politically united Ireland; to an earlier northern nationalist generation, particularly in the years between 1969 and 1972, such doubts would have been deemed heretical. She may, however, simply be registering the fact, like Friel's Hugh in *Translations*, that because of the plural present, there is no way back; there is never a way back, though that does not mean that poetry should not reach after earlier worlds and words, in its effort to throw light on the state of contemporary consciousness.

At a time of violence which served to heighten their more acute sense of their cultural particularly as northern Catholics, it is hardly surprising such writers as Heaney and Montague should credit Kinsella's act of retrieval with political value, and hail it it as 'a landmark in Anglo-Irish poetry's repossession of its past.'[74] Evidence of its impact may be seen not only in Heaney's decision in 1972 to embark on his translation of *Buile Suibhne*,[75] but also in the lyric sequence that preceded it, the place-name poems of *Wintering Out*, in which Heaney revives the ancient Irish tradition of *dinnseanchas*. In his introduction Kinsella had placed great weight on the importance of topography within *The Táin*,

> Place names and their frequently fanciful meanings and origins occupy a remarkable place by modern standards. It is often enough justification for the inclusion of an incident that it ends in the naming of a some physical feature; certain incidents, indeed, seem to have been invented merely to account for a place-name...This phenomenon is not confined to the *Táin*, or the Ulster cycle; it is a continuing preoccupation of early and medieval Irish Literature, which contains a whole class of topographical works.[76]

and followed up this point within the book's preliminaries by supplying three maps 'restoring' ancient Gaelic place-names to Ireland, and a guide to pronouncing Irish words and the names of persons and places.[77]

---

[74]John Montague, *The Figure in the Cave and Other Essays*, ed. Antoinette Quinn (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989), p.125. The quotation is from 'In the Irish Grain', which served as the Preface to *The Faber Book of Irish Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974).

[75]Only a few years' before Heaney tackled it, *Buile Suibhne* had excited the interest of John Montague. His collection, *A Chosen Light* (MacGibbon and Kee, 1967), contains one poem, 'Sweetness', which is a rendering of the scene in which Sweeney lands near Clonmacnoise.

[76]Kinsella, introduction to *The Tain*, p.xiii-xiv.

[77]Marie Heaney follows Kinsella's example of providing approximate English equivalents of Irish names and words in *Over Nine Waves: A Book of Irish Legends* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994). Marie Heaney's book, like Kinsella's *Táin*, should be seen within the context of a steady revival of interest in Gaelic language and literature since 1945, which has been spurred by and reflected in many important texts coming out of Northern Ireland. The centrality of the language issue within the political debate over Ireland's future came to the fore during the last century. Montague's deployment of fragments of the language in *The Rough Field* (1972) influenced Heaney's project in *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975), and almost certainly Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980). Poets from a later generation, such as Paul Muldoon and Ciaran Carson, have repeatedly turned to questions of etymology in their work, playing with Gaelic language, place-names and legends. Two of the most recent collections from Michael Longley, *Gorse Fires* (1991) and *Ghost Orchid* (1995), display a remarkable increase in the number of references to

Yet perhaps it was the changes being wrought in the poetry of one of his earlier mentors, John Montague, that may have affected Heaney most at this juncture. Montague's role in recent developments in Northern Irish literature has, like John Hewitt's, been too little acknowledged, and yet each was a pathfinder[78] who did much to open up routes and lines of growth for a subsequent generation of writers which did enjoy the benefits of a wider recognition. Montague's earlier collection, *Forms of Exile* (1958) and *Poisoned Lands* (1961), made their mark on the young South Derry poet as he was starting out. Heaney was particularly susceptible, as I have shown elsewhere,[79] to those poems which recompose lost portraits from a disappearing parish, though as Richard Kirkland points out Montague was not averse at times to taking a swipe at the parochial/regionalist agenda.[80] What maintained Heaney's attention later in the decade was Montague's adeptness at reading and responding to turns in the political weather, and how he successfully engaged with these in his poetry and fiction. Unlike Heaney's family, Montague's had a history of militant republicanism; James Montague, the poet's father, had been very involved in what is termed 'local republican activities'[81] in Co. Tyrone prior to his emigration to America in 1925. In short stories, such as The Cry' from *Death*

Irish place-names, perhaps as a means of asserting the rights of Northern Protestants within the languages/ lands/ imagined territories of Ireland.

[78]The image is used by Seamus Deane, in *Celtic Revivals* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p.152. In an interview with Dennis O'Driscoll, *Irish University Review*, 19:1, Spring 1989, Montague has referred to himself as 'the missing link of Ulster poetry'(60), perhaps with some justification.

[79] Michael Parker, p.36-9.

[80] In his discussion of Montague's 'Regionalism, Or Portrait of the Artists as a Model Farmer', Kirkland, p.30-1, identifies Hewitt and Kavanagh as the poet's targets. In an interview with Dennis O'Driscoll for the *Irish University Review*, 19:1 (Spring 1989), Montague comments scathingly that 'the Ulster regionalism bit got my goat because it usually meant writing about your cottage in the country or, indeed, only people east of the Bann. So the whole doctrine seemed to me spurious, F.R. Higginsy' (60).

[81] Biographical notes from *The Figure in the Cave*, p.221. In 'The War Years in Ulster', from the same collection, Montague refers to his grandmother as 'a fanatic republican', who rejoiced at the bombing of British cities (p.33).

of a Chieftain (1964), Montague had exposed not only the gross abuse of power within what Michael Farrell has termed 'the Orange State', but also shed light on the mindset that colluded with abuse.[82] The story details how the beating-up of a Catholic teenager by four B Specials comes to the attention of Peter Douglas, a young journalist, during a visit to his family home in Northern Ireland. Now resident in England, Peter determines to expose the case in the English press, but quickly comes up against resistance from his own people, including the victim's family. Peter's mother speaks for all of them, perhaps, in counselling a path of resignation: 'They're a bad lot...But we have to live with them...Why else did God put them there?' Montague's narrative articulates the frustrations of the younger generation of Catholics with the pre-civil rights Nationalist Party response of 'exhausted fatalism',[83] which John Hume was to inveigh against in his *Irish Times* articles of 1964.

Interestingly it was during *his* period in Berkeley, California, between 1964 and 1966, that Montague did much of his work on his most ambitious project yet, *The Rough Field*, its title a translation of the Gaelic *Garbh Faiche*, Garvaghey, the family townland in Co.Tyrone where he had been brought up. By incorporating poems from earlier collections with newer material, he constructed a new narrative, which, he hoped, would raise his status as a poet amongst his peers, but also enable him to speak as a mediating voice for and within the nationalist community:

> Almost all of *The Rough Field* had already appeared in pamphlets and magazines in Ireland long before it was published in 1972. I felt through it and my Faber anthology I was engaged in a dialogue with an audience, especially my fellow writers, as the situation worsened...I was engaging with

[82] John Montague, 'The Cry', *Death of a Chieftain and Other Stories* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1964).
[83] Eamonn Hughes, p.8.

> a public through the composition of the poem, so I scattered parts of it around.[84]

Evidence that Montague's poetic interests were taking a distinctly etymological, archaeological, mythological turn can be found in an important essay, 'The Primal Gaeltacht',[85] published in the *Irish Times* of 30 July 1970. Much of this piece is taken up establishing a network linking the contemporary poet to his Gaelic-speaking forebears, through his inheritance of physical and linguistic landscapes. The concepts of the textuality of place and place as textuality are established from the outset by means of the essay's epigraph, which is drawn from 'The Severed Head' section of *The Rough Field*:

> All around, shards of a lost tradition:
> From the Rough Field I went to school
> In the Glen of the Hazels.

For Montague - as later, for the Friel of *Translations* - these anglicised names are telling signs, reminders of a dispossession linguistic and cultural and political.[86] The paragraph which follows develops this sense of fracture, evoking as it does the *aisling* tradition, but

---

[84]Letter from John Montague to the author, late August 1996. Important extracts from *The Rough Field* appeared in *Threshold* throughout the 1960s. Number 17 (1962), contained 'From the Rough Field', 22-3, while *Threshold* 20 (Winter 1966-67), edited by Brian Friel, included a key section from 'A Severed Head'. *Threshold* 22, edited by Heaney in August 1969, included 'The Bread God', while number 23, *The Northern Crisis* (Summer 1970), edited by Montague, concludes with 'A New Siege', 62-70, having opened with an extract from *The Tain*, 'The Pangs of Ulster'(p.3) and 'The Tollund Man' (p.5).

[85] John Montague, 'The Primal Gaeltacht', reprinted in *The Figure in the Cave*, pp.42-5. Terence Brown quotes from the essay in his pioneering study of contemporary Northern Irish Poetry, *Northern Voices: Poets from Ulster* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), p.156, and it is picked up again in Heaney's 'The Sense of Place', *Preoccupations*, pp.131-149.

[86] In another informative and pertinent essay, 'On Translating Irish, Without Speaking it' (1972), in *The Figure in the Cave*, pp.50-2, Montague confesses to his hostility to the Irish language as a child, before going on to assert how his 'recovery' of it proved a defining moment:

> I first learnt it not during but *after* school, when an enthusiastic priest came to teach us our lost heritage. I loathed it, and him...I passed up a chance to go to the Donegal Gaeltacht. There seemed no connection between his enthusiasm and the world in which I thought I was going to live. And when I came to Dublin my Irish withered; the oral examiner at UCD found my northern dialect a comically barbaric survival.
>
> How do I find myself translating from the Irish, twenty years later? It is intimately connected to my discovery of poetry; at a certain point I felt I had to examine what had been done in this country before the spread of English. One of the exercises that fanatical priest had given us was to collect place-names; so I learnt that I was brought up in the Rough Field, and was going to school in the Glen of Hazels. Like a stream driven underground, Irish still ran under the speech and names of my childhood.

only to undercut it. The poet pictured lying on the hillside is reflecting not on how Hibernia has been abused, or on some *belle Dame sans Merci,* but on the fact that his recent short reading tour of America had netted 'more in a month than a term's teaching at home.' Although, to some readers, this sudden plunge into financial considerations might seem jarring, 'unpoetic' even, it is worth recalling that for much of Montague's (and Friel's) childhood and adult life, thousands of Irish men and women had been forced to become economic refugees.[87] However, whatever sensual (and economic) comforts the American academic circuit can offer in the way of sunlit campuses and heated swimming pools are as nothing compare to the austere pleasures of Slieve Gullion[88] and the 'dark glitter of the Hag's Lake'. The choice of these particular spots in Co. Armagh as a starting point for an examination of Irish cultural identities (circa 1970) may well be a revealing one. According to *The Shell Guide to Ireland,* Slieve Gullion 'dominates the Gap of the North', which is the 'gateway into Ulster from the South'. For Montague, and for Heaney,[89] this geographical breach-point perhaps functions as a reminder of the absurdity of political borders separating the states of Ireland. Lying very close to a locus of bitter childhood exile,[90] Slieve Gullion also engenders personal memories, acts as a crossing-point for the poet's return to homelier places. Natural phenomena - the hill, the

[87] Montague's father's emigration had political as well as economic motives. The fact that his father's experience of the American Dream was largely one of failed business ventures, unemployment and drinking, no doubt informs the son's comments on his own good fortune which might be read as proud, or bitter, or both.

[88] *The Shell Guide to Ireland,* ed. Lord Killanin and Michael V. Duignan (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.231.

[89] The imagined procession in Heaney's 'Funeral Rites', *North,* pp.15-18, passes thorugh this point on its way to the Boyne.

[90] After being sent away by his parents from his Brooklyn home at the age of four, in order to be brought up and educated in Ireland, Montague spent eight years of relative stability with his aunts in Garvaghey and enjoyed academic success both at the local school and later at Glencull, two miles away. His attainments won him a scholarship to St. Patrick's, Armagh, where, according to his later account, he would spend 'the most cramped' five years of his childhood, 'enclosed in the black chill of celibacy' (*The Figure in the Cave,* p.3). Despite the sinister notes struck in 'The Ministry of Fear', *North,* pp.63-5, Heaney appears to have thrived during his secondary years and risen to the rank of Senior Prefect, whereas Montague was, according to his own accounts,

heather, the stream - merge easily with the man-made, in Montague's narrative, to such an extent that 'prehistoric timelessness' appears unthreatening. By itemising human artefacts, such as the cairns, the passage-graves, a decorated stone, lines of his own, Montague renders history 'manageable',[91] capable of being textually contained.

From the formative effects of glaciers during the Ice Age on the Counties Armagh and Down, the essay shifts its focus to domestic forms and agencies, 'the landscape of my Clogher valley childhood', and the school at Glencull, before settling, Sweeney-like, on Knockmany Hill, one of the most sacred spots within the poet's imaginative terrain. The hill 'exists' not so much as a physical entity - he refers solely to its 'mysterious saddle shape' - more as the object of a personal and communal quest for textual possession, or rather re-possession. Montague's account of how 'I walk there one Sunday to discover what the locals called the Grave of the Dead Queen' signals the text's function as cultural pilgrimage, constitutes an attempt by the writer regain by and through language, a lost Gaelic past, a mother,[92] a sense of belonging. The text exhibits a 'double consciousness', to use JanMohamed's phrase,[93] as the poet negotiates between differing kinds of authority, oral and written. Local knowledge, established through two acts of naming

---

'constantly in trouble' (Letter to the author, Spring 1963). According to *Time in Armagh*, 5 - *Collected Poems*, (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1995), p.334 - he once even fronted a hunger-strike.

[91] Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, p.148. 'History is important, but, to be manageable, it has to be shaped and stylised into images. The image thus becomes more than a representation of the past; it is also a mark of the poet's triumph over it.'

[92] Psychoanalytical and feminist readings of Montague's work might well stress the significance of the poet's separation from his mother at the age of four, and the fact that, unlike his two brothers, he was fostered by his father's family. Although in 1936 his mother, Mary, returned form America to live in her family home at Fintona, Co.Tyrone, his time with her was confined largely to summer holidays. (See 'Biographical Notes in *The Figure in the Cave*, p.221.) In Heaney's commentary on Montague in 'The Sense of Place', he describes the elder poet's vision of landscape as 'memory, piety, a loving mother' (*Preoccupations*, p.141).

[93] Abdul JanMohamed, 'Sophisticated Primitivism: The Syncretism of Oral and Literate Modes in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*', *Ariel*, 15:4, 1984, 33. 'Double consciousness' refers to the presence of two conflicting world-views within a text, and is characteristic of narratives seeking to present in writing cultures and societies without a written literature.

(references to 'the Grave of the Dead Queen' and 'Ania's Cove'), is repeatedly confirmed by other generally *written* sources, as Montague alludes to Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*, the theories of O.G.S. Crawford and of an unnamed 'distinguished artist', as well as to three lines of his own.[94]

But, above all, it is Montague's re-emphasis on place-names as loci of cultural history, and his perception of the residual and potential poetry locked within etymology, that made the greatest impression on Heaney and Friel, enabling each, in the words of Kiberd, to 'inscribe his texts into the contours of developing national debate.'[95] Heaney would later quote a substantial section from 'The Primal Gaeltacht, including Montague's speculations on the Northern European origins of Knockmany, in 'The Sense of Place', a lecture which was delivered in 1977 at the Ulster Museum and later published in *Preoccupations*, i.e. the very period in which Friel would have been at work on *Faith Healer* and *Translations*:

> Take the name Knockmany. One could explain it as 'Cnoc Maine', the hill of Manaig or Menapii, a tribe of the Belgae who travelled as far as Lough Erne: after all, they gave their name to the adjoining county of Fermanagh. But the local translation of the name is Ania's Cove, and Ania or Ana is the Danaan mother goddess whose name is also found in the river Boan or Good Mother...I am beginning to sound like Robert Graves's *White Goddess*, but there is an extraordinary identity between the linguistic and archaeological evidence concerning Knockmany. The curious cup marks and circles have been described as the eyes and breasts of a mother goddess, whose cult spread from Syria. I doubt if the late O.G.S. Crawford knew early Irish, but his eye goddess theory bears out the derivations I have suggested, since the same shapes are found at Newgrange on the Boyne.
>
> So the least Irish place-name can net a world with its associations... What I am trying to say is that the Irish landscape is a kind of primal Gaeltacht, and that anyone brought up in it has already absorbed a great deal of the language...The racial aspect of a poet's inheritance should be as unconscious as breathing. Where I was brought up, Irish is no longer a spoken language, but it is still very much alive in the place-names and the

[94] These are from 'The Sean Bhean Bocht', reprinted in *CP Montague*, pp.190-1.
[95] Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p.168.

> local idiom. Like Mairtin O Direain writing of Aran, or Sean O'Riordain from Cork, I must tap tradition where I find it, in my part of the landscape.[96]

What Montague is advocating her is not a slimmed-down version of the Irish Free State's failed linguistic policy, but rather an extension of the regionalist project which previously he had treated with some scepticism; his forthcoming collaboration with John Hewitt on a reading tour for the Northern Ireland Arts Council may well have been a factor in this change of stance.[97] Now, as violence and dislocation gain a hold, his fervent wish is that Irish poets working in English might have their writing energised by their contact with a 'common tradition', enriched by shared linguistic resources. By accentuating his own strong ties with Kavanagh - he had a few years previously edited the *Collected Poems*[98] - and Ulster's eighteenth-century Gaelic poets, Montague is striving to consolidate his position simultaneously in the national cultural scene and in the North. However, he uses the opportunity of appearing in Dublin's *Irish Times* in order to attack the centre's construction of Ireland's literary past. Given that his essay appeared only a few week's after the Falls Curfew, it is interesting that Montague should be directing an attack on a southern '*Kulturkampf* based mainly on the Munster dialect' rather than British policy in Northern Ireland, on Daniel Corkery rather than Edward Heath or Reginald Maudling.

'The Primal Gaeltacht' presented an extremely attractive strategy to Heaney, one which, through its very obliqueness, confirmed for the younger poet in his place-name poems the possibilities of reconciling the lyrical with the political. The potent set of myths, images, and cultural allusions it contained opened up the tempting illusion of a renewed 'contact

[96] Montague, *The Figure in the Cave*, pp.43-4.
[97] In the Autumn of 1970 and the Spring of 1971, Montague toured with Hewitt in *The Planter and the Gael.*
[98] For an account of this project, see 'Patrick Kavanagh: A Speech from the Dock', *The Figure in the Cave*, pp.136-146.

with the oldest and most pre-colonial springs of life of their people',[99] to borrow a phrase from Fanon.

In their early 1970s brand of cultural revivalism, therefore, Montague and Heaney succeed in having it both ways; they align themselves with the Yeatsian master version in promoting the credentials of a pre-Christian, and therefore pre-sectarian Irish civilisation, in part as an act of resistance to the colonisers' political supremacy; at the same time, they distance themselves from Yeats and Synge through their insistence on the crucial role of the mother goddess and the ease of their access to the Gaelic language, and thus construct a version of ancient Irish culture consonant with their own Catholic origins.[100]

IV

Unlike his previous collections which might be characterised as gatherings of individual poems bound together by a number of recurring themes and common features of style, *Wintering Out* is a carefully constructed volume, ordered like Yeats's mature work, in order to articulate an inner debate and division, the 'contradictory awarenesses'[101] which preoccupied him prior to and at the time of composition. In his attempt to articulate a response to the political crisis, Heaney deploys a range of strategies, all of which are also common within his contemporaries' work; he invokes historical analogues; he constructs a cultural matrix linking language to landscape; he utilises myth; he depicts the immediate present by means of 'documentary' poems; he proffers poems rooted in private

---

[99] Frantz Fanon, 'On National Culture', from *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.169.

[100] Montague makes clear in his writing of this period his belief in the *racial* distinctness of the Irish people. In 'The Primal Gaeltacht' he refers to the '*racial* aspect of the poet's inheritance', while in 'I Also Had Music' (1971) he talks of traditional Irish music as a 'deeply *racial* art' (*The Figure in the Cave*, pp.44, 47).

[101] Heaney, 'Pilgrim's Journey', *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, 123, Winter 1984.

experiences and domestic spaces, which contain resonances and often conceal analogies for the current situation in the North.

The collection proper begins with a series of lyrics focussed on language and power. In the first of these, Heaney imagines an impossible return, a return to primal innocence, to a time of total security,[102] linguistic assuredness in a 'native place'.[103] After tendering a standard English word 'Fodder' as his title, the poem's narrator immediately disclaims it and its authority, replacing it with '*fother*', a sign of collective identity, voiced in a 'grafted tongue'[104] perhaps, but with its own distinct accent. The reclamation of that single word releases a spill of images, generates a tumble of enjambed lines, alliterated sounds ('swathes of grass/ and meadowsweet'). The narrator revels in a past characterised by solidarity ('the tight vise', 'bundle') and miraculous natural and spiritual riches ('multiple as loaves/ and fishes'). That there may be 'mucky gaps' within this idealised narrative, as well as between the pastoral past and shelterless present, is acknowledged in the final stanza. The unspecific threat posed by 'These long nights' to 'comfort', 'bed' and 'stall', is reinforced by the rhythm, as those three stressed syllables press against the last line's iambic dimeter; with that uncertain conditional ('I would pull') and that desperate 'anything' comes the admission that the age of saviours and epiphanies may have passed.

[102] In 'A Poet's Childhood', an article for *The Listener*, 11 November 1971, 660, Heaney recalls how he loved to lie in the deep warm fodder' while a farmhand sang quietly above 'the clink of chains' and scrape of buckets and occasional pleased lowing of the cow being milked.'
[103] 'Gloss: On the Difficulties of Translation', *CP Hewitt*, p.129.
[104] A phrase from the epigraph to John Montague's 'A Severed Head', section IV of *The Rough Field*, *CP Montague*, p.30: 'And who ever heard/ Such a sight unsung/ As a severed head/ With a grafted tongue?'

The resistive manoeuvre with which 'Fodder' commences no doubt owes something to John Montagues's contemporaneous forays into linguistic territory, but also seems to echo the closure of John Hewitt's poem, 'Gloss: On the Difficulties of Translation'. In the latter, the poet refuses to re-translate his earlier version of a ninth-century Gaelic lyric for standard English audience, since

> To begin with, I should
> have to substitute
> *golden* for *yellow*
> and *gorse* for *whin,*
> this last is the word we use
> on both sides of Belfast Lough.[105]

Whereas in Hewitt's poem from March 1969 there is a definite effort to establish a common heritage of texts and language by his inclusive 'we', his reference to 'both sides' of the lough, and his privileging of 'whin' over 'gorse', in Heaney's collection the collective 'we' operates as a shifting signifier, denoting both communities in one poem, the oppressed minority in the next.

That this is certainly the case is exemplified in the poems that follow which repeatedly intercut between history ('Bog Oak', 'Servant Boy' and 'The Last Mummer') and vocalised local landscapes ('Anahorish', 'Toome', 'Broagh', 'The Backward Look', 'Traditions', 'Land', 'Gifts of Rain', ''A New Song'), and map the intersections between them. In the historically-focussed poems, Heaney is concerned in tracing the broken narrative that has given rise to 'the new camp for the internees' and the 'coherent

---

[105] *CP Hewitt*, p.129. Heaney reviewed John Hewitt's earlier *Collected Poems 1932-67* for *Threshold*, Summer 1969, 73-77. In this piece he presents Hewitt as an exemplary figure for younger Northern poets, since the man and his work embody 'authority without dogma':

> His lifelong concern to question and document the relationship between art and locality has provided all subsequent Northern writers with a hinterland of reference, should they require a tradition more intimate than the broad perspectives of the English literary achievement.

miseries' referred to in the collection's epigraph.[106] The first of these quest poems, 'Bog Oak', finds its narrator is search of a beam to sustain him in the present. Instead the journey back yields images defying definition, featureless faces, 'hopeless wisdom', smoke which 'struggles to escape', 'mizzling rain', a blurred horizon, 'softening ruts', and another poet 'dreaming sunlight'. In contrast to the triumph and expectation of its opening, savouring the substantiality of the 'carter's trophy', the retrieval of a 'long-seasoned rib' from a known and loved body, the closing lines 'lead back' not to a magical Twilight world of 'mistletoe' and 'green clearings', but to a colonial encounter and colonial texts. The Spenser invoked in the poem is a double figure; while the phrase 'dreaming sunlight' is vaguely suggestive of the lyric voice behind *The Faerie Queene*, the quotation from *A Veue of the Present State of Ireland* firmly locates the Elizabethan writer in his role as colonial administrator and ideologue. The lesser known *Veue* - a political work from 1596 - was written to endorse Lord Deputy Grey's belief that the English would not succeed in building civilisation in Ireland until 'force have planed the ground for foundation',[107] and offers a telling account of the famine that followed on the heels of the Munster rebellion. To a modern audience, Spenser's report of this event might seem to show compassion for the starving Irish, who exhibited

> such wretchedness as that any stony heart would have rued the same. Out of every corner of the woods and glens they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legs could not bear them. They looked anatomies of death, they spake like ghosts crying out of their graves.[108]

---

[106] The reference to the newly-created internment camp in 'This morning from a dewy motorway', *WO*, p.5, makes it clear that the poem was written after Heaney's return from America in the Autumn of 1971, and shortly before he despatched the full typescript to Faber and Faber in late September. Its use as an epigraph no doubt represents a late attempt to signal the new collection's political intents.

[107] Arthur, Lord Grey of Wilton, quoted in the introduction to *Spenser: Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912), p.xxiv.

[108] Edmund Spenser, *A Veue of the Present State of Ireland*, ed. W.L. Renwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.104.

In fact, according to Foster, this 'famous and chilling description' was written to extol 'the effectiveness of Spenser's preferred form of warfare',[109] scorched-earth. Spenser himself adds, lest he be suspected of harbouring pity for the rebels, that the extremity of their condition was what 'they themselves wrought'.[110] While it is generally acknowledged that Heaney's *political* sympathies lie fully with the unnamed, fleshless 'geniuses', whose descendants, according to the nationalist interpretation of history, are still having their lands and liberties 'encroached upon' by an occupying army and a settler state, there are, as several commentators have pointred out, elements of tension within the text and in his position.[111] In his capacity as a lyric poet, only a few years previously, he might well have defended his own perception of the poet as a purveyor of lyric, apolitical 'sunlight'.[112] However, now, like many another nationalist writer living at a crisis-point in the independence struggle, Heaney finds himself compelled to take a stand against a dominant discourse which had contributed hugely to his intellectual, linguistic and cultural empowerment.[113] What he had once regarded simply as 'numinously

[109] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p.34.

[110] Spenser, *Veue*, p.104.

[111] Corcoran, p.75, reminds his readers how 'As a poet writing in the English language, Heaney is inevitably part of the poetic tradition which also contains *The Faerie Queene*.' Hart, pp.51-3, suggests that ultimately Spenser functions as 'a monument to poetic guilt', but one in which Heaney is himself implicated.

[112] In 'A Raindrop on a Thorn: An Interview with Seamus Heaney', with Robert Druce, *Dutch Quarterly Review*, 9, 1978, pp.24-37, Heaney again uses the analogy of sunlight in order to make a somewhat dubious, impressionistic distinction between English and Irish writing, and to convey some of the difficulties he was experiencing in rendering Buile Suibhne into English:

> I think the genius of the English language, certainly since the Norman invasion, has changed. The temperature of the language changed, and became warmer. The temperature of English poetry, on the whole, is a little warmer than the temperature of actual English weather - except for Thomas Hardy, maybe, and a few places in Wordsworth. But the temperature of the Irish language, and the emotional weather in that early Irish verse is colder. It's purer. I always think of a raindrop on a thorn. If the sunlight is winking through that, it isn't a balmy 'Ode to Autumn' sunlight. So the challenge is to find an idiom in English that renders that...I was slightly dissatisfied with what I had because it had more the temperature of English verse; it was kindlier, more benign. It's not thorny and raindroppy enough.

Interestingly from an intertextual point of view, Derek Mahon's opening lines to 'Penshurst Place' are: 'The bright drop quivering on a thorn/ In the rich silence after rain'. See below, notes 114.

[113] In a private letter to the Irish poet, Brendan Hamill, from 8 January 1973, Heaney is at pains to emphasise his dual citizenship: 'England was as much an audience as Ireland. If I had a 'poetic' or an aesthetic', it was a romantic/symbolist one, derived from a reading of English literature at

bright'[114]- the English literary inheritance, and in particular that of the English Renaissance - is now recognised as deeply implicated in the colonial project. A comparable vision of the Elizabethan Age's seductive legacy - for 'Lute music', read also 'loot music' - can be found in 'Penshurst Place', by Heaney's contemporary and friend, Derek Mahon. With its title and refrain echoing Jonson, Marlowe and Raleigh, it exposes a culture in which artistic achievement and political violence are inextricably interleaved, bound into the one text:

> The iron hand and the velvet glove -
> Come live with me and be my love.[115]

'Servant Boy' and 'The Last Mummer', which appear almost immediately after 'Bog Oak', similarly construct lines linking the contemporary Catholic population in the North with their subjugated, alienated predecessors.[116] 'Servant Boy' harks back to the eighteenth century, to a time when, according to Froude, 'nine-tenths of the land' was occupied 'by Protestants of English or Scottish extraction.'[117] At the head of these are 'the little/ barons' of Heaney's poem, waited upon by the still 'resentful', still 'impenitent' Catholic Irish. Despite the fact that he belongs to a very different time and milieu, the narrator claims kinship with one of these silenced, subaltern figures, setting up a trail leading from enforced compliance to resistive closure. If the servant boy's response to petty tyranny seems to connect him to Heaney's parents' generation - he too believes in

University, and in particular from the dominant Eliotesque assumptions.'

[114] Derek Mahon, 'Penshurst Place', *Poems 1962-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.82.

[115] ibid.

[116] Another instance of this comes in an uncollected poem, 'Medallion', published in *The Listener*, 4 September, 1969, 311. In the poem, written one suspects shortly after the Battle of the Bogside, Heaney contemplates a commemorative portrait in silver of the Reverend George Walker, Joint Governor of Derry during the siege of 1689. Its closure sets up a parallel between Protestant resistance then and Unionist intransigence now: 'He holds out, impervious/ To arguments, sit-downs and bombs.' Walker makes a brief appearance in the fourth stanza of Montague's 'A New Siege', published first in *Threshold*, 23, Summer 1970, 64, and later in *The Rough Field*.

[117] Quoted in Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1924; new edition 1967), p.42.

keeping 'patience' and 'counsel' in the face of provocation - then his role as a bearer of eggs, carrier of fodder, 'jobber among shadows', establishes his affinity with the poet, who, through his lyric act, strives to provide nourishment for the community, and to sustain them through this latest winter.

Michael Allen, in an article already referred to, sees the eggs as 'emblems of parochially derived poems', and claims that in 'Servant Boy' we witness 'probably Heaney's last unconditional celebration of the Kavanagh aesthetic'.[118] Rather I would see the poem as reflecting the politicisation of Heaney's poetry, and how the Northern narrative had led him to shift from Kavanagh's poetic trail and towards Montague's. Whereas in earlier collections, Heaney repeatedly turned to parochial crafts and skills in order to make less of the gap between his forebears' labouring and his own creative work, in *Wintering Out* his historically-remote personae are consistently placed politically; it is no accident that the servant boy, alias 'work-whore, slave-/ blood', is sighted first by an 'outhouse', last by the 'back doors'.[119]

The third representative in *Wintering Out*'s opening historical triptych is another excluded insider, 'The Last Mummer'. His tenuous survival into the television age has been, to a certain extent, at the expense of his dignity. Like his poetic predecessor, he has been obliged to maintain a suitably servile pose, to 'don manners/ ay a flutter of curtains', and to adopt the language of his supposed superiors, or, as the poem has it, to go

[118] Allen, 'The Parish and the Dream: Heaney in America 1969-1987', 730.
[119] For a contrary view, see Jay Parini, in 'The Ground Possessed', *Seamus Heaney: Modern Critical Views* (New Haven: Chelsea House, 1986), pp.106-7. Parini describes the poem as 'a simple portrait of a lower class child', and, though he goes on to assert that 'it recollects the old feud between invading noblemen and the indigenous servant classes', concludes that 'there is nothing overtly political' about the poem 'of course.'

'whoring/ among the civil tongues'. Like contemporary Ulster poets and dramatists, this folk-artist is forced to 'pick a nice way' through the ritual dramas of 'blood/ and feuding' which make up the national repertoire; like them, he is a tangential presence, longing for an accredited position within the communities he serves.[120] 'Shrouded' in myth, mist and mystery, this 'trammelled' figure has come to be dismissed as obsolete, as a relic - like Friel's Frank Hardy - and yet, for Heaney, as for an earlier celebrant of the mummers, John Montague, he fulfilled a crucial, morale-boosting function with his 'creaking rustic rhymes', his 'purging lament of bad times'.[121] At a time when 'the centre cannot hold', his role - like that of the writers who act as his heirs - is to work for a restoration of ceremony, communion and communication; his 'dark tracks' on the dewy grass print a possibility of renewal, or rather the dream of one. Though the final lines reach towards a commingling of Ireland's pagan past, through images of the moon and 'holly trees', and its Catholic present, through the symbol of the 'host' and 'monstrance', it is a resolution without much appeal perhaps to a Northern Protestant reader.

Language, landscape and history mesh within *Wintering Out*'s second major lyrical cluster, the place-name poems. Though sometimes read as laments for the 'Vanished music'[122] of a pre-colonial, Gaelic culture, lyrics such as 'Anahorish', 'Broagh' and 'Toome' deny silence and loss, and constitute a reaching-out for cultural affirmation, which in Northern Ireland almost always involves a strong measure of political defiance.

[120] Michael Foley's article, 'This Thing could rule the World', *Fortnight*, 3 September 1971, 20, casts a somewhat cynical eye on the Northern cultural scene. In it he acknowledges Heaney's pre- eminent position, but argues that generous Arts Council sponsorship had deluded poets into the belief that they had 'reached the promised land', that they really had 'an audience' and an effect. (For a full discussion of Foley's piece, see Kirkland, pp.60-1).

[121] 'The Mummer Speaks', from *Poisoned Lands* (1961), reprinted in *CP Montague*, p.203. Originally it was Montague's intention to use it to head the volume, 'so strong was my sense of foreboding' (Letter to the author, August 1996).

[122] 'A New Song', *WO*, p.33.

In *Anomalous States*, David Lloyd deploys the term 'reterritorialisation' to denote the literary-political strategy used by Heaney (and Montague) during this period, and traces a continuum between their allegedly 'atavistic' cultural politics and that of mid-nineteenth century nationalist writers, such as D.F. McCarthy and Thomas Davis.[123] Writing in *The Nation*, two years before the famine laid waste, Davis grieved over the terrible 'tearing' of Irish identity inflicted by three centuries of colonisation and anglicisation; as a consequence, identity had become divorced from territory, place-names had become detached from territory, and 'the people' had been separated from 'their history', which entailed 'the continuity of a patrimony'.[124] However, whereas Davis, along with later nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century nationalists, retained a fervent belief in the ideal of an independent, unitary state, in which the Gaelic language might perform a vital role in healing and fostering a notional collective 'Irish' identity, for Montague, Heaney and Friel, writing in the early 1970s with the fact of fifty years of partition behind them, 'reterritorialisation' remained a remote possibility,[125] one which might only be effected *imaginatively*, and then through the medium of English and fragments of a lost mother-tongue.

In the place-name poems of *Wintering Out*, Heaney revives, translates, re-energises an ancient genre for a contemporary audience increasingly anxious about its identity. For

[123] What Lloyd and some other commentators, however, have neglected to take into account in constructing their versions of Heaney as a recidivist in relation to issues of nationalism and gender are the *specific* historical/ political circumstances in which the texts were produced. The violent aftermaths of many early Civil Rights marches, the killings in the Bogside and Belfast in August 1969, the Falls Curfew of July 1970, the introduction of Internment without trial in August 1971, only *initially* seemed to confirm traditional nationalist narratives, which had retained their currency in the abandoned North - abandoned by the Free State, abandoned by Westminster, abandoned to Unionist (mis)rule.

[124] Lloyd, p.90.

[125] Although, one suspects, some kind of United Ireland may have been an ideal that all three shared, perhaps Montague's 'An Ulster Prophecy', from *RF*, p.30, voices a common scepticism about its realisation.

their narrating voices, as for Friel's Owen and Yolland, the very act of naming becomes intoxicating, gives the satisfying illusion of power and control. By enunciating 'Anahorish', seemingly, oppositions can be resolved - light and dark, fluid and solid, vowel and consonant, Gaelic and English - and the gap closed separating the speaker from an earlier, imagined, unitary state. This is Ireland as past and putative Eden, 'a place of clear water', of unobstructed movement, in which the poet performs as a diviner, summoning not only 'the subconscious and semantic energies of words',[126] but also the quickening cultural energies and political expectations of the minority. In endeavouring to resist the poem's celebratory rush and cast it as elegy, Hart misreads it, I believe; the 'dunghills' of the final line do not 'suggest decay',[127] but rather, as O'Donoghue recognises, link back to 'the fertilising water'[128] of the opening, and anticipate replenishment - cultural and linguistic - not 'the eclipse of a once vibrant life'.[129] Though Heaney's 'quest for precision and definition...lead backward', his aim was to conduct it 'in the *living* speech of a landscape and language I was born with' (my emphasis),[130] and thus in accordance with Montague's prescriptions in 'A Primal Gaeltacht'.

Whereas 'Anahorish', coming immediately after 'Bog Oak', continues its concern with past and present Irish Catholic resistance, 'Broagh' voices a different, and perhaps more complex political position, though one still deeply watermarked by traditional nationalist ideology. Though I would generally concur with Neil Corcoran's and Tom Paulin's[131] conclusion that it constructs 'a linguistic paradigm of a reconciliation beyond sectarian

---

[126] 'The Trade of an Irish Poet', *The Guardian*, 25, May, 1972, 17.
[127] Hart, p.62.
[128] O'Donoghue, p.58.
[129] Hart, p.62.
[130] 'The Trade of an Irish Poet', 17.
[131] Tom Paulin, in a television programme, *Poetry, Language and History*, Open University, 1986.

division',[132] like 'The Other Side' whose politics it anticipates, its images of bruising and marking, its 'black *O*' and its 'low tattoo',[133] are signs of a pain that may not so easily be eased politically or textually. Agreed, the opening lines bring together three linguistic strands in Northern Ireland, through the Gaelic word for a riverbank (*bruach*), the Scots for a riverside field (*rigs*), and the Anglo-Saxon plural for the dock plant (*docken*), in order to ford internal differences. However inclusions foster exclusions, and while both communities in the North can indeed manage that 'last *gh*', their failure to achieve a political accommodation during the previous half-century cannot be entirely laid at the door of 'the strangers'. If left to themselves, the closure seems to imply, Ulster's Catholics and Protestants might one day learn to accept each other's distinctive traditions and acknowledge the diversity of their shared linguistic heritage. While one may applaud, as Paulin does, Heaney's endeavour to find a 'language in which everybody from the North of Ireland could feel at home',[134] at the same time one recognises how 'Broagh' demonstrates the difficulties of translation, of outgrowing the earliest binary, Irish/ British,[135] when so many encounters from the past and in the present seemed to confirm its 'authority' and 'reality'.

The preoccupation with language and history, language in history, is maintained in 'Land', 'Toome', 'Oracle', 'The Backward Look', 'Traditions', and 'Gifts of Rain'.[136]

[132] Corcoran, p.90.

[133] cf. the 'small drumming' picked up in 'Land', *WO*, p.22.

[134] Paulin, *Poetry, Language and History*.

[135] In a recent radio programme, *No Man is an Island: Letter from the South*, 18 November 1996, the BBC correspondent, Fergal Keane, recalled his Dublin childhood in the early 1960s. The constitution of the Republic, he observes, 'was designed...to make a statement about ourselves, a statement defining our difference and separateness from the big island across the water...Our history was a history of struggles against the English, and our consciousness was shaped by constant reference to those struggles.'

[136] Morrison, p.40, usefully draws attention to the impact on Heaney of John Braidwood's and G.B.Adams's English language lectures at Queen's University, and suggests that they may have equipped Heaney with the linguistic vocabulary he deploys in *Wintering Out*. Hart, p.59, refers to

Many of these are elegies to a lost tongue, lyrics to the 'lost/ syllables of an old order';[137] by retrieving 'vestigial'[138] linguistic features from his dual inheritance, Gaelic and English, Heaney attempts to salvage from a savage tide a measure of assertion. In reaching towards their resolutions, these texts generally work with interactive metaphors, in which vocal tract becomes landscape and landscape becomes vocal tract, and register any movements which disturb and define these spaces.

In 'Toome', for example, the initial site of resonance is its narrator's mouth, whose opening allows access to a suppressed identity, a culture long driven underground. Slipping 'under the dislodged/ slab of the tongue' - the image translates the tongue into a prehistoric lintel, like those at Newgrange - the speaker descends into a souterrain, goes 'prospecting' for material among shards. Although Corcoran maintains that the 'search culminates not in the "new", but in the very ancient indeed',[139] citing the final Medusa image as evidence, it could be argued that the poem itself stands as an act of renewal, though one that leaves the narrator uneasily 'sleeved', mired, then immersed in a past read as both fertile ('alluvial') and menacing ('mud that shelves/ suddenly', 'elvers tail my hair'). There are some affinities between the images of 'flints, musket-balls,/ fragmented wares,/ torcs and fish-bones' within Heaney's and those in Michael Longley's contemporaneous poem, 'Poteen'. In the latter the speaker similarly undertakes a subterranean odyssey into Ireland's history, its 'Remembered souterrains', but ends unearthing relatively recent evidence of murder, extortion, betrayal and profit:

> Where, alongside cudgels,
> Guns, the informer's ear

---

specific sections of a lecture on language history given by Braidwood on 23 April 1969, which he convincingly links to 'The Backward Look', 'Broagh', 'Serenades' and 'Traditions'.

137 'A Grafted Tongue', *CP Montague*, p.37.

138 An image from 'Traditions', *WO*, p.31.

139 Corcoran, p.89.

We have buried it -
Blood-money, treasure-trove.[140]

Whereas Longley's finds seem linked and belong to the eighteenth/ nineteenth/ early twentieth century, the signs of war and occupation disclosed by Heaney are more arbitrary and ancient, as one might expect from a writer claiming allegiance to a fractured, nativist tradition. 'Toome's concluding image may well be linked to Celtic mythology, as Hart suggests,[141] but equally it can be seen as self-referential, since it draws again upon the 'unhatched fears' and guilts of a childhood nightmare that had surfaced previously in 'A Lough Neagh Sequence', section 7:

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.[142]

In again seeming to locate 'malign power',[143] albeit metaphorically, in the natural world - Toome's elvers are clearly akin to the frogs, rats, bats that haunted *Death of a Naturalist* - Heaney might be accused of repeating himself, and of retreating from the complex political realities of contemporary urban violence into private myth. Such was the force and speed of political and social disintegration,[144] and the disorientation it induced, that many other poets opted initially for a similar obliqueness, insulating themselves temporarily from the crisis's full impact by re-examining familial myths, familiar

[140] Michael Longley, first published in *An Exploded View* (1972), reprinted in *Poems 1963-1983*, p.91.
[141] Hart, p.63, suggests that the closure of 'Toome' finds Heaney in communion with an ancient Celtic water-goddess, and stresses how Anne Ross's *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London: Routledge, 1967) and Sean O'Riordain's *Antiquities of the Irish Countryside* (London: Methuen, 1942), provided important sources of archaeological information for Heaney in *Wintering Out*.
[142] Prior to its publication in *DD*, pp.38-45, 'A Lough Neagh Sequence' appeared in a slim volume produced by Harry Chambers, (Didsbury: *Phoenix* Pamphlet Poets Press, January 1969).
[143] John Wilson Foster, *The Achievement of Seamus Heaney* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1995), p.13.
[144] In 'Strife and the Ulster Poet', Michael Longley employs an image from nature - a hurricane - in order to convey dramatically the sense of devastation. However, he then goes on to situate himself politically in relation to it.

landscapes, rather than approach head-on the defamiliarised state in which they now lived. Others, however, might see in 'Toome' an early indication of the poet's determination not to 'desert his imaginative terrain',[145] to retain control of his own artistic agenda. And yet, this resistive stance, most recently re-stated in 'The Flight Path', 'If I do write something,/ Whatever it is, I'll be writing for myself',[146] cannot fully mask anxieties about what it excludes; a village on the Bann, Toome is indeed noted for its eels and bogland, but also as a place with political resonances for the nationalist minority, since it was the site of the hanging of Roddy McCorley, one of the rebels of the '98. What will continue to 'tail' Heaney throughout *Wintering Out* and *North*, curtailing the attempts at cultural affirmation, are guilts. In this light, 'Toome' can be clearly seen as a poem both rooted and adrift at a time of at first uneasy, and later appalling transitions.

'The Backward Look' similarly and simultaneously admits and resists narratives of linguistic and political defeats, as one might expect from its ambivalent title.[147] From the outset, irregular stresses make the verse labour to get off the ground, to find a rhythm:

> A stagger in air
> as if a language
> failed, a sleight
> of wing.

Out of this aural and grammatical unease - there is no active verb in this verse - bird images emerge, allegorised images that are both originary and the products of translation. Heaney's use of the simple present and present continuous positions the

[145] Michael Longley, 'Poetry', *Causeway: The Arts in Ulster* (Belfast: Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1971), p.107.
[146] Seamus Heaney, *The Spirit Level* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p.25.
[147] The phrase and the poem can be read as affirming the importance of the Gaelic past and the Gaelic language in sustaining a sense of 'Irish' identity. However, the title also admits a contrary reading, in which the idea that Gaelic tradition can be revived is seen as a delusion, and the project as regressive, atavistic, 'backward'. These two opposing stances towards the 'language question' would be later voiced by Manus and Maire in Friel's *Translations*.

reader as a witness to 'an eviction of sorts',[148] to a displacement which is literal and psychic, linguistic and demographic. Snipe, wild geese and yellow bittern, like the signs denoting them - and like those who had transmuted them into signs - are forced to leave their 'nesting ground', to make themselves scarce in 'vaults' and archives. Each of these named birds has a resonance within Irish cultural and literary tradition, and thus again the poet's choice of referents includes and excludes. Only someone familiar with Gaelic would be aware that the poem's italicised phrases, 'little goat of the evening' and 'little goat of the frost' are renderings into English of Irish kennings, *gabhairín oidhche* and *gabhairín reo*, denoting the 'snipe'. Encoded within the references to 'wild goose' and 'yellow bittern' in stanza five are allusions to those Jacobites who left Ireland for exile in France following William III's triumph[149] - they became known as the 'Wild Geese' - and to a Gaelic lament by Cathal Bui Mac Giolla Ghunna (c.1680-1756); writing in 1970, John Montague claimed that for Heaney 'The Yellow Bittern/ '*An Bonnán Buí*' constituted 'his touchstone for the (Gaelic) tradition'.[150]

Puzzlingly, given the valuable background detail he had himself amassed on the poem, Henry Hart mistakenly identifies the snipe as 'British'. Rather its function within the allegory is to represent the dispossessed 'Irish' in general, and perhaps in particular those presently suffering political oppression, but capable of retributive violence, the northern

[148] Friel, *T* in *SP*, p.420.
[149] Under the provisions of the Treaty of Limerick (1691), Jacobite soldiers were given the option of returning home, serving with William's armies or leaving for France. Initially about 12,000 are said to have entered the service of Louis XIV. During the eighteenth century many more Irishmen joined the Irish brigade in the French army, and in so doing, as Roy Foster points out in *Modern Ireland*, p.151, 'bequeathed a dilemma affecting those they left behind them: could Irish Catholics ever be considered loyal to William, when they continued to be, in a sense represented abroad by an army fighting for Louis?' It is worth remembering that *Seamus* Heaney's Christian name, is the Irish equivalent of *James*.
[150] Montague, 'A Primal Gaeltacht', *The Figure in the Cave*, p.45. Montague's translation of the poem is included in *The Faber Book of Irish Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), pp.183-4.

nationalist minority. The deliberately ambiguous imagery Heaney utilises points towards such a reading; phrases such as 'drumming elegies' may suggest a mingling of music and militarism, poetry and defiance, celebration and loss; the 'vaults /that we live off' might well be vinous, and thus imply distilled wisdom or an alcohol-induced obliviousness,[151] but equally could be discerning a necrophiliac element within Nationalist and Catholic tradition, and thus reading its pieties towards the dead and martyred as unhealthy, if not downright *Dracula*esque.[152] The poem's closure rehearses a survival in the face of contemporary threat ('the sniper's eyrie'), and a successful transgression of ancient borders ('earthworks/ and wall-steads'),[153] before a dramatic touch-down 'in the combs/ of a fieldworker's archive'. Although in one respect the 'combs' may be connected to other underground recesses - the 'sunken drills' of 'Gifts of Rain', the 'souterrain' of 'Toome', 'the hollow trunk' in 'Oracle' - as an image suggestive of fertile industry it anticipates the 'honeyed' water of 'Mossbawn: Sunlight'. The poet's presentation of himself as a fieldworker - as a Wordsworthian celebrant of rural living, as an academic undertaking practical research, as a cultivator of the cultural ground - looks forward to later phases in his literary and academic career, including *Field Work* and Field Day.

[151] Taken with the allusion to *'An Bunnan Bui'*, in which the narrator identifies himself with the 'yellow bittern' who died of thirst, the 'corkscrew' metaphor translates the vaults into wine-cellars

[152] Padraig O'Malley's *Biting at the Grave: The Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1990) offers considerable insight into Northern Nationalist ideology and psychology, and the continuing dependency on myths and historical narratives involving blood and sacrifice. (See, for example, pp.109, 110, 158.)

[153] In 'The Trade of an Irish Poet', reprinted as '1972' in *Preoccupations*, p.35, Heaney provides an etymology for Mossbawn, his first home, which has an obvious relevance to this and many of the other language poems in *Wintering Out*:

> 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. Mossbawn, the Planter's house on the bog. Yet in spite of this Ordnance Survey spelling, we pronounced it Moss bann, and *bán* is the Gaelic word for white...In the syllables of my home I see a metaphor of the split culture of Ulster.

Within 'Gifts of Rain' one witnesses the subtle drawing-together of each of the previous strategies referred to, and the increasing allure of myth-making. Like so many of Heaney's other most important early poems - 'Digging', 'Bogland', 'The Tollund Man' - it constitutes a renewal of the covenant made with his predecessors, one that has acquired greater urgency at this period when 'the shared calling of blood' urged solidarity. Here the poet endeavours to cross over the swirling incoherences and indeterminacies of the bloody present, by relocating himself imaginatively beside securer waters, beside the river that runs past his first home, Mossbawn, and through Castledawson, the place where he was born. It is one of Heaney's most Wordsworthian of poems, in which Moyola stands in for the Derwent as a mythic source, a prime mover behind his initiation into music, his baptism into sound.

Opening inauspiciously and dramatically with 'Cloudburst and steady downpour now/ for days', 'Gifts of Rain' echoes consciously perhaps Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence',

> There was a roaring in the wind all night.
> The rain came heavily and fell in floods.[154]

Into this bleak and oppressive setting an unidentified figure is introduced, a solitary, who appears to bear some affinity with both the leech gatherer and the poet contemplating him. This is a tentative human being, one who is trying to interpret an unstable text, 'to *sense* weather/ by his skin',[155] like Hardy's Gabriel Oak, or some Hughesian outcast, or indeed the author of *Wintering Out*.[156] To survive he must acknowledge his kinship with

[154] William Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.155.
[155] O'Donoghue, p.57, gives the line this emphasis.
[156] Oak, the hero of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, possesses the capacity to interpret the weather through observing the behaviour of horses, sheep, slugs and toads, their reactions constituting a 'direct message from the Great Mother'(Chapter 35).

and dependence on the rest of the animal and vegetative world, for he is part of a pattern and not its Adamic centre. His stillness in section one, his hesitant progress in section two, contrast with the assured, purposeful movement of the water:

> A nimble snout of flood
> licks over stepping stones
> and goes uprooting

The animal image allies the water with the 'Still mammal' watching it; like the leech-gatherer, or Ted Hughes's unrooted Wodwo,[157] he enters the assuaging element of water in search of definition. By the close of the opening section, the reader seems no closer to identifying this figure, although the repeated words, 'sounding' and 'Soundings', are generally taken as pointing to the poet.[158]

The reference to 'lost fields' in the second part, however, emphasises the composite nature of the persona, and begins the poem's shift towards territory as a conferrer and confirmer of identity. If the poem were to be read as an oblique private lyric, then the 'lost fields' might be simply those of childhood; if read as a postmodernist parable, then they could represent the state of alienation. However, given the haunting presence of Yeats in Heaney's work at this period - it might be argued that poem's antediluvianism represents an attempt to fend off 'the brimming flood' and 'blood dimmed tide' of 'The Second Coming'[159] - the phrase almost certainly is intended to evoke Cathleen ni Hoolihan's 'four beautiful green fields', lost to 'strangers', and contains a particular

[157] Ted Hughes, *Wodwo*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p.

[158] Corcoran, p.84, for example, speaks of how 'Heaney's mythologised "I" pushes out of the poem's previous third persons'. *Soundings* later was used by Heaney as the title of an anthology of Irish poetry he edited in 1972 for the Blackstaff Press. In the introduction to this book he writes, '*Soundings* can mean two things: the activity of taking readings of the sea's depth and the area within which this activity is possible. It implies a notion of geographical limits and of exploration of depth within those limits'(p.5) i.e. the very activity he had been engaged on metaphorically in *Wintering Out*.

[159] W.B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p.211.

reference to the lost field of Ulster.[160] (In a near contemporaneous poem, Michael Longley similarly alludes to 'every lost bedraggled field', replete with its hidden cache of 'gelignite and dumdums').[161] If this is granted, the man 'wading' the flood, breaking the 'pane', trying to break out of the pain immersing the land, might be more broadly identified as a northern nationalist. As he looks into the disturbed mirror[162] - the water, memory, the present North, himself - a metaphor of beauty surfaces briefly, only to be displaced; the mud-water bloom changes suddenly into 'a cut swaying/ its red spoors through a basin', a Lacanian translation indicative of the fragmentation occurring in the subject.[163] Disjunctions in the chain of metaphors ('fields'>'pane'>'flower'>'cut'> 'basin'>'atlantis'), irregular, sometimes jarring rhyme and rhythm indicate disturbance, which the remainder of the section and the rest of the text struggle to overcome. Despite the stress on circuitry and circularity generated through the image of the hoop and recurrent 'h', 'p', 'd', 'n' and 'gr' sounds at the close of part two, the surviving impression of the relationship between man and earth is not exactly charged with romance; the land crops only after a process of grubbing and groping.[164]

Significantly for subsequent developments in Heaney's poetics, resolution is 'achieved' in parts three and four of 'Gifts of Rain' by means of myth. Again a backward look provides the initial impetus for the translation the poem endeavours to effect, and music

[160] W.B. Yeats, *Selected Plays* (London: Macmillan 1966), p.250.
[161] Michael Longley, 'Letters: To Three Irish Poets', *Poems 1963-1983*, p.77. Significantly, this section of Longley's poem ends with a muddied 'dim reflection.../...that dissolves'(p.78).
[162] Mirrors figure frequently in colonial and postcolonial discourse as well as in Lacanian psychology. One thinks, for example, of Joyce's 'cracked looking-glass' in the opening chapter of *Ulysses*, or of Jean Rhys's mirror images in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp.38, 147.
[163] See Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', *Écrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan, in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, eds. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh, pp.122-127. In *P*, p.33, Heaney recalls a dream during his stay in California: 'I was shaving at the mirror of the bathroom when I glimpsed in the mirror a wounded man falling towards me with bloodied hands lifted to tear at me or to implore'. This would seem to me a projection of some kind of guilt.
[164] The fumbling images here contrast with the sexual relish voiced in 'Undine', *DD*, p.26.

and meaning combine to transport the reader from a tense present into a securer past, to an 'experience of a totally different order, a 'consciousness that wasn't striving or agitated, but at its ease and with its own conviction and assurance.'[165] Rhythm, syntax, diction and tense convey exhilaration and energy, imply a shared, familiar, regular occurrence:

> When rains were gathering
> there would be an all-night
> roaring off the ford.
> *Their world-schooled* ear
>
> could *monitor* the *usual*
> confabulations, the race
> slabbering past the gable
> the Moyola harping on
>
> its gravel beds. (my italics)

Immediacy is heightened through the use of enjambed lines and repeated participle (-ing') forms. What begins as inchoate - an animal-like 'roaring' - is humanised, translated into accessible text, through images suggestive of story-telling ('confabulations') and music ('harping', 'airs'), which further the illusion of an affinity linking the lyric river to the fluent poet. The lines which follow delight in a sense of abundance and beauty

> all spouts by daylight
> *brimmed* with their own airs
> and *overflowed* each barrel
>
> in long tresses

and perhaps act both as tribute and ironic counterpoint to the words of another poet seeking affirmation in time of civil war. However, the 'slabbering' Moyola and the Heaneys' domestic guttering exist at a far remove from the Yeatsian Arcadia of lush lawns and jetting fountains, where allegedly

> Life overflows without ambitious pains;
> And rains down life until the basin spills,

[165] Friel, *T* in *SP*, p.416.

And mounts more dizzy high the more it rains
As though to choose whatever shape it wills[166]

Given this and the other intertextual allusions, one should perhaps be wary of simply identifying the 'Soft voices of the dead' as belonging exclusively and solely to his Irish forebears.[167] The 'antediluvian lore' the narrator craves *is* connected to an imagined 'pre-colonial'[168] Gaelic past, one which paradoxically exists as an absence, but may also refer to the English and Anglo-Irish literary legacy which fostered Heaney, and which he is loth to disown in the wake of 1969, the North's Year Zero.

Necessarily for morale during this extended season of moral and spiritual famine, 'Gifts of Rain' ends affirmatively. This has been anticipated at the close of the third section, which sets continuing artistic/cultural activity ('*glazing* the *baked clay* floor') against past economic disasters ('crops *rotted*').[169] In part four, however, Heaney marries the potency of metaphor to the transformative power of myth, as his American mentors, Snyder, Bly and Duncan, had done. The Moyola is reincarnated as goddess, an accessible, articulate, self-sufficient deity. Like the dancer in Yeats's 'Among School Children', she symbolises creative unity, the inseparability of composer and score, nature and art, history and contemporaneity, physical and spiritual being. In contrast to Wordsworth, who speaks of the Derwent as 'A tempting Playmate whom we dearly

[166] W.B.Yeats, 'Ancestral Houses' from 'Meditations in Time of Civil War', *Collected Poems*, p.225.
[167] The phrase does, however, seem to echo sentiments in the *Proclamation of the Republic*, 24 April 1916, which addresses 'Irishmen and Irishwomen: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationnhood'. It is reprinted in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, Volume III, ed. Seamus Deane (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), p.733.
[168] Corcoran, p.84.
[169] cf. 'A rich language. A rich literature. You'll find, sir, that certain cultures expend on their vocabularies and syntax acquisitive energies and ostentations entirely lacking in their material lives...It is our responses to mud cabins and a diet of potatoes', Hugh's comments in *Translations*, *SP*, p.418.

lov'd',[170] the images Heaney deploys emphasise the 'adult' relationship he enjoys with his familiar river.[171] Words such as 'consort', 'bedding' and 'mating' prepare the way for the final climactic metaphor, which sees the tawny, sensuous Moyola rising 'to pleasure me'. This fertile, 'swollen' river, though 'wrinkled deep in time',[172] comes to embody a saving grace, a potential 'common ground'; she predates sectarian divisions, is equally at ease beside all of the interlocking farmsteads of South Derry. Like the guttural 'gh' sound at the end of 'Broagh', like the rhyme she restores ('sound'/'ground'), she represents the possibilities of reconciliation, tolerance, a sharing of territory and culture.[173]

These same possibilities are raised within 'The Other Side'. This is a poem which exemplifies some of the findings of Rosemary Harris's research study, *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster* (1972), which illustrated 'how "normal" life and amicable community relations are sustained through joint recognition of the constraints imposed by religious and cultural polarization'.[174] In detailing a number of encounters between a Protestant neighbour and the children of a nationalist family to which its narrator belongs, 'The Other Side' illustrates the difficulties of achieving a *rapprochement*, after centuries of conflict and mutual distrust. The Protestant farmer is initially glimpsed on a border, 'where his lea sloped/ to meet our fallow'. Consistently he is regarded from a

[170] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1850), in *Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, p.498.
[171] Some might argue that the figure of the experienced older woman initiating the 'aggravated young male' into sexual rites belongs more properly in the realms of adolescent fantasy. For a fuller discussion of Heaney's use of gendered images, see Chapter 5.
[172] Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, I, v, line 28. Heaney's positive use of the word 'tawny' contrasts with pejorative usage employed by the Roman, Philo, in describing Cleopatra in I, i, line 6.
[173] Heaney in his commentary on 'Gifts of Rain' for a Faber Poetry Cassette (1982), gives the date of the poem as 1971. Within the context of that year's events, he characterises the poem's final words - and his own longing then for 'common ground' - as 'desperate and pious'.
[174] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, p.582. Foster describes how Rosemary Harris's analysis laid bare the structural and institutionalised divisions within the North in the 1950s. Her study, *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster: A Study of Neighbours and 'Strangers' in a Border Community*, was not published until 1972.

distance, from a child's eye view, and thus made to conform by and large to nationalist expectations of the Other. A looming 'shadow', a '*white*-haired', *black*thorn-carrying ascetic, he is presented as the archetypal Puritan, an upright, 'uptight' soul, rather too smug about his 'promised furrows' and status as one of God's 'chosen'. Fortunately, however, the text outgrows the caricaturisation of its opening, and its own anxieties about one who is *perceived to be* a social, economic and cultural superior. Eamonn Hughes's contention that 'identity must always be formed on terms of intimacy with whatever one chooses to regard as the other',[175] is borne out in the poem's third and final part, in which the farmer comes to call on his Catholic neighbours. The scene stands as one of Heaney's most poignant evocations of a time before violence, of a road not taken. In it the elderly Protestant and the young Catholic meet at a threshold which they would wish to, but lack the confidence to cross:

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

Aptly, the poem ends with an unresolved question. That an initiative has been made is acknowledged, but does the image of the 'grass-seed' imply that a more fertile relationship may develop in the future? Or should one read into it the bleak conclusion that exchanges across the sectarian divide are likely to remain confined to the superficial or politically neutral matters, and unlikely to move on to substantive issues?

It is interesting to compare the closure of 'The Other Side' with that of the John Hewitt poem which partly inspired it. Written in 1956, published in *The Day of the Corncrake*

[175] Hughes, *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland*, pp.3-4.

(1969), 'The Hill Farm' works with a virtually identical cross-sectarian situation, though with a crucial difference; in Hewitt's poem, the narration and focalisation come from a Protestant perspective. Hewitt's persona displays a characteristically complex response to his Catholic neighbours - a mixture of warmth and tact, embarrassment and fear. Words and phrases are pitched against one another, marking alternating feelings of aversion and attraction, from and towards the Catholic Other, their apparent unity, their collective rituals:

> At each Hail Mary, Full of Grace,
> I pictured *every friendly face*,
> clenched in devotion of a kind
> *alien to my breed and mind*,
> *easy* as breathing, *natural*
> as birds that fly, as leaves that fall;
> yet with a sense that I still stood
> *far from* that *faith-based certitude*,
> here *in the vast enclosing night*,
> outside its *little ring of light*.(my emphases)[176]

Like 'The Other Side','The Hill Farm' draws to a close giving prominence to the saying of the rosary, to picturing a circle which, like all circles, defines itself by what it includes and excludes. Despite his stress on the distance between his 'breed and mind' and this 'alien' rite - his 'Here-I-Stand' note - Hewitt's uninitiate pictures it largely in positive terms; one winces at the clichés ('easy as breathing', 'natural/ as birds that fly'), and at the cute charm of the final image ('little ring of light'), yet sense behind the affirmations of difference if not a 'yawning want',[177] then a wish that things were other. Within 'The Other Side' the ambivalence towards the rosary is voiced by an insider, but again at stake is the issue of loyalty to the 'dead generations'.[178] Heaney's young narrator at first talks

[176] *CP Hewitt*, pp.124-5.
[177] ibid, 'Freehold', Part 2:'The Lonely Heart', p.378.
[178] cf. Edmund Burke's concept of society as 'a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born' (*Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968], pp.194-5). See also above, note 167.

of the chain of prayers as 'dragging', as something mournful to be escaped from. Subsequently, however, its 'moan' is eroticised, and linked in the neighbour's and the reader's imaginations to 'lovemaking or a stranger's weeping'. Post-partition, for the Northern Irish Catholic family, the telling of the rosary acquired deeper resonances; to its private, familial, theological functions was added a political one; it served to sustain within the Catholic North a sense of hope and unity, solidarity and resistance, despite the South's betrayal.[179] What underlies both Heaney's riposte and Hewitt's 'original' is a recognition of the deep-rooted, almost insurmountable difficulties that must be overcome if the people of the North are ever to be released from the state of paralysis in which they find or found themselves. Each aspires to dialogue, to some kind of *internal* accommodation, but is held back for fear of being misinterpreted by their own and the other side.

Perhaps the most accomplished piece in the whole of *Wintering Out* is the poem placed at its exact centre, 'The Tollund Man'.[180] A potent combination of myth, historical analogy and intense personal feeling, it has been described as a 'threshold-poem',[181] and is a work which exhibits the depth of Heaney's religious nature and the growing catholicity of his reading. Although it belongs within the long tradition of Catholic iconography, in which appalling suffering is translated into art, its victims into objects of reverence, at the same time it questions the process of aestheticisation, I would suggest, and ultimately finds little consolation in its own myth-making.

[179] Earlier in 'The Hill Farm', Hewitt refers to the 'muffled challenge' of the drawn curtains.
[180] This was first published in *Threshold*, Summer 1970, 5-6.
[181] Edna Longley, *Poetry in the Wars* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1986), p.144.

For Heaney, and for other contemporary writers such as Hughes, Montague, Snyder, Bly and Duncan, myth held a number of significant attractions at this time.[182] It ratified both poet and poems by seeming to embody 'timeless' values; it gave access to 'universal' narratives which could then be employed to interrogate - or more commonly - to castigate the present; and, most importantly, as Clair Wills has suggested,[183] it seemed to open a door back into 'the primitive' regions of the human psyche, thereby enabling the poets and their readers to re-establish contact with some deeper originary human 'essence'. As Heaney himself confessed some seven years after its composition, his imagination settled far more readily on casualties from a distant past than on the all-too-immediate victims of the present:

> My emotions, my feelings, whatever those instinctive energies are that have to be engaged for a poem, those energies quickened more when contemplating a victim, strangely, from 2,000 years ago than they did from contemplating a man at the end of a road being swept up into a plastic bag - I mean the barman at the end of our road tried to carry out a bomb and it blew up. Now there is of course something terrible about that, but somehow language, words didn't live in the way I think they have to live in a poem when they were hovering over that kind of horror and pity. They became, they just became inert, strangely, for me anyway.[184]

---

[182] See above for Berkeley poets' fascination with myth and all things Indian. During the same period Ted Hughes's interest in North American Indian trickster mythology quickened, as can be seen in his controversial sequence, *Crow* (1970). At a conference at the University of Sheffield, *British and Irish Poetry 1945-1997: Community and Consensus*, 15 March 1997, Neil Roberts delivered a lecture in which he drew attention to Hughes's use of these myths as means of striving towards a universality of utterance, while at the same time conveying a sense of the apocalypse in the present moment.

[183] Wills, p.28.

[184] Seamus Heaney, interviewed by Brian Donnelly, in *Seamus Heaney*, ed. Edward Broadbridge (Copenhagen: Danmarks Radio, 1977), p.60. In a comparatively recent interview, Medbh McGuckian describes her strategy for addressing the violence in terms not dissimilar from those deployed by Heaney. After referring to the shooting of a young mother in Belfast, she comments:

> That doesn't inspire me...What inspires me are the things that happen and how you cope with them, or how you make sense of them. What I tend to do is gloss over them, or use poetry to control horror and evil, to make them, not less important, but to put them in their overall context. That's what I'm trying to do, not trying to cover it up, but trying to understand it, especially violent death, death imposed upon one human being by another. (*Sleeping with Monsters*, p.2).

The 'entrancement' Heaney experienced looking for the first time at photographs of the Tollund Man may well have been comparable to that felt by Professor Glob, the distinguished Danish archaeologist, summoned one May evening in 1950 to Bjaeldskov Dal in central Jutland to inspect a body unearthed a few hours earlier by two men digging peat for their winter fires. In his book, *The Bog People*, Glob describes the shock of finding himself 'face to face with an Iron Age man, who twenty millenia before had been deposited in the bog as a sacrifice to the powers that rule men's destinies.'[185] Foremost amongst these powers was the fertility goddess, Nerthus, a North European equivalent of the Mediterranean earth goddesses, Ishtar and Aphrodite. It was for her sake that the Tollund Man endured death by hanging, so that the great ritual drama of the seasons might continue.

Heaney was quick in recognising the poetic potential of Glob's book, in seizing upon its anthropological insights as means for interpreting the present matter of Ireland.[186] In subsequent re-writings of the text, Nerthus undergoes a kind of hibernicisation, and thus becomes a convenient player in what he presents as at root a confrontation between irreconcilable theologies, the native and the foreign:

> 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, whatever; and her sovereignty 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.[187]

[185] Glob, p.20.

[186] From the very first chapter of his study, Glob blends factual description with an evocative use of metaphor in establishing the ambivalence of his subject, translating the Tollund Man into an object of beauty and piety, horror and fear.

[187] 'Feeling into Words', *P*, p.57. Heaney's deployment of gender archetypes within this and other writings will be discussed fully in Chapter 5.

Although a few lines further on he dismisses what he terms as 'the bankrupt psychology and mythologies implicit in the terms Irish Catholic and Ulster Protestant', the binaries he has just replicated within this passage from 'Feeling into Words'(1974) would lead one to conclude that certain discourses are less bankrupt than others; implicit within his references to 'the whole island', to 'indigenous' authority, to 'territorial piety' are ahistorical, but traditional nationalist views that what is a geographical entity ought to be a political one, that land-rights and sovereignty should seized back from the absentees - the *reges* and caesars 'resident...in London' - and restored to the majority population.

By the time of 'Feeling into Words', and in the wake of Bloody Sunday, Heaney had begun to read the conflict principally in terms of 'Ireland' versus 'Britain'. Within 'The Tollund Man', however, attention is still perhaps primarily centred on sectarian violence, and the prayer tentatively voiced that in some miraculous way the contemporary blood-letting in the North might produce renewal and growth.[188] In retrospect, after so many killings and failed initiatives, such optimism appears pious, naive, grotesquely misplaced, but it is worth bearing in mind that the poem originates in one of the earliest phases in the Troubles and that its reverential notes echo those of its source.[189]

Heaney's poem opens quietly. The language is simple. Monosyllables predominate. In the first line where the poet resolves to visit the shrine, the only sound repeated is the 's' at

[188] Before his reading of 'The Tollund Man' on the Faber Poetry Cassette (1982), he talks of how in the poem he had attempted to voice the hope that 'these destructive old passions might in some way be transferred or transmuted into some kind of benign future.'

[189] See, for example, Glob p.18: 'He lay on his damp *bed as though asleep, resting* on his side, the head inclined a little forward, arms and legs bent. His face wore a *gentle* expression - the eyes *lightly* closed, the lips *softly* pursed, *as if in silent prayer*'(my italics). In recompense for their sacrifice and suffering, we are later informed, Nerthus bestowed 'her *blessing*' upon the faces of her husbands, 'and *preserved* them through the millenia'(p.192).

its opening and close. Subsequently in the quatrain a simple pattern of sounds emerges ('s', 'p', 'd', 'i' and 'ɑi'), and a spare and subtle imagery appears. The reference to the '*mild pods* of his eye-lids' establishes the gentleness of the face, which Glob had commented upon, and connects an adjective frequently associated with Christ and a noun introducing the fertility motif. The image of the 'winter seeds' in verse two consolidates this idea, but by this timea starker, bleaker note has been sounded, partly by means of the diction ('flat', 'dug', 'gruel', 'Caked'), partly through the use of alliteration (the harsh stops 'k' and 'g' and the fricative 's'). Empathy increases with the disclosure that he is, to all intents and purposes, naked, a fact which stresses his defencelessness and prepares us for his dual role as groom and victim. (The cap and girdle can hardly be said to constitute clothing. Though they might form part of the nuptial attire, the intrusive noose certainly does not.) The unequal marriage between the mortal and the goddess proves proves durable, despite the contrariness in her nature.[190] She constricts, releases ('tightened', 'opened'), maintains a soft spot for the man she keeps and for the creative process ('working/ Him to a saint's kept body'). Swift and deadly in her embrace, as the alliterated 't's suggest, she is generous in her choice of wedding gift, and, in the long term, constant in her sexual favours. Her torc, the plaited noose, is, according to Glob, 'the pass which carries him over the threshold of death',[191] and her 'dark juices' confer immortality.

Part One of the poem ends as it began, *pianissimo*. This effect is achieved by means of a succession of 's' and 'z' sounds, and through the strategic placing of 'Reposes' at the heart of the final couplet and its near-rhyming with Aarhus.

[190] Friel would later portray both tragic and comic exogamous relationships in *Translations*.
[191] Glob, p.166.

Heaney's Tollund Man seems at this stage a modest, unassuming saint, in comparison to the magnetic, transcendent figure of Glob's imagination, whose 'majestic head astonishes the beholder and rivets his attention. Dark in hue, the head is still full of life and more beautiful than the best portraits of the world's greatest artists, since it is the man himself we see.'[192] For the Danish archaeologist, his subject embodies the triumph of nature over art, while for the Irish poet he is potentially an active spiritual entity, capable of restoring sanctity and sanity to a now unholy ground. Consequently, in the dramatic opening of Part Two, Heaney contemplates an appeal to the man to intercede for Ireland. At first he hesitates over the propriety of such an action, which in effect would elevate the anonymous pagan to the communion of saints, then decides the risk may be worth taking since the 'cauldron bog' may yield a benign outcome. In contrast to the almost 'civilised' ritual killings of Iron Age Jutland, which at least could claim the dignity of a religious purpose, he cites an incident from the 1920s which, like more recent atrocities, illustrates the barbarity to which some of the 'Christian' inhabitants of Ireland have descended. 'Part of the folk-lore of where I grew up', it concerns four Catholic brothers 'massacred by Protestant paramilitaries', whose bodies 'had been trailed along the railway lines, over the sleepers as a kind of mutilation;'[193] an entire generation from one family had been wiped out so that their land could not be passed on. Whereas the Tollund Man was forewarned of his death, may even have accepted its justification, and left physically intact by his 'executors', the young brothers were 'ambushed', slaughtered for no

[192] ibid, p.36.

[193] Faber Poetry Cassette. Kevin Boyle and Tom Hadden, in *Ireland: A Positive Proposal*, p.59, state that 'In the period from 1921 to 1924 some 2,000 suspects were interned without trial. Between June 1920 and June 1922 over 400 people were killed, either by security forces or by irregular paramilitaries on either side.'

conceivable 'common good',[194] reduced to fragments and flecks. The horror of this dismemberment is intensified when Heaney writes of their 'Stockinged corpses', an image which makes them appear even younger. In comparison with the serene, almost painless, loving demise of the Iron Age man, these contemporary acts of sadism and brutality seem all the more appalling.

In the course of recreating the scene at Aarhus and at the edge of the fen, the narrator has increasingly become bonded to his subject moved by the apparent 'stillness' of history. Despite his consciousness that a huge timespan and vast difference in destiny separate him from the Tollund Man - this is signalled by part three's initial phrase - he perseveres with the bold comparison:

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

Sombre rhythms and sounds anticipate the meeting of the dispirited son with his adopted father. Each of the above lines is weighted with a trochee ('*free*dom', '*tum*bril', '*dri*ving'), burdened by alliteration ('s', 'd', 'm'), assonance ('freedom', he', 'me'), internal rhyme ('tumbril', 'come') and near-rhyme ('sad', 'rode'). From Glob the poet would have been aware that Nerthus's chosen one was probably transported on his final journey in a highly ornate wagon,[195] yet Heaney chooses the word 'tumbril' for this vehicle, a choice of diction which itself has the effect of bridging time. One pictures the Danish sacrificial victim as a lonely French aristocrat en route to the guillotine. Motoring through a foreign country hardly seems a comparable experience, an adequate 'objective

---

[194] 'Kinship', *N*, p.45.
[195] Glob, pp.168-70.

correlative', yet the poem successfully conveys 'Something of' the isolation, the vulnerability, the exposure. These feelings are enacted by reciting the alien place-names,[196] evoked by the 'pointing hands' and their implied threat. Added to this is the sense of exclusion which would come from 'Not knowing their tongue'. Rather than freeing the him from disorientation and his present desolation, ironically the mythic, imagined pilgrimage ends confirming them.[197] After living in Belfast under the shadow of immanent death, 'the old man-killing parishes' of Jutland would seem familiar territory, a 'home from home'. Hugh Haughton's comments on the word, 'home', within his discussion of contemporaneous work by Derek Mahon, might equally be applied to the work of other Northern Irish poets including Heaney. It is a signifier that no longer embodies safety; 'it is intimately related to dereliction and violence'.[198]

This is borne out within the last two clusters of poems to be considered, the domestic lyrics and what one might term the 'documentary' poems, in which Heaney tries to address the immediacies of the present. His decision to delve further into the possibilities of myth may well have arisen from the difficulties he experienced in wresting from the contemporary urban context 'images and symbols adequate to our predicament'.[199]

---

[196] Friel creates a similar melancholy effect through his use of the place-name at the closure of *Translations*:

> HUGH: Ballybeg. Burnfoot. King's Head. White Plains. Fair Hill. Dunboy. Green Bank.
> (OWEN snatches the book from HUGH)
> OWEN: I'll take that... It's only a catalogue of names (*SP*, p.444).

[197] The moment reminds one of *Station Island*'s closure, leaving the reader at 'the font of exhaustion' (p.121).

[198] Hugh Haughton, '"Even now there are places where a thought might grow": Place and Displacement in the Poetry of Derek Mahon', *The Chosen Ground*, ed. Neil Corcoran (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1992), p.100. Haughton's sub-title nods to the title of Heaney's Peter Laver Memorial Lecture of 2 August 1984, *Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry of Northern Ireland*, published by the Trustees of Dove Cottage, Grasmere, in which he also discusses Mahon's work. It is pertinent to note that the first section of *The Rough Field*, bears the ironic title 'Home Again'.

[199] *P*, p.56.

His ambitious five-part sequence, 'A Northern Hoard', demonstrates this point; in it he struggles to maintain his gaze and the reader's focus on the present. The poem's epigraph, derived from 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', immediately invites one to approach Belfast and 1971 by way of Nether Stowey and 1798, the year which saw the collapse of Coleridge's hopes for the French Revolution. Like the mariner, Heaney's paralysed, powerless narrator inhabits a world of ghostly beings, ghastly sights. However, whereas for Coleridge's exile repetition serves as a means to redemption, for Heaney's there is no absolution; his is a narrative without prospect of closure.

One of the weaknesses of the sequence lies in the diversity of its allusions, and the incongruous juxtapositions that result. 'All shifts dreamily', he writes in 'Roots', except the images of time and place and movement. Readers are put through their paces, dodging 'clucking gas' in 'old Gomorrah'('Roots'), glimpsing victims of a plague, huddled in a 'pow-wow'('Stump'). Again Yeatsian 'tidal blood' makes its appearance, but this time in conjunction with an Audenesque - or is it a Montaguean? - 'fault'.[200]

From the perspective of the late 1990s, Heaney's emphasis in 'A Northern Hoard' on his personal burden of culpability seems excessive. Lines such as, 'I've soaked by moonlight in tidal blood'('Roots'), 'I deserted/...Must I crawl back now'('No Man's Land'), 'I'm cauterized, a black stump of home'('Stump'), can be seen as giving too little attention to the victims of atrocities - 'the lumpy dead' of 'No Man's Land' - and too much space to

[200] 'The Fault' is the title of *The Rough Field*'s fifth section. Comparable images of seismic, psychic and social division occur in the opening of Michael Longley's 'Letters', 'Blood on the kerbstones, and my mind/ Dividing like a pavement,/ Cracked by the weeds, by the green grass/ That covers our necropolis' (*Poems 1963- 1983*, p.78). Similarly Trevor McMahon's 'Breaking' speaks of how now 'Only the snow exists/ fractured,/ remaining throughe the breaking of/ tribes' (*WB*, p.2).

the writer's examination of conscience. Yet these agonised, guilty reactions to the early phases of the violence are not wholly untypical. In 'Where are My People Now?', one finds the Falls-born, but newly-bourgeois Michael Brophy beating his breast, accusing himself of betraying class, faith and nation:

> State-educated,
> Carefully creamed off,
> Cultivated by Stormont,
> Until now in the suburbs,
> With my Methodist neighbours,
> My mortgage and
> Oath of Allegiance job;
>
> I sit in my neat new
> Government subsidy, semi-detached
> And watch the riot squad
> Baton charge down the Falls,
> See my friends and relations
> With black blood on their faces
> And their cracked open skulls.[201]

Michael Longley, in a previously-cited article from November 1969, 'Strife and the Ulster Poet', similarly censures himself and other middle-class liberals for their 'civic inactivity', accepting 'as I must, the criticism of the slogan "Malone Road fiddles while the Falls Road burns."'[202]

Looking to the future, Longley stresses his personal commitment to a poetry which will be 'in the broadest sense...political',[203] to an oppositional aesthetic which would confront violence and injustice. Not surprisingly, Longley is imprecise about what the form and direction this new poetry might take, though one suspects from the article's conclusion that his thinking would be very much in line with that of Auden at the close of

[201] *WB*, pp.24-5. At the time Brophy was the Head of Science in an Anderstown school.
[202] Michael Longley, 'Strife and the Irish Poet', 11. The Heaneys lived just off the Malone Road during their time in Belfast, at 11 Malone Avenue.
[203] ibid.

'September 1, 1939' - 'All I have is a voice/ To undo the folded lie', 'We must love one another or die'[204] - and with Heaney's later call for 'a refinement of feelings' in the North, a poetry that makes things happen.[205]

The most effective sections of 'A Northern Hoard' are the final two, which witness a significant shift from first person singular to first person plural. It is in 'Tinder' that the poet achieves most success, for here he opts for a relatively simple and coherent parable.. The poem opens with a seemingly innocuous boyhood memory; some boys are collecting pieces of flint, trying to make fire. Within the space of a few lines these flints become transformed into 'Cold beads of history and home', a rosary of martyrs and disasters from nationalist mythology, an orthodoxy which the poem's narrator is beginning to question. The obsessive fingering of shards from the past is viewed as spiritually disabling; in trying to raise a spark, the boys in the past - like 'the boys' in the present? - inflict wounds upon themselves, 'our knuckle joints/ Striking as often as the flints'. The legacy of almost fifty years of 'shrunken hope' is apparent on the city streets. *Anagnorisis* has arrived through the medium of arson attacks, bombings, and shootings, an 'unhallowed light'('No Sanctuary'). What was once a fertile island - like Golding's, like Friel's - has been desecrated, has become 'cankered ground'('Veteran's Dream); exterior and interior landscapes have been reduced to scorched sites of 'cinder' and 'ash'. Worse is to come. The poem imagines a new Age of Ice,[206] succeeding the

---

[204] *W.H. Auden: Selected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p.88.

[205] Seamus Heaney, Editor's Note to *Soundings* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1972), p.6:

> 'Finally I disagree that "poetry makes nothing happen". It can eventually make new feelings, or feelings about feelings, happen, and anybody can see that in this country for a long time to come a refinement of feelings will be more urgent than a re-framing of policies or of constitutions.'

[206] The Ice Age analogy is similarly deployed in the poem by Trevor McMahon already cited - see above note 199 - and in Michael Longley's poem, 'The North', from *Lares* (Woodford Green: Poet & Printer, 1972), p.13: 'There are no landmarks round here,/ Only immeasurable shifts/ Of the snow, frozen eddies/ To guide us home. Snow and ice/ Turn us into eskimoes.../ We die walking in circles'.

holocaust; survivors 'squat'[207] like animals, 'Red-eyed' from insomnia, grief, guilt or blood-lust. Seemingly 'fighting had become its own justification, and they could not stop'.[208]

The desolate couplets with which 'A Northern Hoard' concludes are prefigured in *Wintering Out*'s dedicatory poem, a late addition to the collection, composed shortly after Heaney's return from America.[209] 'This morning from a dewy motorway' succinctly and successfully depicts the renewed sense of siege within the nationalist community following the introduction of internment. Oppression in the present is set within existing paradigms; Northern Irish Catholic history is again represented as a narrative of suffering, as a continuation of the (closureless) national narrative. In contrast to John Montague who alludes to documentary film as a means of naturalising the latest siege of Derry, of presenting it as the inevitable sequel to earlier Irish reels:

> once again, it happens,
> like an old Troubles film,
> run for the last time.[210]

Heaney invokes a sense of *déjà vu* in his readers by evoking images from post-war *British* feature films. Having taken great care to describe the scene from his windscreen - the new camp, the bomb crater, the machine gun posts, the 'real stockade' - he then challenges its authenticity. As Andrew Murphy points out, there is 'an air of unreality'[211]

---

[207] cf. Derek Mahon's ironic lines from 'Entropy', *Lives*, p.31, which refrain from apocalyptics : 'We have pared life to the bone/ And squat now/ In the firelight reading/ Gibbon and old comics'.

[208] Doris Lessing, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (first ed. Cape, 1971; St Albans: Panther, 1972), p.85. At this point in the novel Lessing depicts a bloody struggle being fought out on earth between rival species of Rat-Dogs.

[209] The reference to the internment camp suggests that the poem dates from August-September 1971. According to Faber and Faber, the manuscript of *Wintering Out* arrived on September 30, 1971.

[210] 'A New Siege', *RF*, p.71.

[211] Murphy, p.29.

about the internment camp; it is likened to a representation, to the prisoner-of-war camps one sees in films such as *The Wooden Horse*, *The Great Escape* or *Colditz*:[212]

> *There was that white mist you get on a low ground*
> *and it was déjà vu, some film made*
> *of Stalag 17, a bad dream with no sound.*

The analogy also has the effect of encouraging the reader to equate the regime responsible for internment with that of Nazi Germany. In retrospect such a comparison can be seen as false, as ludicrous, though its currency reveals a great deal about the mindset of many in the nationalist community at the time and since, and the degree of their alienation.[213]

In the last stanza a characteristic shift occurs, in which the narrator-poet ceases to represent himself as a detached, solitary observer. What prompts his recognition of the affinities between his position and that of some larger, unvoiced, but articulate group, is a text:

> *Is there a life before death? That's chalked up*
> *on a wall downtown.*

It is a sentiment that Beckett's Molloy would have no problem in endorsing.[214] However, for the narrator the importance of this text is that it offers access to a silenced Other, a class Other, whose actuality the poet seeks to, or perhaps, presumes to represent.

---

212 Corcoran, p.72, mistakenly identifies Stalag 17 as 'a concentration camp'.

213 Padraic Fiacc uses the same analogy in 'Credo Credo', a poem discussed in Chapter 1. In a recent lecture, Richard Kirkland has drawn attention to the exploitation of the holocaust analogy within the loyalist writings. The narrator of 'Our Way' by Sam Duddy - once dubbed the UDA's official poet - makes an equation between the situation of the Protestant working-class and that of the Jews led quietly into the gas-chambers. The poem comes from his collection, *Concrete Whirlpools of the Mind*, Belfast: Ulidia Press, 1983.

214 Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, in *The Beckett Trilogy* (London: Picador, 1979), p.63:.'Yes, the confusion of my ideas on the subject of death was such that I sometimes wondered, believe me or not, if it wasn't a state of being even worse than life.'

Significantly the final line begins with 'we', and depicts the nationalist minority as an unproblematic entity, sharing a common destiny, 'Huddled...in a ring'.[215] Although one one can read the closure as an affirmation of solidarity, one detects traces again of a critique of Catholic ideology, in particular its repressive and masochistic tendencies.[216]

Curiously, several of the most astute commentators on Heaney's work have tended to ignore Part Two of *Wintering Out*, which contains several outstanding lyric poems, which indirectly comment on political matters. Blake Morrison dismisses it as a 'disappointment', and damns its poems as 'memorable only for the occasional image';[217] Henry Hart ignores it altogether, while Bernard O'Donoghue refers only to two poems in passing, and then only because they strike him as 'Muldonian'.[218] The opening poems in the book's second half, 'Wedding Day' and 'Mother of the Groom', relocate the reader in private spaces, and in effect re-wind some defining moments from home movies. Instead of the romance of the 'happy event', the camera lingers on darker moments; whereas 'Wedding Day' is marked by an outpouring of feeling, suffused with images of strain and distress, 'Mother of the Groom' deals in emotional containment, as its subject struggles to come to terms with 'her voided lap', 'a daughter welcomed', a hold broken.[219]

---

[215] 'Tinder', 'A Northern Hoard', *WO*, p.43.

[216] These will be subsequently addressed in such poems as 'Freedman'(*N*, pp.61-2), 'From the Canton of Expectation'(*HL*, pp.46-7), and 'A Sofa in the Forties' (*SL*, pp.7-9). Bernard Mac Laverty's novel, *Cal*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), written at the time of the hunger strike campaign, similarly targets this aspect of Catholicism. The story of Matt Talbot and his chains serves as an analogue for Cal McCluskey's protracted, self-inflicted suffering.

[217] Morrison, pp.47-8.

[218] O'Donoghue, pp.66-7.

[219] For a fuller discussion of these poems, see Michael Parker, *Seamus Heaney*, pp.109-10.

Immediately following on from these poems is one which has been justly praised for its painful insights and masterful technique.[220] 'Summer Home' reveals the poet's growing confidence in his ability to 'control and manipulate experience',[221] to access bitter, private experience and transmute it into Art. Like *A Winter's Tale*, Heaney's poem is a journey in five acts from sin to chastened redemption, an exposé of male guilt, female subjection. It opens dramatically, marrying intimacy and artistry, addressing both wife and readers:

> Was it wind off the dumps
> or something in heat
>
> dogging us, the summer gone sour,
> a fouled nest incubating somewhere?

Immediately one is made conscious that something, as yet unnamed, is afflicting the marital state. Rhythm, sound and imagery combine to evoke a stifling atmosphere. The regularity established in the first line by the two anapestic feet (◡ ◡ /) is suddenly disrupted in the second by that 'something', and thereafter strong stresses stalk the verse at will. There is dense use of alliteration ('w', 'd', 'm', 'n', 'g', 'ng', 's') and assonance ('o', 'ɪ', 'ʌ', 'aʊ'). These vowel rhymes are embedded in images with unpleasant associations, which snake from one line to the next ('dumps'/'something', 'in heat/ dogging us', ''sour'/'fouled'). The question, 'Whose fault', generates a brief moment of self-questioning. Self-satisfaction, self-possession are implicit in his description of himself as an 'inquisitor', though the word's grandness is somewhat deflated when we learn that

220 See Terence Brown, 'Four New Voices: Poets of the Present', *Northern Voices: Poets from Ulster* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), p.185, and Philip Hobsbaum, 'Craft and Technique in *Wintering Out*', in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. Tony Curtis (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1985), pp.37-43. Brown comments on the poem's explicitness, the 'sadistic cruelty and masochistic ambivalence about pain' it contains, a view which accords with my own feeling that Heaney's Catholicism is a complex matter that can easily be, and frequently is, misunderstood.

221 Sylvia Plath, interviewed by Peter Orr, *The Poet Speaks*, The British Council, 1963.

he is interrogating air. It is only when he stares downwards - and inwards? - that he is able to discover the source of evil, though not his responsibility for its presence. With frenetic energy, he endeavours to purge away his 'larval' enemies, his 'scald', 'scald', 'scald', recalling Lear's manic 'kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill'.[222]

After this dramatic conclusion to act one, act two begins with a framed portrait. Hoping to say it with flowers, the narrator gathers an abundance of 'wild cherry and rhododendron', as if this gesture alone might restore harmony, and enable him to cross thresholds. Instead he is greeted by the sound of his wife's distress, 'her small lost weeping'. Though reduced by grief, her voice, amplified by the hallway, challenges his largeness and largesse. The appositeness of the rhyme connecting 'my name' with 'blame' strikes home. His wife's tears, like Cordelia's, initiate a process of restoration. In addition, Catholic imagery and ritual are enlisted in an effort to re-compose the sacred and secular union, as the male voice again seeks to re-take the initiative.[223] 'The loosened flowers', like her 'frank and falling' tears, might 'taint', he warns, if they should fail to 'Attend. Anoint the wound'. However, the male narrator's determination to will a resolution to the conflict, to 'gather in', is undermined by the presence of images he has himself chosen, 'falling', 'taint' and 'wound'.

That the original sin which caused division cannot be so easily forgotten is evident in part three. Attempts at making love, to tent the wound, leave them 'winded', a word which beats its way back to the poem's initial disturbed image. Under the 'homely sheet', the

[222] Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act IV, vi, 189.
[223] Heaney refers to the Catholic custom of arranging a May altar of flowers in honour of the Virgin Mary in 'The Poet as a Christian', *The Furrow*, 29:10, p.605.

'cold flat of a blade' is discovered, as in some Greek tragedy. Further purification rites are deemed necessary, but instead of these 'healings' we are presented with another kind of violence, with the male gaze translating woman into an aesthetic object. Although the lines

> as you bend in the shower
> water lives down the tilting stoups of your breasts

can be regarded as celebratory - they suggest an almost symbiotic relationship between woman and water - they could equally be read as reductive and voyeuristic. The woman's body is tilted in order to titillate; the only physical feature he names is her breasts; having enjoyed her, he desexualises her, by comparing her breasts with 'stoups', vessels used containing holy-water.

Even when in part four a sexual climax is achieved, 'a final/ unmusical drive', it brings neither gratitude nor gratification, and at the outset of the final section the pair appear as far away as ever from ending their discord.[224] The atmosphere of unhappiness and estrangement has claimed further victims, their children, but at least now the narrator can identify the source of 'foulness'. Honesty prevents him from imposing a cosy resolution on the poem, yet in the last lines there is a reaching out towards some better state. Like the native maize and vine, the couple must shoulder their 'burden' of growth, subject it to the scrutiny of light. In the concluding lines, however, the poem, like its narrative voice, turns back to the dark 'that wombed me',[225] and to finding figures in the cave:

> Yesterday rocks sang when we tapped
> Stalactites in the cave's old dripping dark -
> Our love calls tiny as a tuning fork.[226]

---

[224] In 'Somnambulist', WO, p.63, Heaney again juxtaposes startlingly images of weeping and sexual activity: 'he came back weeping/ to unstarch the pillow/ and freckle her sheets/ with tiny yolk'.
[225] 'Antaeus', *N*, p.12.
[226] A possible literary source for the stalactite and womb images may have been Sylvia Plath's poem, 'Nick and the Candlestick', *Ariel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), pp.40-1. The poem similarly

The cave functions both as a physical location - it is an actual point of reference where the couple shared a sense of the sublime - and as a symbol of sexual unity. It also enables them to regain a sense of perspective, of their place in the scale of creation. The delicate, resonant image of the 'tuning fork' prompts a renewed search for the right note, its tiny fragile sound, its 'short-pitched ring',[227] a counterpoint to the 'small lost weeping' of his wife and children in II and V. Interestingly, Heaney would later re-deploy the image when discussing Wordsworth, talking of the poet as 'a living tuning fork planted between wood and hill.'[228] Certainly 'Summer Home' has travelled a long way from the perturbed free verse of its opening to the *nearly* regular rhythms and half-rhymes of its close. Perhaps the slightly jarring effect of that last 'dark'/'fork' rhyme implies that the healing, like language, is never complete. In the meantime the poem exists to assuage, to 'Anoint the wound'.[229]

With our foreknowledge of later poems such as 'Act of Union' and 'Punishment', it is tempting to interpret the gendered oppositions of 'Summer Home' as on some level 'political'. Summers have regularly 'gone sour' in Ulster,[230] and the use of the word 'home' within the title might well encourage the reader to draw parallels between guilts and recriminations, hauntings and catharses, in domestic and public spheres. When in

---

'Nick and the Candlestick', *Ariel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), pp.40-1. The poem similarly sets off the innocence of children against the guilt of parents.

[227] 'The Forge', *DD*, p.19.

[228] 'The Makings of a Music', *P*, p.70.

[229] John Montague's 'Summer Storm', from *Tides* (1971), resembles Heaney's 'Summer Home' in certain superficial respects. Marital conflict, 'accusation &/ counter accusation', is signalled from the outset; in the middle section the intensity of the heat is emphasised, a couple find some kind of external outlet for their anger and perhaps their thwarted lovemaking by crushing, rather than scalding insects. The third and final section, 'Tides', achieves a resolution in which the woman is represented as the more powerful entity: 'we begin to make/ love quietly, bodies/ turning like fish/ in obedience to/ the pull & tug/ of your great tides'(*CP Montague*, pp.242-3).

[230] One thinks, for example, of 1969, 1970, 1971, and the Drumcree events of 1996.

1969 Michael Longley asserted that 'Anything I may write in the future is bound to be influenced by the recent turmoil',[231] he was not only speaking for himself.

Although at first sight 'Limbo' and 'Bye-Child' appear to be exclusively concerned with particular private tragedies, they similarly lend themselves to interpretation as parables telling of the present state of Ireland and the latest phase in its spiritual and moral paralysis. Rather than risk ostracism, the unmarried mothers of 'Limbo' and 'Bye Child' attempt to hide their 'sin' from the world's prying eyes, one by drowning her new-born baby, the other by confining her child in a hen-house. These could be viewed as updated *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, which, like Blake's poems, expose the inhumanity behind the so-called 'moral law' established by the dominant ideology. The forgiveness shown by Christ to the woman taken in adultery, and to other transgressors, would seem to have no place in twentieth-century Ireland, North or South.[232]

The protagonists in both poems are victims, frightened and confused human beings, caught in an in-between condition, neither one thing nor another. In 'Limbo', the woman/mother's killing of the baby is simultaneously a criminal act of self-interest and a perverse act of love, for if the child had survived it too would be stigmatised. Heaney's stunningly effective choice of the word 'tenderly' forces the reader to probe deeper into this not extraordinary narrative, to ask how culpable was she. Some of the responsibility for this murder of an innocent lies clearly with the whole community, not to mention the unmentioned father. Self-righteous, intolerant, sadistic, unforgiving, it is the absent signifiers, the good people of the parish, who in effect rub fresh salt into the wounds of

[231] Michael Longley, 'Strife and the Ulster Poet', art. cit, 11.
[232] Heaney returns to the issue of sexual betrayal in 'Punishment', which is fully discussed in Chapter 5.

the Saviour they claim to serve. 'Limbo' can thus be read as exemplifying the thesis put forward in Heaney's short article 'King of the Dark', which preceded it in an edition of *The Listener* from February 1970:

> Somehow the dark presides in the Irish Christian consciousness. But not as a primeval womb which we shall re-enter: it is something more negative. I think of those statues of St Patrick that you find in Irish churches: St Patrick banishing the snakes from Ireland. The snakes are the emblems of evil, perhaps, the satanic worms who poisoned Eden, and Patrick is the hero ridding the country. But in another way Patrick's staff could be seen as a spade that's planting the sense of evil in the country. The snakes are frigid at the foot of his crozier. Certain life forces have been paralysed.[233]

'Bye-Child' appears almost optimistic in comparison with the poem it faces, in spite of the cruelty it accommodates. This is another of Heaney's restorative myths. His initial encounter with the henhouse boy - like his first sighting of 'The Tollund Man' - came through the medium of a photograph accompanying a newspaper article, one presumes. According to this source text, cited in the poem's epigraph, the child's short life-time had consisted solely of continuous physical and emotional deprivation,

> *He was discovered in the henhouse*
> *where she had confined him. He was*
> *incapable of saying anything*

and yet, according to the poem's mediating voice, his imagination has enabled him to transcend his 'Kennelled' cell, his 'canine'[234] conditioning. 'Sharp-faced', rodent-like, when first 'Glimpsed' in stanza two, the boy is carefully re-written during the remainder of the text. Like several of the subjects of Heaney's bog poems, he is retrieved for humanity, but at a certain cost, the cost of being translated into an icon.[235] The 'faithful',

---

[233] 'King of the Dark', 'Limbo' and an uncollected poem, 'Elegy for a Postman', appear in *The Listener*, 5 February 1970, 181-2. 'Bye-Child' was published in *Twelve to Twelve* (Camden Festival, 1970).
[234] 'Tinder', 'A Northern Hoard', *WO*, p.44.
[235] On completing my analysis, I discovered that Edna Longley comes to very similar conclusions about the relationship of these poems to 'The Tollund Man'. See '"Inner Emigre" or "Artful Voyeur": Seamus Heaney's *North*', in *Poetry in the Wars*, p.145.

'frail', 'luminous', 'weightless' ascetic of stanzas three and four, who receives his frugal meals through a trapdoor and whose life is a continuum of 'Vigils, solitudes, fasts', achieves a kind of transfiguration in the last verse, a 'haunt/..well out, beyond'.[236] He has journeyed 'beyond patience', beyond the limitations of human 'love' and language, and discovered in the still and changing moon values - constancy, fullness, grace, loveliness - in short supply on earth.

The moon serves as the presiding symbol in the final poem of *Wintering Out*, 'Westering', which garners together a number of its richest images. In its quest for 'common ground', the collection has ranged over landscapes (rural and urban), place-names, linguistics, history and myth, yet struggled to secure a sense of shelter anywhere. Homesick in California, sitting under a paper moon - the handiwork of Rand McNally, cartographer and fellow Irish exile - the poem's narrator sends out his spirit on a journey back in time to Donegal. Initially his recall of his last night in the West of Ireland provides reassurance. The home moon lent a sense of definition, illuminating 'The cobbles of the yard', transmuting them into 'pale..eggs'. Yet set against the emotions these intimately known spaces and objects inspire is his exhilaration at the prospect of going to America. This he likens to 'a free fall', one of those ambivalent images which Heaney has such a fondness for. The thought of being exposed to a different element, a different culture excites him, but the word 'fall' also carries theological associations. Although he experiences a truant pleasure in travelling on a Good Friday, in leaving behind the 'still churches' and their 'congregations bent/ To the studded crucifix', at the

[236] 'Casualty', *FW*, p.24.

same time some part of him feels unease at his separation, his exclusion. He resents being reduced to the status of a 'shadow', or merely 'A dwindling interruption'.

Like John Donne in his poem, 'Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward', Heaney is in two minds; or rather as a material being he is pulled in one direction, as a creature of conscience, with intense cultural and religious loyalties he is pulled in another. Though 'carryed towards the West', Donne's soul 'bends towards the East'. He too would like to avoid the harrowing vision of Christ on the Cross,

> Yet dare I almost be glad, I do not see
> That spectacle of too much weight for mee.[237]

Attempting to find relief from the pain of exile, like the bye-child, Heaney's narrator turns to the moon as a site of serenity. Yet its surface too is marked by stigmata. Much as he would like to imagine an Ireland of 'untroubled dust', a situation of lessening 'gravity', reason tells him this is just another American dream. Even when seemingly 'freed' from his cross, Heaney still feels the weight on his hands. After the prolonged search for symbols of comfort, hope, transcendence, the eager quest for myths of restoration, unoriginally he falls back on an originary sign, the cross, which denotes the pain of the crucified North and his difficulties in voicing it.

Given the prevalence of critics who attempt to de-problematise Heaney's complex relationship with Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular, it is perhaps appropriate at this point to consider this question. Just as in discussions of his 'politics', all too frequently poems or prose pronouncements are cited, adduced as evidence of a

[237] John Donne, *Selected Poems*, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p.174.

position, often regardless of the context, the whens, wheres and in what circumstances. Sometimes, however, detailed analysis is not deemed necessary, and the troubled dialogic, the subtle plays of tension, the verbal ambiguities, are simply overlooked. Henry Hart, for example, seems keen to present a Heaney who is smartly secularised by the early seventies. Is it true that the poet in 'The Forge' merely 'intimates correspondences between his blacksmith and God, then retracts them'? Does one conclude from 'Heaney's pastorals' that 'Christian concepts provide little balm'? That *Stations* illustrates how 'for centuries the Christian cross has inspired rancorous division rather than divine unity'?[238] In an earlier book, *Seamus Heaney: A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems 1965-75*, Nicholas McGuinn informs less well-read readers that, 'It is because Heaney feels that Christianity is at best irrelevant and at worst a force for harm that he rarely refers to it in *Wintering Out*'.[239] Yet if Christianity and Christian allusion did indeed hold neither relevance or moral force, why would it feature in so many of the collection's major poems?

When, in an article from November 1970, Derek Mahon, claimed that Heaney was a Catholic who was a poet, rather than '*a Catholic poet*',[240] he was mistaken, since he was implying that a distinction might exist between something called artistic sensibility and cultural/ religious affiliations. In fact, Catholicism permeated and continues to permeate both Heaney's poetic consciousness and its vocabulary; his is a poetry of ritual supplication, his habits those of awe, guilt, humility, piety, responsibility, grace, benediction. The religious concepts, icons, metaphors and allusions with which his work

---

[238] Hart, pp.36, 30, 6.

[239] Nicholas McGuinn. *Seamus Heaney: A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems 1965-75* (Leeds: Arnold-Wheaton, 1986), p.68.

[240] Derek Mahon, 'Poetry in Northern Ireland', *Twentieth Century Studies*, November 1970, pp.89-93.

is suffused cannot be dismissed simply as the products of nostalgia, as the detritus of a belief-system long since abandoned. His attachment to the Marian culture of his Mossbawn childhood remains constant and intense, though one detects in certain volumes over the years an increasingly sceptical, critical stance towards the operation of the Catholic-Nationalist axis beyond the home.

For Heaney, as for Friel, Catholicism provided 'the blueprint' of identity.[241] However, during the late sixties and early seventies, under the impact of the political events in the North and processes of secularisation, social and intellectual change beyond it, both writers came to recognise that what might have been a highly enabling factor in their personal literary development might have profoundly disabling effects and repercussions within the broader communities in which they lived and worked. Antagonism towards the Church and the Nationalist Party for their failure to give political, social and spiritual leadership is perhaps more prominent in Friel's plays than in Heaney's poems, but that is not to say that it is a minor element in the latter. After decades of defeatism, abstentionism, repression, discrimination, unemployment and poverty, it was not surprising that they and their fellow Catholics should seize so eagerly on the possibilities of a different narrative promised by the Civil Rights Movement, which for a while filled a vacuum created by the inadequacies of their own leaders and those of their Unionist masters.

[241] Heaney employs this image both in his article, 'The Poet as a Christian', *The Furrow*, 29:10, October 1978, 604, and in his interview with Frank Kinahan, *Critical Inquiry*, 8:3, Spring 1982, 408.

Heaney's relatively secure rural upbringing and glittering educational career might tempt one to question his credentials for the part of 'aggravated young Catholic male';[242] his experiences would have been very different from that of disadvantaged working-class youngsters growing up in the Bogside, the Falls or Ballymurphy. Although he came to be appalled by the extreme violence which flared up there, he certainly understood the rage which gave rise to it. Internment, sectarian killings, deteriorating relations between the British Army and the nationalist community, particularly following Bloody Sunday, increasingly impelled him to identify with his co-religionists, to 'side with his own side',[243] but also encouraged him to pursue other modes of feeling, perception, interpretation, *in addition to* Catholic and Christian ones, hence the attractions of pre-Christian, mythic material and of Jungian thought. How appropriate or adequate these modes were for addressing the state of Northern Ireland between 1971-1975 will form much of the matter of a later chapter.

---

[242] 'Unhappy and at Home', interview with Seamus Deane, *The Crane Bag*, I:1, 1977, 61.
[243] Author's interview with Harry Chambers, 9 March, 1985.

CHAPTER FOUR: THROWING SHADOWS: BRIAN FRIEL'S *THE FREEDOM OF THE CITY*

> When someone asks me where I live, I remember where I used to live.
> Someone asks me for directions, and I think again. I turn into
> A side street to try to throw off my shadow, and history is changed.
>
> (Ciaran Carson)[1]

I

Behind and within every text are the shadows of other texts - cultural, political, religious, historical, literary - and specific contexts. One of the foremost issues to be faced initially in discussing Brian Friel's 1973 play, *The Freedom of the City*, is to address the extent and nature of the text's relationship to historical events and to political and socio-economic conditions in Ireland, in particular those appertaining to Derry in the late 1960s. Indisputably the play was written partly in response to the killing on 30 January 1972 of thirteen unarmed civilians by the British Army, but also, and equally importantly, to the publication in April 1972 of the Widgery Report which exonerated the soldiers. However, it is important to locate within *The Freedom of the City* the shadows of a much longer political and historical time-span, to recognise the extent to which it develops broader themes and preoccupations from his earlier work, and, above all, to assess its effectiveness *as a play*.

Certainly some familiarity with the history of Derry this century is essential to an understanding of the contexts from which *The Freedom of the City* emerges. Almost exactly seven years before Brian Friel's birth, the Government of Ireland Act was finally passed bringing the state of Northern Ireland into being. Partition, the British Government's 'solution' to the political impasse in Ireland, placed the city of

[1] Ciaran Carson, 'Turn Again', *Belfast Confetti*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1990), p.11.

Londonderry (Derry) inside the borders of the new Protestant-dominated state, even though the majority of its citizens were Roman Catholics. Early in 1920 local elections in the six counties that were to make up 'Northern Ireland' had resulted in Derry and nine other urban councils, including Omagh (Friel's birthplace), Strabane and Enniskillen, coming under the control of a Nationalist-Sinn Féin alliance, which fiercely opposed partition on grounds cited by Republicans to this day, that it constituted a denial of the democratic will of the majority of people on the island. Catholic jubilation at the voting into office in the Guildhall of Derry's first-ever Catholic mayor, Hugh O'Doherty - the *Derry Journal*'s headline proclaimed 'Citadel Conquered After Centuries of Oppression'[2] - was short-lived, as only a few months later the city was engulfed in bitter sectarian conflict. Much of the fighting centring on the area around Long Tower Street, where almost twenty years later Friel's father would be appointed headmaster of the local school, and St Columb's College on Windmill Hill, where the young Friel would become a pupil. Reading Jonathan Bardon's account of Derry in the Spring and Summer of 1920 inevitably brings to mind subsequent, and appallingly similar sequences of violent confrontation from the mid-1930s and the late 1960s/ early 1970s, which clearly belong to the same narrative and may also be read as direct consequences of partition and the pre-existing culture of division and bigotry on both sides:

> Fierce rioting...spread into the Waterside, where Catholics homes were set on fire on Saturday 18 June...Catholics burned Protestants out of the Bogside and shot dead two Protestants. By the time 1,500 troops had arrived on 23 June, eight Catholics and four Protestants had been killed. The army imposed a curfew and directed heavy machine-gun fire into the Bogside, killing six more Catholics.[3]

---

[2] Bardon, p.467.

[3] ibid, p.469. However, Buckland, p.156, stresses crucial differences between Northern Ireland in the early 1920s and 1970s:

> In 1921-2 the government of Northern Ireland had been able to save itself by presenting a united Unionist front and by relying...on its own security force, the USC. In 1971-2, however,

In its struggle to establish its authority, the Unionist-dominated Northern Ireland parliament dissolved local councils which had refused to recognise its governance, and, in 1924, in order to prevent a repeat of the outcome of the 1920 elections, a system of gerrymandering was introduced. This ensured that even in those areas where they were in a minority control of local goverment was firmly in Unionist hands. Figures for 1966, for example, show a Derry population of approximately 20,000 Catholics and 10,000 Protestants returning eight Nationalist and twelve Unionist councillors. Dantanus[4] provides a simple diagram illustrating how gerrymandering in Derry was organised, by dividing the city into three unequal wards:

South Ward	*North Ward*	*Waterside Ward*
11,185 voters	6,476 voters	5,549 voters
10,047 Catholics	2,530 Catholics	1,852 Catholics
1,138 Protestants	3,946 Protestants	3,697 Protestants
returning	returning	returning
8 Nationalist councillors	8 Unionist councillors	4 Unionist councillors

Another method employed by Unionists which 'stacked (elections) in their favour',[5] was the retention in Northern Ireland of the 'business vote'. Abolished in Britain in 1948, this gave up to six extra votes to companies, which were predominantly Protestant-owned. At the same time, up to a quarter of a million potential voters, the majority of them the poorest Catholics, were effectively disenfranchised under the law which denied the vote to 'sub-tenants, lodgers, servants and children over twenty-one living at home'.[6] In a city where at the time unemployment was seven times higher than

Unionists were in disarray the government of Northern Ireland was entirely reliant upon the security forces of a British government which was becoming increasingly concerned at the extent to which its support of the Stormont regime was committing resources to the North, losing men and bringing British liberal democratic traditions into disrepute.

[4] Ulf Dantanus, *Brian Friel: A Study*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), pp.33-4. The book is inaccurate in stating that the Waterside Ward returned 8 Unionist councillors, however.

[5] The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p.35.

[6] ibid.

the average for the United Kingdom - 23.3% of men and 4.8% of women were registered unemployed in March 1966 - '70 per cent of the Corporation's administrative, clerical and technical employees were non-Catholics, who also held nine of the ten best paid jobs'.[7] In a scathing piece of polemic from *The Honest Ulsterman* in December 1968 - one which displays a 'glib' sure-footedness and intelligence worthy of Skinner[8] - John D. Stewart, a non-Catholic Civil Rights' activist, proffered 'a brief analysis of the Northern Ireland Problem today' for visitors to the North:

> The Orange-Unionist System, in Derry and elsewhere throughout the six counties is based on the following simple formula:
>
> j = h = v
>
> wherein j = job
> h = home
> v = vote
>
> It means that a man with a good job is likely to get himself a home, and that with a home, under the system, goes a vote. The formula proves equally true in the negative, thus:
>
> -j = -h = -v
>
> Meaning that a man without a job is more likely to be homeless, which means that he is also voteless. In Derry, the extreme case, the Unionists had multiplied right through the formula with the factor of infinity, thus:
>
> -joo = -hoo = -voo
> wherein oo = infinity
>
> Meaning that a man permanently kept unemployed, could be kept permanently homeless, and, hence, permanently voteless. The mathematical significance of the infinity factor lies in the fact that a voteless man could do nothing to change the equation, which would therefore perpetuate itself *ad infinitum*.
>
> Since public housing is provided out of public funds, and since a local authority has now a statutory duty to provide it, the Unionists found themselves in some difficulty to sustain this equation. As it happened members of what they call the Minority tend to have larger families than Unionists. If such houses as were built... were allocated according to need, as they are in every town and city in the United Kingdom, then it was certain that the larger families would procure them.[9]

---

[7] Buckland, pp.116-7.

[8] One of the three principal characters in *The Freedom of the City*.

[9] John D. Stewart, 'How It Is', *The Honest Ulsterman*, 8, December 1968, 2-4. His analysis is largely borne out by Robert Kee, *Ireland: A History*, pp.229-230, and the *Sunday Times* Insight Team, pp.36-7. Significantly, however, the latter also comment on how Catholic abstentionism from the 1920s onwards and the IRA's 1956-62 campaign were important factors which helped to entrench Unionist fears about the minority. (See pp.29, 37).

Instead housing allocation seems to have been made according to favour and at the whim of Londonderry's Unionist Mayors, and generally not according to need. Stewart goes on to suggest that though houses were given to some Catholic families, it was 'only in districts where the opposition vote was dominant in any case - and where the new voters could make no difference to the Orange-Unionist system'.[10] Early on in *The Freedom of the City*, it is established that Lily Doherty lives with her husband and eleven children 'in a condemned property behind the old railway - a warehouse that was converted into eight flats'.[11]

It was this scandalous housing situation, and incidents such as the Caledon case,[12] which played such a major role in the politicisation of the Nationalist community in the mid- to late-1960s. Impatient with the older generation of Nationalist Party politicians, and their lack of any constructive social or economic programme, there emerged an increasingly articulate and sophisticated generation of young Nationalist politicians, who challenged the status quo and directed much of their energies to housing issues. Whereas John Hume worked alongside Father Anthony Mulvey in the Derry Housing Association (DHA), which purchased large properties and then divided them into flats, and promoted change by operating within the law, Eamonn McCann favoured a confrontational response to the city authorities.[13] A key figure within the Northern

---

[10] Stewart, 3.

[11] *The Freedom of the City* in *SP*, p.108. (Further page references to the play will be given in brackets in the main text).

[12] In June 1968, in Caledon, Co. Armagh, Miss Emily Beattie, a 19 year-old single woman, who happened to be a secretary to a Unionist solicitor, was allocated a council house by Dungannon Rural District Council, jumping the queue on the housing list which contained many large families. The Nationalist MP for East Tyrone, Austin Currie, occupied the house in protest on behalf of the Civil Rights Movement, but was finally ejected by the police in the person of R.U.C Constable Beattie, Emily's brother. The notoriety of the case gave a major boost to the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, which had been founded on 29 January 1967, but had up until the summer of 1968 madevery little impact. See Bardon, p.651, White, p.59.

[13] The contrast between the Hume and McCann approaches are, to a certain extent, reflected in the

Ireland Labour Party and a highly-gifted orator, he was a leading member the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC), which organised a series of demonstrations in the Guildhall during April and May of 1968 in order to disrupt corporation business. Although these were in part an attempt 'to draw attention to the housing problem', they had a broader general aim which was to provoke retaliation from their Unionist opponents.[14] On one of these occasions - in a scene which clearly anticipates Skinner's antics in Friel's play, when he confers on Lily 'the freedom of the city of Derry' and gives Michael a life-peerage (136) - the Guildhall was temporarily 'lost' to the DHAC activists:

> After the mayor abandoned his chair and adjourned one Corporation meeting, Finbar Doherty vaulted from the public gallery into the chamber, installed himself in the mayoral chair, declared himself First Citizen and issued a number of decrees...there were very few in our area who failed to smile when they heard of the incident.[15]

II

That Brian Friel would have been extremely well-informed about socio-economic conditions in Derry and developments in the political scene prior to Bloody Sunday cannot be doubted. The playwright's father, Patrick Friel, served for three terms on the City Corporation as one of the eight councillors for the South Ward of the City, an area which included the Bogside, Creggan and Brandywell, until the Corporation was suspended in 1969.[16] Brian Friel is known to have been an active supporter of the Civil Rights Movement,[17] and, from various interviews, such as that cited in Maxwell's 1973 study, one learns that he took part in a demonstration about housing in Derry, 'not

Michael-Skinner confrontations in *The Freedom of the City*.

[14] McCann, pp.27, 34.

[15] ibid, pp.28-9.

[16] Dantanus, p.34.

[17] Richard Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama*, (London: Routledge, 1990), p.106.

because I was involved, but because I was an interested spectator at that point'.[18] Pine also informs us that Friel's 'knowledge of the events of Bloody Sunday was gained at first hand'.[19]

The quotation in Maxwell's book typifies many of the 'early' public statements Friel made on the repercussions on his writing of the deteriorating political situation, in which he is at pains to emphasise the importance of maintaining 'distance'. Especially since the early 1970s, but generally throughout his career, Friel has eschewed opportunities to give interviews or make pronouncements about the state of Ireland, of Irish drama or his own dramatic purposes, preferring to 'speak' obliquely through his plays, to let the audience or reader to determine their own meanings.[20] In an interview published in 1972, but presumably recorded at some time before the introduction of internment and Bloody Sunday, Friel voiced legitimate anxieties about having his artistic agenda determined for him:

> People ask why I have not written a play about the Civil Rights movement. One answer is that I have no objectivity in this situation; I am too much involved emotionally to view it with any calm. Again I don't believe there is the stuff of drama in the situation. To have a conflict you must have a conflict of equals or at least near equals. There is no drama in Rhodesia or South Africa, and similarly there is no drama in the North of Ireland.[21]

Though one might take issue with his contention that that drama has ever necessitated between 'equals' or 'near equals', or the suggestion that 'objectivity' and 'distance' are ever attainable or desirable in a writer,[22] one can understand his caution about

---

[18] Maxwell, p.27.
[19] Pine, p.106.
[20] Most bibliographies of non-fiction pieces by Friel have a major gap between 1972 and 1980. In comparison, over the same period 1968-80, Seamus Heaney produced approximately twenty-one articles and reviews, and gave eight major published interviews. For Friel's early pronouncements on politics and the artist's role, see above Chapter 3, pp.127-130.
[21] Friel quoted in Hickey and Smith, p.222.
[22] In 'Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland', *Poetry in the Wars*, p.185, Edna Longley argues that

incorporating delicate political matter into his work. Not surprisingly, like any other artist, he feared having his work subjected to exclusively political interpretations, charges that he was partisan or that he was exploiting the crisis.[23] At the time when he made these initial cautious statements, Friel could not have foreseen the tragic escalation of violence that would occur on and after Sunday, 30 January, 1972.

Like Heaney's *North*, Friel's *The Freedom of the City*, exemplifies how 'politics seizes violently upon the imagination'.[24] In contrast to the bulk of Friel's writing which presents the audience with a variety of readings none of which are necessarily privileged, this particular play does establish a clear demarcation between truth and lies, and ironically utilises rhetoric to unmask rhetoric. For all its so-called distancing effects, and the efforts of some critics to lift it and universalise it out of its context,[25] *The Freedom of the City* is very much an engaged and impassioned response to Bloody Sunday and its even bloodier aftermath, and the issues they raised about 'Ireland' and the effects of the continuing 'British' presence.

One of the two key factors in precipitating the tragedy of Bloody Sunday was certainly the increasing activity of the Provisional IRA during the summer of 1971, particularly in the wake of internment, yet Friel excludes any direct reference to paramilitaries in

---

'whatever causes' Northern writers 'may support as citizens, their imaginations cannot be asked to settle for less than *full human truth*' (my emphasis). This last phrase presumes that there are certain values which command universal assent, and that the imagination is somehow a place apart.

[23] In his 1970 interview with Eavan Boland, quoted in Maxwell, pp.27-8, he does talk about the situation in terms of 'how it can be of use to me' and admits that 'this may seem a very selfish attitude'.

[24] D.E.S. Maxwell, 'Semantic Scruples: A Rhetoric for Politics in the North', *Literature and the Changing Ireland*, ed. Peter Connolly, *Irish Literary Studies* 9, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1982), p.168.

[25] See, for example, William Jent's attempts in 'Supranational Civics: Poverty and the Politics of Representation in Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*', *Modern Drama*, 37, 1994,.568-587.

his play. There are perhaps a number of reasons for this significant gap in the text. One might be that he viewed their growing influence in Derry after 1969 as a symptom rather than a cause of the Troubles; another may be that he wished to direct the audience's attention all the more onto the culpability of other participants.[26] Civil Rights sources insist that the Provisional IRA had agreed in advance to stay away from the planned march on 30 January; according to Bishop and Mallie, 'men leading the Derry IRA at the time are equally insistent that no IRA action took place that day'.[27] In *Secret History: Bloody Sunday,* a documentary made in 1991 for Channel 4, Ivan Cooper, the M.P. for Mid-Derry at Stormont at the time, tells how he went to speak to the Provisional leader in Derry and received reassurances that they would not be present.[28] Other sources indicate, however, 'that two Official IRA volunteers with guns were in the vicinity of the march ten minutes before the shooting.'[29]

The other crucial factor behind what Heaney would later term the 'Derry massacre'[30] was frustration and anger within the British Army. Like their political masters, Army chiefs were eager to restore control over 'Free Derry', where in effect since the Battle of the Bogside the paramilitaries had held sway. Previously plans to re-establish control over the No-Go areas had had to be dropped 'because it was felt that the troop levels needed to hold the areas would be politically unacceptable'.[31] On hearing that a

---

[26] That Republicanism and Northern Catholic tradition are implicated in the tragedy is, however, emphasised within the play. The balladeer clearly belongs to those traditions, obsessed as he is with martyrs and the cult of the blood- sacrifice. Like the play's other distorting 'frame narrators', he translates individual characters and their divisions into a crude unity. Like the church, like the media, the balladeer is a predatory figure who feeds on evil and injustice committed by others in order to consolidate a previously held ideological position.

[27] Bishop and Mallie, p.208.

[28] *Secret History: Bloody Sunday,* Channel 4 , 4 December 1991.

[29] Bowyer Bell, p.268.

[30] Heaney used the phrase in a private letter to the poet Brendan Hamill, 8 January 1973.

[31] Bishop and Mallie, p.206.

Civil Rights March in protest against internment was going to go ahead despite a Stormont ban, the Army, with Government support, drew up plans designed to re-affirm British authority and pride. To them the daily ritual whereby several hundred Nationalist youths would gather at 'Aggro Corner' on most days to pelt stones at British soldiers had become unendurable, and so the decision was made to pursue offenders into the Bogside and to make arrests if rioting occurred after the march.[32] To assist in this potentially dangerous security operation, the First Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, one of the toughest in the Army, were imported from Belfast to Derry.

Whatever precisely happened between 4.00 and 4.20 p.m. on that January afternoon will never be known.[33] At one point in a generally even-handed, detailed account of events, written twenty years later, the historian, J. Bowyer Bell, proffers these laudably dispassionate reflections:

> During the crucial twenty minutes on Sunday afternoon, no one was aware of the event as a whole, not the British soldiers firing at the 'gunmen', nor the victims, nor the others rushing away from the barricades...The time that stretched out endlessly for the vulnerable and passed in a flash for the men firing did not generate a historian. History as it happens was, as always, a matter of shreds and patches, recollection and perception; and not all the instant replays or stop-action cameras of memory could fashion it whole again. Bloody Sunday remained a frozen kaleidoscope and only meant what the various eyes chose to recall, what the involved made out of the images. It was thus for the perceptive a lesson in the construction and application of Irish history.[34]

---

[32] Bardon, p.687, rightly draws attention to the fact that in the two weeks prior to Bloody Sunday, the security forces had faced 319 rounds in the course of 80 shooting incidents which had resulted in the deaths of two soldiers and the wounding of two others.

[33] Peter Taylor's BBC documentary of January 1992, *Remember Bloody Sunday*, contains many interesting retrospective accounts by soldiers and civilians who took part in the events of Bloody Sunday. To this day, the soldiers maintain still that they were fired upon first. When asked by Taylor whether he accepted that thirteen innocent civilians were shot by his men, the Commanding Officer of the Parachute Regiment on that day, Colonel Derek Wilford, replied 'I can't accept that because to accept that would be to accept that my soldiers were wrong. It was not done as a malicious act. It was done, if you like as an act of war.'

[34] Bowyer Bell, p.269.

At the time, however, and with thirteen of their fellow citizens killed and another eighteen wounded, other less philosophical lessons were drawn in Catholic Derry. Only one of the killed, the seventeen year old Gerry Donaghy, is known to have had any links with a paramilitary organisation, while

> the rest of the dead and all the injured were Civil Rights supporters with no connections to the IRA. Five of those killed and three of those wounded were shot in the back. No guns were found on any of the bodies. No soldiers were injured by nail bombs or gunfire.[35]

For the former Catholic Bishop of Derry, Edward Daly, 'What really made Bloody Sunday so obscene was the fact that people afterwards at the highest level justified it. That is the real obscenity'.[36] In a statement in the House of Commons the day after, the Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling, offered this version of events:

> When the Army advanced to make arrests among the trouble-makers, they came under fire from a block of flats and other quarters...At this stage the members of the orderly, although illegal march were no longer in the near vicinity. The Army returned the fire directed at them with aimed shots and inflicted a number of casualties on those who were attacking them with firearms and with bombs.[37]

When the 'independent', 'impartial', 'judicial'[38] inquiry Maudling promised Parliament, headed by Lord Chief Justice Widgery, delivered its verdict on 19 April 1972, its conclusions were seen within the Nationalist community as a grotesque, establishment whitewash, which acquitted the army of responsibility for murder and cast a slur upon

---

[35] *Secret History: Bloody Sunday*, Channel 4, 4 December 1991.

[36] ibid. Bishop Daly was a curate at the time of Bloody Sunday, and ministered to most of the dying.

[37] *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, House of Commons Official Report, Session 1971-2, Fifth Series, Volume 830, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1972, 32-3.

[38] ibid. An article in *The Guardian* of 10 November 1995, pp.1, 19, revealed how shortly before his enquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday began Lord Widgery received a confidential memo from the then Prime Minister, Edward Heath, which urged him to remember 'that we were in Northern Ireland fighting not only a military war but a propaganda war'. Later in the piece, 'Memo reveals "propaganda war"', *The Guardian*'s correspondents, Eamonn McCann and Owen Boycott, comment that the 'revelation of the private conversation on the eve of the inquiry may reinforce claims that there was a political input into the official enquiry from the outset'.

the innocent dead. Like Friel's Judge in *The Freedom of the City*, Lord Widgery preferred to believe soldiers' accounts rather than those of civilian eyewitnesses:

> There would have been no deaths if those who organised the illegal march had not thereby created a highly dangerous situation in which a clash between demonstrators and the security forces was almost inevitable...At one end of the scale some soldiers showed a high degree of responsibility; at the other firing bordered on the reckless...None of the deceased or wounded is proved to have been shot whilst handling a firearm or bomb. Some are wholly acquitted of complicity in such action; but there is a strong suspicion that some others had been firing weapons or handling bombs in the course of the afternoon...There was no general breakdown in discipline. For the most part the soldiers acted as they did because they thought their orders required it.[39]

Many of the conclusions and of the underlying attitudes towards the Nationalist community within the Widgery Report are replicated in fictional form in *The Freedom of the City*, which itself sets up a tribunal in order to denounce sham justice.[40]

Even so, as the following discussion will make clear, it would be a mistake to regard *The Freedom of the City* simply as a thinly-disguised, fictionalised re-run of Bloody Sunday and Widgery. Although each is of crucial importance to an understanding of the play's context, content, the circumstances of its composition and its reception, *The Freedom of the City*, like *The Gentle Island* and *Faith Healer*, is far broader in scope than may be first apparent, especially in its treatment of issues of authority - political, judicial, spiritual, moral, domestic. Hardly surprisingly, many pro-Conservative British

---

[39] The Widgery *Report*: Summary of Conclusions: HL101/HC 220, London 1972, quoted in *Families At War*, Peter Taylor, (London: BBC Books, 1989), p.71. Of the three dead who were suspected by Widgery of having fired guns because of traces of lead deposits on their hands, one, James Wray, worked in a factory using lead, while the other two, John Young and William Nash, may have had their hands contaminated by soldiers' hands. Eyewitnesses in *Secret History* recall seeing soldiers picking up the bodies in the street and hauling them into a Saracen. Ivan Cooper in the same programme describes Paras at Altnaglevin carrying Young's and Nash's bodies by the wrists into the hospital and out again.

[40] John Hume, dismissing Widgery's *Report* in 1972, characterised it as 'a case of the accused holding an inquiry into their own misdemeanours' (White, p.126). Bowyer Bell's equally critical verdict is that Widgery 'simply contributed to the dispute and not to British advantage. He chose in every case to believe the soldiers, to accept the views of the British officers as given, to support the positions of the authorities, and to construct the best official explanation possible'(p.275).

newspaper reviews focussed exclusively on *Freedom* as an indictment of British policy, dismissing it as 'an entertaining piece of unconvincing propaganda' (*Daily Telegraph*), as 'too loaded to encourage much intelligent sympathy' (*Daily Express*), and as exhibiting 'an over-zealous determination to discredit the means and motives of the English in the present Ulster crisis' (*Evening Standard*).[41] Certainly the play does present British establishment attitudes to Ireland as being characterised by an unhappy mixture of incomprehension, arrogance, ineptitude, brutality and hypocrisy, which is not the whole story, but sadly has too often in the past typified British dealings in Ireland and elsewhere.

The charge of propaganda also ignores the fact others are arraigned in the dock besides the British, and that Friel's play endorses the views of no party. Although effectively doing nothing to relieve the plight of the besieged minority in the 'Six Counties', the Southern Irish political establishment and the Irish media are depicted as quick to capitalise on tragedy. In the North, meanwhile, despite their profound ideological differences, the Catholic priest and the Republican balladeer collude together in translating the very individual Michael, Lily and Skinner into the Guildhall Three, re-constructing them to fit into a continuing narrative of willing sacrifice, heroic martyrdom.

On another level, perhaps, *The Freedom of the City* stands as a lament for the lost hope which once centred upon the Civil Rights Movement, which, like many protest groups in the late 1960s, briefly banded people together of very different backgrounds

---

[41] Dantanus, p.140.

and with very different political aims. It is not simply for the sake of diversity in characterisation that Friel portrays a range of Nationalist positions within this text, and later in *Translations*; it is because the community itself contains key ideological divisions.

III

First performed in Dublin on 20 February 1973, but set in Derry on the afternoon of Saturday, 10 February 1970, *The Freedom of the City* is a play which presents the murder by security forces of three unarmed civilians, three Civil Rights Marchers. Throughout the play, Friel establishes a counterpoint between the 'actual' events which precede and follow this killing, and the scenario 'imagined' by a tribunal supposedly investigating the incident, and by various other vested interests referred to above. The victims and the subjects of these fictions - Michael Hegarty, Lily Doherty and Adrian Fitzgerald (Skinner) - had been attending an 'illegal' march and rally in Derry, which had been broken up by the police using CS gas and water-cannon. In the confused aftermath of the march, the three stumble unintentionally into the Guildhall (Londonderry's town hall and bastion of Unionist power),[42] which is then surrounded by the Army and the police. Lacking accurate intelligence, the security forces conclude that a large number of armed intruders have seized the building, and call upon them to surrender. When the three do finally emerge from the building, with their arms raised above their heads,[43] they are shot down in cold blood.

---

[42] The original plans for the NICRA march on 30 January had envisaged a gathering outside the Guildhall.

[43] At least one of the thirteen dead is known to have been shot in a gesture of 'surrender', with his arms in the air.

The very structure of *The Freedom of the City* is an expression of the complexity of Friel's reach. Formally arranged into two Acts, the play contains approximately thirty-four 'scenes', in which the action constantly shuttles backwards and forwards in time, and over twenty-two different voices are heard in a range of registers, a diversity of speech forms.[44] Interspersed between ten substantial sections of dialogue between the three central characters, Michael, Lily and Skinner, a Judge delivers four monologues and cross-questions witnesses on four occasions, a priest gives two sermons, an RTE commentator two live reports, a balladeer two songs, and a sociologist, Professor. Dodds, a lecture in five parts. In Act One a pattern is established whereby for every one long episode in which Michael, Lily and Skinner appear, there are generally three others involving other commentators, while in Act Two scenes tend to alternate between the besieged and the empowered. Although the play's closure gives the last word to the media and the Judge, the time-sequencing throughout the play subverts their (and all other) authority, since the audience's direct experience of the 'live' private exchanges between Michael, Lily and Skinner exposes the false witness of those who subsequently hold court.

The combined effect of this overtly 'loaded' structure and the irony-generating, narrative anachronies running through it is to bond the audience's sympathies with the dead - misread and outnumbered as they are from the outset. Anticipating the daring illusions in *Faith Healer*, where three out of the four Parts are delivered by 'ghosts',

[44] The text itself does not number the scenes or episodes in the narrative, but I have done so in order to investigate the play's structure. As well as the seventeen characters listed in the *Dramatis Personae* (*SP*, p.103), there are three Voices from the Bogside (125-6), two Pressmen (126), and a children's chorus (118-9).

and *Translations*, where the audience listening to English become 'convinced' they are hearing Gaelic, *The Freedom of the City* begins establishing the fate of the protagonists - *Three bodies lie grotesquely across the front of the stage* (107) - and then proceeds to resurrect them. After having re-animated them in a series of flashbacks within Act One (scenes 7, 11, 15, 19, 22), Friel disrupts the linear narrative operating for scenes inside the Guildhall at the beginning of Act Two by a remarkable use of *prolepsis*. In a scene further confirming the 'privileged' status of the audience, Michael, Lily and Skinner are heard lucidly articulating their thoughts at the moment of death (149-150, scene 25), yet when they next appear in scenes 27 and 29 it is prior to the decision to leave their 'refuge'.

Startling dramatic effects, stark juxtapositions, are adopted from the outset. Aptly in a play dealing with the distortion and debasement of language, *The Freedom of the City* opens wordlessly, with Friel relying on visual metaphors to set meanings in motion. The stage is silent and dark, except where a blue light chills the empty apron, singling out three broken bodies, a contemporary crucifixion scene.[45] The silence, stillness, and sense of absence once established are intruded upon first by a distant wail, an ambulance siren - too late and too far away to bring relief - and then by two scuttling figures, a photographer and a priest. Like those who will succeed them, both have a considerable stake in the dead, the one commercial, the other ideological. The photographer's eerie white flashes, like the constant blue apron light, drain the dead

[45] It is perhaps not fanciful to suggest that the geopolitics on stage reproduces the political attitudes of the three, with Lily in the centre, Skinner on the Left and Michael on the Right within the Civil Rights Movement. I would concur with Jent's view that Nicholas Grene is far from the mark in describing Skinner, somewhat tautologically, as 'a potential Provo in the making'. Politically Skinner comes closest to Anarchist thinking. (See Jent, and Grene, 'Distancing Drama: Sean O'Casey to Brian Friel' in *Irish Writers and the Theatre*, ed. Masaru Sekine, [Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987], pp.47-70.)

further, offer an illusion of definition, while the priest's hasty gestures and blurred words seem mild impositions in comparison to those which will occur in the main text.

The introduction of a spotlight, picking out '*the JUDGE high up in the battlements*' and drawing the eye away from these crouching and stricken shapes, becomes a signal for the 'descent' into language, and the introduction of the tribunal as a dramatic formal device. The placing of the Judge, as Elizabeth Hale Winkler, among others, has noted, is both scenic and symbolic, alluding as it does to Derry's fortress history,[46] preparing the way as it does for examples of other characters exalting themselves. Despite the fact that they embody competing ideological positions, rival discourses to that of the British establishment, the Priest and the T.V. commentator will be later presented sharing these battlements with the Judge and the Brigadier. By means of this 'speaking picture',[47] this geopolitical metaphor, Friel implies 'a similarity in dissimilars',[48] enabling the audience to imagine a tenuous affinity between their own position and that of the play's lower-placed victims, and to recognise how easily, like 'a pair of chaps', antithetical political forces in Ireland, just as elsewhere, can seem to come together to crush the poor

> And throw between them all the food thou hast
> They'll grind the one the other.[49]

---

[46] Elizabeth Hale Winkler, 'Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*: Historical Actuality and Dramatic Imagination', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, June 1981, Vol.7, no.1, 12-31. Winkler rightly draws attention to Derry's pre-twentieth century history and the significance of its walls. She refers to the famous siege of 1689 when the Catholic forces of King James II failed to take the city, and how, as a consequence, in the words of Cruise O'Brien, 'Derry is more than a city, it is a symbol of Protestant Ulster'(*States of Ireland*, p.168). Friel alludes to the siege in the text, when, on p.119, Skinner is seen examining exhibits in the Mayor's parlour.

[47] Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, (London, 1965), p. 101.

[48] Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, translation by Ingram Bywater, (New York, 1941), p.1478.

[49] Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act III, scene V, ll.13-15. Friel's Shane and Skinner clearly share something of Enobarbus's subversive wit and wry intelligence, which, of course, offer no protection against bullets.

That Friel is concerned with language as a site of conflict in which *monologic*, authoritarian forces strive to close down meaning and suppress the challenge of *dialogic*, quickly becomes apparent.[50] The play's opening lines themselves serve as a paradigm for what will follow, as the unnamed Judge - a '*fussy*', '*testy*' Englishman '*in his early sixties*'(107) - makes a brusque demonstration of his considerable authority, first by forcing an RUC witness to repeat himself, secondly by asking leading questions which might well be interpreted as an attempt to justify the Army's shoot-to-kill policy, and thirdly by his peremptory dismissal of the socio-economic circumstances of the victims as an irrelevance, 'We are not conducting a social survey, Constable'.[51] Despite the Judge's claims in his subsequent monologue that he is engaged in a search for 'an objective view' of what really occurred, it soon becomes abundantly clear that this is not the case. 'This tribunal of enquiry', he explains, unaware of the irony in his words, 'is in no sense a court of justice'. One minute he characterises the tribunal as 'a fact-finding exercise',[52] which is unconcerned with making 'moral judgements', the next he presents the audience with only two possible readings of events and people both of which fix the Guildhall three as guilty; either their seizure of the building was the premeditated act of 'callous terrorists', or a spontaneous gesture carried out under the intoxication of 'revolutionary speeches'(109-110). Each of these phrases are

[50] Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas, though originally applied to fiction, provide a very useful theoretical model for analysing Friel's text. In particular terms such as 'parodic stylization' and 'carnivalesque' are useful for contrasting the languages reproduced inside and outside the Guildhall.

[51] Immediately after learning each of the deceased's names, occupations and ages, the Judge swiftly moves onto possible previous convictions and whether firearms were found on or near the bodies. When the officer mentions that he had come across Skinner before, the Judge's question, 'As a terrorist?' again seems to suggest that he may have already constructed a narrative in his mind.

[52] These are the very words Widgery used to characterise his inquiry. They are quoted in *The Guardian* article cited in note 38, 'Memo reveals "propaganda war"'.

indicative of his failure to have any concept of the people whose deaths he is investigating or the contexts within which he is working, and constitute an attempt to impose closure, 'to block other narratives from forming and emerging'.[53]

The Judge's later speeches and exchanges confirm these initial impressions. Part way through his next appearance, during which he ineffectually and almost apologetically cross-examines the officer responsible for the killings, it emerges that the man appointed to pass judgment on the Army's handling of the incident is 'an old army man, myself'(134), just like Lord Chief Justice Widgery. Once more he refers to the three as 'terrorists' as if this were an indisputable fact. Having extracted from Brigadier Johnson-Hanbury that he had

> The 8th Infantry Brigade, 1st Battalion Parachute Regiment, 1st Battalion King's Own Border Regiment, two companies of the 3rd Battalionn Royal regiment of Fusiliers...Twelve Saracens, ten Saladins, two dozen Ferrets and four water-cannons and a modicum of air-cover (133)

and 'the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment' at his disposal, he then fails to press him as to how, given this 'rather formidable array', he could be described as in any way 'exposed' or seriously threatened. Like Widgery, the play's Judge privileges the 'sworn testimony'(142) of the security forces over the 'persistent suggestions'(134) of civilian witnesses and counsel for the deceased, preferring to believe 'eight soldiers and four policeman' and dubious forensic evidence rather than the evidence of Father Brosnan's eyes or Mr Montini's 'very lucid' photographs. By the time the audience overhear the questioning of Dr Winbourne, an *Army* forensic specialist, and Professor Cuppley, the pathologist, and their allusions to 'smear

[53] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.xiii. The Judge's views seem to accord with that of many of those Unionists who regarded the Civil Rights Movement as a front for the IRA. Behind the just appeal for democratic and equal rights for the minority, they detected a hidden agenda.

marks'(143) and 'serious mutilation', they are fully conscious of the Judge's contribution to the dishonouring of the dead, and the mangling of truth.[54]

Throughout the play 'parodic stylization'[55] is utilised within the characterisation to undermine those - like the Judge - who seek to 'manage' discourse, as well as to generate continual shifts in language and perspective. Within the priest's two sermons, Friel reproduces some of the rhetorical devices traditionally used by Irish clerics to direct their flock, in an effort to maintain a spirit of sheepish obedience.[56] Although their openings are identical, the politics of each homily are radically different. Each begins with the local congregation being proffered the promise of a ritual channel for their 'deep and numbing grief'(124, 155), before harping on Father Brosnan's priestly ministrations which, he claims, fortified the victims before they met their Maker. Like the tribunal, neither sermon names the truly culpable. Nor does the priest provide a credible answer to his own rhetorical question, 'Why did they die?' The first sermon translates the deaths into a conscious sacrificial choice, and 'naturalises' the killings by placing them within an existing Catholic-Nationalist ideological narrative. This process of 'familiarisation' - *ostranenie* in reverse - is effected by such means as repetitions in diction and grammatical forms ('*They died for..*'); use of clichés ('*endure no longer*', '*you and I and thousands like us*') and antithesis ('*iniquitous yoke*' versus '*a decent way of life*'); the run of three abstract nouns, ('*injuries*', '*injustices*', '*indignities*'),

[54] In some perverse way he sees the hand of justice in the fate of the three terrorists, since they had 'defaced' the building, 'despoiled' the furnishings, and 'defiled' its records.(149).

[55] The term is derived from Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', from *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.301. Part of this essay is reproduced in *Modern Literary Theory*, eds. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh, (Leeds: Arnold, 1989), p.202.

[56] cf. Seamus Heaney's poem, 'Freedman' in *North*, p.61, with its reaction against clerical subjugation.

whose emotive impact is strengthened by means of alliteration and assonance; and finally the dramatic 'expansion' in the length of sentences and complexity of structure:

> They died for their beliefs. They died for their fellow citizens. They died because they could endure no longer the injuries and injustices and indignities that have been their lot for too many years. They sacrificed their lives so that you and I and thousands like us might be rid of that iniquitous yoke and might inherit a decent way of life. (125)

Whereas this first address ends with the priest's rhetoric gesturing towards unspecified forms of political action, and deploys again the 'run of three' device and the optative mood,[57] the second rejects confrontation with the authorities at Stormont and Westminster in favour of a crusade against evil, poisonous, contaminating influences from within their own community. In a remarkable piece of 'revisionist' thinking, what were once 'injuries and injustices and indignities' become merely 'certain *imperfections* in our society', iniquities in the allocation of employment, housing, and voting rights regrettable flaws in a system that was 'less than equal'(156). The Civil Rights Movement, he contends, has become hopelessly compromised, 'an instrument for corruption' in the hands of Godless communists and revolutionaries, whose oratory and persuasiveness and appeal threaten his own. Evidently as an orthodox Catholic cleric, he has no faith in people's democracy or People's Democracy, and, like Michael, puts his trust in Dignity and Decency as the means by which 'the meek' shall come to 'possess the land'(156).[58] In effect the priest reverts to the passive, pre-Civil

[57] 'May we be worthy of that dream, of their trust. May we have the courage to implement their noble hopes. May we have God's strength to carry on where they left off'(125). The subjunctives here complete the sermon's movement from present 'numbing grief'(ours) through martyrdom (theirs) to a dream-future (ours). Seamus Heaney speaks of the nationalists community's predeliction for 'optative moods', post-Partition, in his poem, 'From the Canton of Expectation' from *The Haw Lantern*, p.46-7.

[58] It is interesting that Michael does not appear in the scene (151-5) preceding the priest's second sermon, but that he does dominate the exchanges that follow it (156-161). In these he voices a similar faith in Dignity, which Seamus Deane has described as 'the distinguishing feature of the older generation in Derry' ('Why Bogside?', *The Honest Ulsterman*, 27, January-March 1971, 2). He also displays a somewhat naive, misplaced belief in the processes of British justice.

Rights Nationalist Party position. By sidelining himself from any further involvement in the community's social and political struggle, he leaves a gap which in the 'real world' outside the text the Provisional IRA were eager to fill.

Friel's withering critique of life in de Valera's unfree state and Republic, begun in *Philadelphia Here I Come!*, continued in *The Mundy Scheme* and *The Gentle Island*, is developed further in this play through his depiction of the RTE commentator, Liam O'Kelly.[59] For him, those inside the Guildhall, whether dead or alive, are merely marvellous 'copy'. Like the priest, at first he is prepared to flirt with Republican fervour; like the Judge he has a criminal disregard for accuracy, and is content to recycle hackneyed phrases and misinformation. Whether duped by '*usually reliable* spokesmen in the Bogside'(my italics), or colluding with them in their point-scoring propaganda war, or simply a victim of his own self-interest, his irresponsible broadcast about 'a group of about fifty armed gunmen' seizing a potent 'symbol of Unionist domination' serves as a contributing factor in the (fictional) Army's later over-reaction. Ending his report happily repeating the Bogsiders' cocky allusion to 'the fall of the Bastille', he confirms the Army hierarchy's reading of the situation as a confrontation between lawless revolutionary mob and the Forces of Order. Representative of many in both the South and North harbouring ambivalent feelings towards militant Republicanism, though his use of the term 'terrorists' implies condemnation, his delight in the discomfiture of the Unionists and the British denotes approval.

---

[59] See Chapter 1, p.60, n.187.

O'Kelly's importance within the play's dialectics can be seen from the fact that he is given *The Freedom of the City*'s penultimate speech. For his second and final appearance, Friel presents him narrating unctuously in sub-Dimbleby, voice-of-a-nation's grief mode at the funeral of the Guildhall victims. With less excuse than *Faith Healer*'s Frank Hardy, but equally suspect eloquence, O'Kelly tries to transmute the locus for a brutal, sordid, unnecessary killing into something 'most beautiful, most triumphant'(167). Derry for him is an opportunity to display his art. A cultural void, a socio-economic black hole, it can only be redeemed by the presence of lords spiritual and temporal, Bach's music, his own metaphors. A complex text he cannot conceptualise, he falls back on stock phrases about the 'bitterly cold' city with its 'narrow ghetto streets' and humble parishes, and uses stock devices like the pathetic fallacy to describe how the clouds 'can contain themselves no longer'. Whereas none of the minor actors in this grand ritual are individualised in his discourse - the possessors of the 'patient drawn faces' or the pious men 'kneeling on the wet pavements' - the Cardinal Primate and the Taoiseach are singled out in obsequious references. Ironically, although he has no problem remembering the name of Colonel Foley (the President's representative), or indeed the number of Bach's *Prelude and Fugue*, he makes a hash of Skinner's name, calling him Adrian Fitzmaurice - not that it matters, of course.

More problematical within the play's characterisation than any of those discussed above is the figure of Professor Dodds. From the outset there is an ambiguity about Dodds' relationship with the other characters since at no point is he made to

acknowledge their existence. The fact that he is an outsider[60] obviously distances him from the three principals and their Derry, and has led several critics to place him amongst those other discredited authority figures in the play. His speech-acts - like those of other agents of what Althusser has termed the Ideological State Apparatuses[61] - are couched in formal register, standard English, professional language, and consist of direct, Brechtian addresses to the audience. Friel's placing of him in the stage directions '*in a small area stage left*'(104) might be interpreted as an indication that he is aligned with the marginalised characters off-stage, such as the Civil Rights protesters, and Michael, Lily and Skinner who have yet to appear; certainly he is separated geographically from the 'voices of control'.[62] However, against that it could simply be argued that it would have been inappropriate to set him on the battlements alongside the British and Irish Catholic establishments.

An interesting case for a re-evaluation of Dodds' role and significance has recently been made by William Jent, who uses the character to contest readings which impose too neat a symmetry on the play's form and debate, though in the process he overstates the sociologist's centrality by identifying him as 'Friel's proxy'. Necessarily for his argument, Jent cites Friel's assertion to Eavan Boland that the play is 'not about

[60] He is an American sociologist, a professional with a privileged academic and social position, a man whose voice is attended to.

[61] See Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and the State', from *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. B. Brewster, reprinted in *Modern Literary Theory*, pp.54-62. A Marxist reading of *The Freedom of the City* might well begin by focussing on the range of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) represented in the text. ISAs, the systems and structures used to maintain ideological control, are extremely well-represented in the play; there is the religious ISA (represented by the Church), the family ISA (Lily's husband, Michael's family), the communications ISA (the RTE commentator and the photographer) and the educational/ cultural ISA,represented perhaps by Dodds. These ISAs function alongside the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) to which the judiciary, the Army, and the police belong.

[62] Seamus Deane's phrase, in his Introduction to *Selected Plays of Brian Friel*, p.18.

Bloody Sunday', but rather 'about poverty'.[63] This statement, like some of his others, should perhaps be treated as something of a diversionary ploy on Friel's part to discourage audiences and critics from interpreting the play solely as a one-issue piece, or simply as anti-British polemic. Friel intended us, Jent claims, to recognise *Freedom*'s global, internationalist agenda, and how in a sense it is located 'not in Derry as such ...but in every city where the poor struggle for political and economic freedom.'[64] Such a reading, however, like the fictional Dodds', seems to diminish, if not to deny the very particularity of Derry that the play insists upon and which is embodied in Michael, Lily and Skinner, who are clearly individualised and not simply members of a homogeneous caste or class.[65]

The first two sections of his segmented lecture on 'the culture of poverty' are sandwiched between, and concurrent with two off-stage 'scenes' depicting a Civil Rights gathering, addressed by a 'fiery' woman orator, who is heard urging her supporters to 'Stand your ground!'[66] Whereas their marginalisation in society, ironically mimicked by the staging, is indisputable, the question as to where Dodds

---

[63] Jent, 575-6. The quotation is from Eavan Boland, 'Brian Friel: Derry's Playwright', *Hibernia*, 16 February 1973, 18.

[64] Jent, 579.

[65] George O'Brien, p. 82, voices a similar view to my own when he comments that

> the seductive fluidity of the professor's confident language does not disguise the generalizing and impersonalizing tendency in his approach. Ultimately his language is as suspect as the rest, since its objective is to assert a model for Lily, Skinner and Michael to fit.

In defending the notion of Dodds' objectivity, Jent asserts that 'as an American, he is neither colonizer nor colonized'(577). Even if one ignores the fate of the Amerindian population, there was a little matter of the United States' involvement in Vietnam concurrent with the writing of Friel's play

[66] One is tempted to 'identify' this orator as Bernadette Devlin, who was present on the platform on 30 January. She was accompanied by other M.P.s, all of whom were 'forced to prostrate themselves while a hail of bullets was fired in their direction'(*Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, House of Commons Official Report, Session 1971-2, p.41). Within Friel's play, this lone female voice, which can only be briefly heard, is drowned out the noisy responses from her fictional audiences, her supporters and the Army. Confidently resisting the silence, she contrasts with Lily who, until her confinement with Skinner and involvement in Civil Rights, has been clearly under the thumb of the 'Chairman'.

stands is difficult to determine. His speeches clearly function as a counter-discourse to the Judge's, since they construct a larger socio-economic narrative which, to a certain extent, the principal characters may seem to conform to, but ultimately resist. Dodds' generalised critique frequently intersects with and, on occasion, usefully illuminates elements in Michael, Lily and Skinner's story. One thinks, for example, of his description of the values and conditions shared by ghetto-dwellers 'all over the Western world'(111, 133), and how external 'events', like the campaign led by Martin Luther King for black Civil Rights in America, can induce a sudden burst into consciousness which 'breaks the pane'[67] of hopelessness and despair:

> But the very moment they acquire an objective view of their condition, once they become aware that their condition has counterparts elsewhere, from that moment they have broken out of their subculture, evwen though they may still be desperately poor. And any movement - trade union, religious, civil rights, pacifist, revolutionary - any movement which gives them this objectivity, organizes them gives them real hope, promotes solidarity, such a movement inevitably smashes the rigid caste that encases their minds and bodies.(111)[68]

In a number of significant respects, however, Dodds' readings do not describe the Derry characters with much precision, despite Jent's assertions to the contrary;[69] his suggestions that the poor are not 'psychologically geared to take advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities'(110)[70] and are 'present time-orientated'(133) may apply to Lily, but certainly not to Michael, who, like Butt in *Volunteers*, is determined to 'improve myself'(122). Although Dodds talks about how

---

[67] 'A man wading lost fields/ breaks the pane of flood:/ a flower of mud-/ water blooms up to his reflection', (Seamus Heaney, 'Gifts of Rain', *WO*, p.23).

[68] The televising of the RUC's reaction to the first Derry Civil Rights March on 5 October 1968 made a huge impact on the Northern Nationalist consciousness, leading Heaney to characterise the event as 'a watershed in the political life of Northern Ireland' ('Old Derry Walls', 522).

[69] 'Skinner, Michael and Lily literally embody Dodds' ideas about the subculture of poverty and the role of politicization in escaping from it' (Jent, 580).

[70] The '*roar of approaching tanks*' follows on immediately from Dodds' reference to 'increased opportunities'. The irony is obvious, but are the stage directions intended to undermine Dodds and his urbane discourse?

economic conditions induce feelings of inferiority, helplessness and dependency, in practice Skinner, Lily and Michael show themselves to be buoyant, unbowed, and often mutually supportive; his assertion that the poor 'often have a hell of a lot more fun than we have'(135), though seemingly confirmed by Lily's and Skinner's antics with the mayoral robes, do not take into account the price exacted for their 'fun'. Informed, articulate, logical, sensitive, as Dodds' analysis most definitely is, it cannot tell the whole story any more than a playwright can, because there is no whole story - only partial narratives.

IV

In sharp contrast to each of his frame narrators - the Judge, the Priest, the Balladeer, the T.V. man, the soldiers and the sociologist - who ascribe a unity of purpose and collective solidarity to the three characters trapped in the Guildhall, the author is at pains to differentiate between them. Through his characterisation of the three, Friel illustrates how, like any other mass membership political grouping, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was an inspirational, but potentially unstable entity, drawing on 'resources of recalcitrance'[71] in people with very diverse opinions and agendas.

These are made apparent during the early flashbacks when the audience became acquainted with Michael, Lily and 'Skinner'. Even before these, however, Skinner is in a sense marked out from the others by the presence of the ceremonial hat beside his body and, more importantly, by his 'form'(109). This seems almost to confirm Seamus

[71] Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, p.2.

Deane's sweeping characterisation of the younger generation in the Bogside amongst whom 'the prevailing notion...was that in a totally corrupt society like theirs, delinquency was an expression of intelligence'.[72] From his very first entry, Skinner quickly distinguishes himself from his prostrated, disorientated companions, by the speed of his thinking and action. Significantly he has not been blinded by gas, and the verbs used to describe him - '*races*', '*looking about frantically*', '*races*', '*runs*', '*discovers*', '*flings*', '*glances*', '*runs*', '*grabs*', '*drags*', '*rushes*'(112-3) - stress his energy and the '*lithe efficiency*' with which he rescues them and adjusts to situations. Observing his brisk man-handling of Lily and Michael as he leads them to the 'safety' of the parlour, inevitably the audience recall the moment a minute earlier when they saw soldiers dragging the same bodies off-stage by the feet.

In the theatre programme or on the page, the juxtaposition of the two names Lily and Skinner - names associated with a popular chain of shoe shops - hints at an affinity, and indeed they soon establish themselves as a comic double act through their brusque manner with each other.[73] Their repartee gives an early sign of the affection and trust that will develop

[72] 'Why Bogside?', 1a. Deane in this article provides a number of insights into the thinking of the young in the Bogside, who trod a very different future path to his, and which have an obvious application to Friel's characterisations, particularly that of Skinner. 'Delinquency', we are informed, ranged from 'street fighting to cynical detachment to moral and political numbness'. His analysis of the impact of television and pop music bears some affinities to Professor Dodds':

> It was a slow shock of awareness...alienation, inertia, aimlessness were not experiences peculiar to us. They were part of a general climate of disaffection. The minute alienation is seen to be a shared fate, it ceased to be a sad one The next step is towards commitment, brotherhood philosophies like civil rights and socialism...Thus from the traditional dignity of the older generation to the new commitment of the young alienation was the paradoxical bridge'(1a-2).

One senses reverberations from this important article on both Heaney's and Friel's work of this time.

[73] Friel frequently uses comic pairings effectively such as the two Gars (*Philadelphia, Here I Come!*), Shane and Peter (*The Gentle Island*), Keeney and Pyne (*Volunteers*), Doalty and Bridget, Hugh and Jimmy Jack (*Translations*), Maggie and Michael, Chrissie and Gerry (*Dancing at Lughnasa*).

SKINNER: Did you get a dose of the CS gas?
LILY: D'you think I'm playing blind-man's-buff?

LILY: My good coat! Mother of God, will you watch my good coat!
SKINNER: I should have left you to the soldiers.
LILY: They'd be no thicker nor you.
SKINNER: D'you want to go back to them?
LILY: Don't be so damned smart.

LILY: (to Michael) Did you get a thump of a baton, young fella?
SKINNER: Gas.
LILY: Maybe he got a rubber bullet in the stomach.
SKINNER: Only gas.
LILY: He might be bleeding internal.
SKINNER: Gas! Are you deaf?

LILY: What got into them anyway?
SKINNER: Did no one tell you the march was banned?
LILY: I knew the march was banned.
SKINNER: Did you expect them to give you tea at the end of it?
LILY: I didn't expect them to drive their tanks through us and shoot gas and rubber bullets into us, young fella. It's a mercy to God if no one's hurted.(112-4)[74]

as well as an indication of how throughout the play Friel will employ desperate ironies linking backwards and forwards to its tragic beginning and closure.

For a sizeable section of their opening encounter (scene 7), however, Friel has Skinner dropping out of sight, and allows Lily, the forty-three year old mother of eleven, to take centre stage.[75] Her obvious concern for Michael's well-being, her lurid fascination

[74] The week before Bloody Sunday, on Saturday, 22 January 1972, civil rights marchers arriving on Magilligan strand, near Derry, were in fact offered tea and buns by Royal Green Jackets. These were declined by the marchers, who, when they proceeded towards the internment camp, were offered different fare. Along with the Royal Green Jackets were men from the First Battalion of the Parachute Regiment. It was they who opened fire on the demonstrators with gas guns and rubber bullets, often at close range, when an attempt was made to outflank the wire. See Bowyer Bell, p.257.

[75] *The Freedom of the City* is preoccupied with numbers, which may well be connected with one of its key sources, the Widgery Report. Lily's age (43) is the sum of those of her companions, Michael (22) and Skinner (21). There are constantly changing figures given for the number of armed terrorists in the Guildhall - fifty (O'Kelly, 117), a hundred (the Balladeer, 118), forty (the Army Press Officer, 126), while the citizens' Voices (125) claim 'at least a dozen dead', 'fifteen or sixteen', 'Maybe twenty'. The Brigadier details the names and numbers of battalions involved in the siege (133-4), and pathologist lists the number of the wounds and names the bullets, 7.62 mm,

with blood and injuries, and above all her comic anecdotes bring warmth and relief after the austerity, brutality and formality of the previous scenes. Whereas Dodds offers the audience urbane generalisations about the poor couched in elaborated code, Lily peoples the stage with her working-class acquaintances in animated dialect.[76] Her thumbnail sketches of Johnny Duffy, the accident-prone window-cleaner who keeps falling off ladders, of Celia Cunningham who hauls 'wee Colm Damien' into riots so that the CS gas will cure his stuttering, or Minnie McLaughlin who fakes a limp to earn compensation, or or of her own discomfiture faced by a Saracen, show her to be a natural born storyteller and humourist; at the same time these anecdotes remind us how violence has become normalised, as common an accessory to life in Derry as a miraculous medal. Friel repeatedly draws the audience's attention to differences between her insistently 'non-standard' linguistic usage - phrases such as 'no thicker than', 'hurted bad', 'bleeding internal', 'I seen', 'I was afeard', 'breathe shalla', 'I'm just after', 'better nor'- and the languages of the better educated, more socially mobile Michael and Skinner, thereby questioning Dodds' construction of the 'poor' as a uniform block of humanity.

Such is the economy and skill in so much of Friel's writing that even scenes apparently devoted to comic 'business' are never just that. Subsequently it will emerge that Lily's garrulousness masks a lack of self-esteem, and the fact that, like the childless, solitary female character, half her age, in *The Gentle Island,* for most of her life she too has

that caused them (161-2). The choice of three as the number for the victims is no accident.

[76] Lily is not the ignoramus she is sometimes presented as in some (patronising) commentaries. She has heard of Che Guevara and Joe Stalin, and though in her posthumous speech she laments that she had never 'isolated, and assessed and articulated' any of the experiences or events that had happened to her, she shows herself to be the possessor of considerable social skills through her exchanges with Skinner and Michael.

been subjected to an oppressive domestic as well as political and spiritual patriarchy. The respect in which she holds 'the Chairman', we subsequently discover, is not one that is reciprocated, when she lets slip to Skinner the contemptuous words her husband had spoken to her.[77] Though several times she describes him as the one with 'the brains', she later refers to him sitting round all day reading the children's comics, which gives a rather different twist to his honorary title. From her seemingly innocuous question to Michael, 'Where were you standing?', there emerges a telling distinction between the two:

> MICHAEL: Beside the platform. Just below the speakers.
> LILY: I was at the back of the crowd.

Michael's placing of himself highlights the attraction authority holds for him and the respect he affords to it, and how beneath his commitment to the new spirit of collective action within the community lies a strong element of self-interest, though not one he would like to admit to. Lily's positioning of herself on the margins, by contrast, is indicative of the modest, self-deprecating side of her character, exemplified unconsciously in one of her next comments, 'How would I know where I run. I followed the crowd'(116), and may be understood in the light of her later revelation to Skinner about her secret, private motives for marching, that she is doing it for the sake of her mongol son.

During these exchanges, Skinner has been busy taking his bearings, and not surprisingly, it is he who is the first to discover where they have found shelter, just as later he will be the first to realise the dangers it entails. Part Mercutio, part antic Hamlet, he bursts in on Lily's fourth anecdote with a wild laugh which makes her

[77] 'You're a bone stupid bitch. No wonder the kid's bone stupid, too'(*SP*, p.155).

doubt his sanity, and then rushes manically round the room, beats his fists on the doors, before his finale - a somersault across the table. In contrast to the boyish '*mixture of delight and excitement and malice*' of his reaction, which is later rounded off with a 'Yipeeeeeeeee!' and the flinging of cushion at the wall, his companions' response at learning 'You. Are. Inside. The Guildhall.' is initially one of disbelief. There then follows a reverential silence - 'LILY *stands up.* MICHAEL *stands up. They stare in awe at their surroundings*'(117) - which is broken only in the next scene. Everything about their behaviour at this stage makes a nonsense, of course, of both the British soldiers' dismissive description of them as 'fucking yobbos'(117)[78] and the swaggering balladeer's mythologising of them, which starts off by multiplying their numbers and ends up making them 'one' with 'Tone, Pearce and Connolly'(118).

The audience's second encounter with the three sees personal and political differences becoming more pronounced. Ironically the individual who will receive the most wounds, according to Professor Cuppley(162), and of whose guilt Dr Winbourne, the forensic specialist, is most convinced(143), is the one who displays the most deference towards the trappings of Unionist power, once he finds himself inside its temple. Although at first the Guildhall's splendour and opulence strikes him as almost supra-human - 'Christ Almighty!', 'God, it's very impressive', 'God, it's beautiful, isn't it?' he exclaims - soon afterwards he sounds more down-to-earth, like an estate agent on overkill or an overawed visitor to the National Trust. His meticulously itemising of each of its quality features, including oak walls, brass doorhandles, a carpet 'like a

[78] It is interesting to note how the soldiers initially define themselves through lyrical metaphors. Their code-names 'Blue Star' and 'Eagle' are suggestive of remote beauty, grace and power. Ironically, they quickly switch to demotic, with one 'fuck' and four 'fuckings', when referring to subjects drawn from similar socio-economic, urban backgrounds to their own.

mattress', gold taps with 'fishes' heads', contrasts markedly with Lily's rapidly cooling response. Her feelings of unease and exclusion ('We shouldn't be here', 'No place for us') soon become apparent, along with her sense of the gross disparity between her world and this:

> MICHAEL: God, it's very impressive. Isn't it impressive, Missus?
> SKINNER: Isn't it, Missus?
> LILY: It's all right.
>
> LILY: This room's bigger than my whole place.
> SKINNER: Have you no gold taps and tiled walls?
> LILY: There's one tap and one toilet below in the yard - and they're for eight families. (119-120)

Increasingly irritated by Michael's fawning tone and language, which at this point he chooses not to confront directly, Skinner provokes Lily to dissent, by promoting a counter-discourse, which assert *their* rights of ownership, '...it's yours for ten bob a week', 'That's our window, Lily'. His prising-open of the display cabinet is on one level merely a piece of exhibitionism intended to impress Lily, whose attentions he seems desperate to retain; on another level, it is the first of several acts of what David Lloyd terms 'reterritorialization',[79] a 'gesture', like Doalty's shifting of the surveyors' posts in *Translations*, whose purpose is 'to indicate...a presence' long denied.[80]

Keen though he is to hint at future divisions between Skinner and Michael, it is dramatically necessary for Friel that his characters develop a rapport that will enable them to divulge details of their personal lives for the audience's benefit. The conditions for this are carried forward through the characterisation of Lily. She is the first to name herself, crisply informing Skinner that she should be properly addressed as 'Mrs Doherty...Mrs Lily Doherty'.[81] This is succeeded by her suggestions for improving the

---

[79] Lloyd, 'Pap for the dispossessed', in *Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Elmer Andrews, p.95.
[80] *SP*, p.391.
[81] The choice of Lily's surname, *Doherty*, was not chosen at random, one suspects. When the names of the thirteen men killed on Bloody Sunday is arranged alphabetically, the list begins with Patrick Joseph Doherty, aged 31. Other well-known Derry Dohertys, who Friel might have had in mind

décor in the Mayor's parlour, which eases tensions further and makes '*SKINNER and MICHAEL both laugh*', but also constitutes a kind of imaginative repossession. Growing belief in her civic rights and confidence in herself explain her decision to sit down at last, or rather to enthrone herself. Her imitation of the assured formal language of her social 'superiors' which accompanies this grand gesture

> And since this is my first time here and since you (SKINNER) seem to be the caretaker, the least you might do is offer a drink to a ratepayer. (*She sits - taking possession.*) (121)

serves as a significant early contribution towards the *carnivalesque*,[82] the holiday role-playing in the parlour fostered by Skinner, which cocks a snook at the authorities waiting in the wings, and which is central to Friel's dramatic purposes and technique in *The Freedom of the City*. Fortified by 'a little port wine', Lily encourages Michael to relax - 'And will you quit creeping about on your toes, young fella, as if you were doing the stations of the Cross' - and draws him out on his name, family and origins. Again the mordant ironies are not lost on the audience, as they taste the glistening optimism of Michael's imagined future:

> ...now my father's trying to get me into the gas-works...And in the meantime I'm going to the tech. four nights a week - you know - to improve myself... But I'm a lot luckier than my father was. And since that North Sea discovery

---

when developing his principal characters, include Paddy 'Bogside' Doherty and Finbar Doherty. Denied a council house by a Londonderry Corporation official, Paddy Doherty responded by buying some land and building his own home. 'One of an energetic group of Derry Catholics who put their faith in self- help' (Bardon, p.648), he joined Father Anthony Mulvey and John Hume in 1960 in the Credit Union enterprise (White, pp.29-31). For a previous reference to Finbar Doherty, see above in this chapter, p.213.

[82] Mikhail Bakhtin's term is derived from 'carnival', which he reads as a manifestation of the collective disdain felt by the ruled for their rulers. Raman Selden, in *Practising Theory and Reading Literature*, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1989), p.167, p.169, provides a useful, and accessible synopsis of Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque:

> Hierarchies are turned on their heads - fools become wise, kings become beggars; separate spheres are flung together - fact and fantasy, heaven and hell, spirit and body, life and death are all confused...The emphasis upon Carnival is not so much an indulgent attitude as a view from 'below' of the ruling class's repressive moral and social attitudes. Carnivalised literature preserves something of this almost invisible counter-culture.

In *The Art of Brian Friel*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp.71, 123, Elmer Andrews picks up on this feature of Friel's work.

there's a big future in gas.(122)

Whether out of envy or distaste for the pretensions of 'Mr Hegarty', or simply because he finds Lily infinitely more attractive, or because he is beginning to feel sidelined, Skinner steers the dialogue back towards her. As a consequence, Lily's previous confinements come to light, at school, when she was locked in the cloakroom if an inspection was due, and at home with her eleven children, 'every one of them sound of mind and limb',[83] and a husband with a dickie chest. No doubt the thought of this prompts her to busy herself suddenly about Skinner's welfare, forcing him to strip off his wet clothes 'before you die of internal pneumonia'. This act of divestment has three main purposes; it discloses Skinner's poverty, showing that he is without either a vest or socks in early February;[84] it prepares the way for scene 19 (135-141) when Skinner, dressed in borrowed robes, confers on his disenfranchised fellow citizens 'the freedom of the city'; and thirdly, it functions as a metonym for the process of exposure and self-exposure - or skinning - within the Guildhall.

The celebratory resolution of this scene, their second together is instantly undercut by the *prolepsis* in the next, with the priest's announcement of a solemn requiem Mass to be held in their honour. Early on in their third appearance, the cracks in this impromptu alliance open more widely, principally because of Skinner's adverse reaction to the self-righteous tone and content of Michael's political pronouncements, but also perhaps because of his insecurities about himself. Skinner's questions evince details about Lily, and her queries help to reveal Michael's background, yet to his companions

[83] Underneath this exchange of intimacies, of course, there are suppressions, such as the real cause of Declan's lack of forwardness.

[84] The stage directions explicitly state '*he is wearing nothing underneath*' his shirt. When '*He takes off the canvas shoes*', we discover that '*He is not wearing socks*'(124).

and to the audience Skinner remains an enigma, 'a man from God knows where'. His bizarre 'name' is not disclosed until ten pages after Lily has given hers and eight pages after Michael, and even then it is left unexplained. When Lily does successfully prise a little information from him, he claims to be an orphan,[85] to have been expelled from grammar school, and to have worked only for two brief spells. To deflect the possibility of further probing into his past, he puts a distance between himself and them by switching on the radio, singing along with the music, and doing '*a parody-waltz off and into the dressing-room*' (132).

Intimations of Skinner's increasing alienation and frustration within the triangle have surfaced prior to this. His hostility to Michael seems partly political, partly personal. Like Young Martin in Peter Shaffer's *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964), characterised by Pizarro as belonging 'to hope, to faith, dipping flags and ducking heads, and laying hands and licking rings',[86] Michael embodies a world of sureties Skinner has never known, of obeisance he could never subscribe to. Though galled by Michael's condemnation of the corrosive influence of 'the hooligan element' and 'strange characters' who have 'knuckled in on' the civil rights 'act', [87] he contains himself. However, once Michael's language begins insistently to replicate the rhetoric of the civil rights leaders,

[85] Significantly many of Friel's key characters suffer from the loss of one or both parents. Skinner most closely resembles Shane in *The Gentle Island*, who also presents himself as parentless. In other plays, *Philadelphia*'s Gar, *The Gentle Island's* Philly and Joe, *Living Quarters*' Ben, *Translations*'s Manus and Owen are all motherless, exacerbating their 'exposure' in their struggles against their fathers. It is also indicative of the profound sense of discontinuities afflicting their and their creator's worlds.

[86] A recurring motif in each of Peter Shaffer's best known plays, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964), *Equus* (1973) and *Amadeus* (1979), is the violent struggle between sons and fathers, would-be sons and fathers, sons and would-be fathers, an *agon* replicated in so many of Friel's plays.

[87] i.e. Working-class protestors who do not conform to the turn-the-other-cheek philosophy he espouses.

> the main thing is to keep a united front. The ultimate objectives we're all striving for is more important than the personalities or the politics of the individuals concerned...It was a good, disciplined responsible march.
> And that's what we must show them - that we're responsible and respectable; and they'll come to respect what we're campaigning for (127, 128-9)

Skinner breaks ranks, initially by parodying it because of its blandness and caution ('At this point of time', 'And taking full cognizance of all relative facts'), and later on by dismissing its naïve premises and inter-class solidarity as so much 'Shite'.[88]

What has provoked this second, unambiguous assessment may have been in part due to Skinner's failure to draw Lily's motherly attentions back to him. Although her focus on Michael had waned during his political outpouring, at the mention of Norah, his fiancée, Lily is again all ears, and Skinner feels again at a disadvantage. Unlike, yet in some ways like his equally impassioned namesake in Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, who abandons his bride to march behind Mother Ireland, Michael imagines happy conclusions to both his engagements. Mention of an Easter wedding[89] prompts Lily to another ironic toast - 'I wish you health, wealth and every happiness...' - and triggers reminiscences of her own time as a teenage bride. This is all too much for Skinner whose feelings of estrangement find voice in a plaintive appeal, 'Leely, the language I speak a leetle too - yes?' When he continues to be ignored, his mind turns to 'Bingo Mistress' instead, and he rings up his bookie, Jackie, to check on how his luck is

[88] Andrews, in *The Art of Brian Friel*, p.131, summarises the linguistic limbo Michael inhabits rather well. His speech 'lacks the vigour of the class he wishes to leave, but has none of the confidence of the one to which he aspires'.

[89] There is an irony obvious to an Irish audience in the reference to Easter, because of its associations with the 1916 Rising; Pearse's name, one recalls, has been mentioned earlier in the play by the Balladeer. Michael's political philosophy has nothing in common with Pearse's, though the fictional British Brigadier who orders his death would not have recognised a distinction.

running.[90] Skinner's mimicking of his language and contempt for his ideals has deeply antagonised Michael, who begins to cast doubt on whether Skinner is a *bona fide* civil rights supporter; ironically, like the forces ranged against all three, he begins to suspects that Skinner is 'a revolutionary' in disguise.

The carnivalisation is carried forward to a climax with their next appearance, which finds Skinner officiating at a parodic ceremony, conferring on Lily 'the freedom of the city' and on Michael, with an eye to his middle-class pretensions, a life peerage and the title 'Lord Michael - of Gas'(136). The scene opens with Skinner bursting from a side-room into the parlour, kitted out in the robes of the all-powerful Mayor, quoting *King Lear*. His choice of quotation

> Through tattered clothes small vices do appear;
> Robes and furred gowns hide all[91]

is particularly apposite, and not only in the light of the Brigadier's perjury which the audience has just witnessed; it could almost serve as a potential epigraph for the entire play, which, like *Lear*, deals with injustice, vicious brutality, corruption, poverty, murdered innocence, blindness, people with 'glass eyes' who 'seem/To see the things thou dost not'.[92]

Witnessing Skinner's confident play acts as a liberating experience for Lily. Empowered by drink and his direction, she throws herself into his costume drama, and

---

[90] Deane in 'Why Bogside?', 7-8, stresses that gambling is endemic within Derry's working classes.
[91] William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act IV, scene vi, ll.166-7.
[92] ibid, ll.172-4. Friel's use of intertextuality here resembles that of many postcolonial writers who allude to the canon in order to 'write back' against imperial power and the long shadows it continues to cast.

for a little while acquires a different accent, a different role as Lady Elizabeth, the talk and 'the walk of a queen':

> *(LILY joins SKINNER in a ceremonial parade before imaginary people. They both affect grand accents. Very fast.)*
> SKINNER: How are you? Delighted you could come.
> LILY: How do do.
> SKINNER: My wife - Lady Elizabeth
> LILY: (Blows kiss) Wonderful people.
> SKINNER: Nice of you to turn up.
> LILY: My husband and I.

She revels in the part of being a partner again, in the parody and the dancing and the singing, and is even prepared to take the lead at one point by dragging Skinner into a *military* two-step around the parlour floor.

Throughout all this Michael has been sitting aloof. However, once the radio is switched off, he attempts to re-establish a sense of decorum, and detach Lily from Skinner, whom he regards as a Lord of Misrule, 'more at home with the hooligans, out throwing stones and burning shops!'(138). Skinner's reply again takes the form of a symbolic gesture when '*very deliberately he stubs out his cigar on the leather-top desk*'(138). Like the Judge (149), Michael reads this as further proof of Skinner's criminality; for them both it is clearly an act of mindless desecration.

Surprisingly after all the animosity they have exhibited towards each other, when Michael makes the decision to leave a kind of civility breaks out between the two men. In exchange for Michael's thanks for 'pulling him in', Skinner, in a change of role from clown to Fool, warns him of the very real dangers waiting outside in the Guildhall Square. The innocent Michael believes in his inalienable right 'to walk' in Derry, 'straight out of here and across the Square', and that the law will protect him. The

ideological and moral divisions and confusions, which paralysed the Civil Rights Movement and would split the Nationalist community from the early 1970s onwards, over what the appropriate response to state violence should be, find voice in these final exchanges between Michael and Skinner as they watch the frenetic military activity surrounding them:

> SKINNER: They could do terrible things to you...
> MICHAEL: Gandhi showed that violence done against peaceful protest helps your cause.
> SKINNER: Or shoot you.
> MICHAEL: As long as we don't react violently, as long as we don't allow ourselves to be provoked, ultimately we must win...
> SKINNER: Mr Hegarty is of the belief that if five thousand of us are demonstrating peacefully and they come along and shoot us down, then automatically we...we... (*To MICHAEL*) Sorry, what's the theory again?

Significantly, Friel excludes Lily from the debate between the men, and when she does speak again she is given a rather flat speech, whose purpose seems to be to reiterate the point that her life is one of literal and imaginative poverty. One's sense that the play has rather lost something of its momentum is confirmed in the final scene of Act One (143-7). This adds very little to the drama, occupied as it is mainly with Lily's rather embarrassing attempt at a telephone conversation, which merely provokes a re-run of Michael's outrage. What revives dramatic interest and intrigue immediately before the interval is the likely future impact made by the Brigadier's announcement, 'We know exactly where you are and we know you are armed. I advise you to surrender before there is loss of life'.[93]

[93] Given the insight Skinner displays earlier in the Act in pointing out to Michael the very real possibility that they might be shot, it is rather surprising that his only response to the Brigadier's threat is to comment on his accent. It is dramatically necessary for the tragic outcome, however, that they do underestimate the Establishment reaction

V

The play's tragic power is restored almost immediately at the beginning of Act Two, with the moving testimonies of Michael, Lily and Skinner at the moment of their deaths. It is a startling, non-naturalistic stroke on Friel's part, in which for the first and only time in the play the three enjoy the privilege of addressing the audience directly, in speeches shot through with an understated, poignant irony. Calmly speaking, '*without emotion, in neutral accents*', each conveys a sense of the terrible wasting of their lives.

Characteristically, Michael continues to deny the possibility of the nightmare scenario, even when he hears 'the click of their rifle bolts'(149). As in life, he can only read 'outlines', and as he dies he is trying for a form that eludes him, 'mistake-mistake-mistake'.[94] In this stylised scene he is divested of his rather smug, self-righteous *persona*, and the exposure of his frustration and disbelief humanises him. For Lily, the imminence of death was instantly recognised; its wake brings 'a tidal wave of regret', an epiphany, an articulation that arrives too late to be of service. Just as for so many of Chekhov's and Friel's characters, she experiences a sense that 'life had somehow eluded me. And now it had finished; it had all seeped away'(150).

Given the last word, Skinner leaves life promising to change his ways, regretting how 'unpardonably casual' he had been about the authorities, and his 'defensive flippancy' in the face of injustice. The wide-boy's, the individualist's final words are full of first-person plurals, and instead of odds at the races, his mind runs philosophically, reckoning on how 'the poor are always over-charged', and how the only apt way to

[94] As an example of lexical understatement, it comes close to matching the Priest's choice of the word, 'imperfections'(156).

confront those who tax and brutalise their lives is to strive towards 'a total dedication, a solemnity as formal as theirs'(150).[95]

The concluding scenes between Lily and Skinner enact their movement towards *dialogic*, a greater apprehension of and trust in each other, an inching towards self-apprehension. On discovering that the aunt who had 'reared' Skinner had died ten years ago when he was eleven, and that since then he had lived 'Anywhere - everywhere', Lily's compassion once more comes to the fore:

> I can't offer you no bed, Skinner, 'cos there's six in one room and seven in the other. But I could give you a bite to eat most days of the week...
> If you're stuck.

Drawing attention again to the impossible odds, and to the 'defensive flippancy' he has just confessed to, Friel depicts Skinner arming himself with the Gaelic, fourteenth-century sword to engage the British Army, like some latter-day Quixote. The serious intent behind the sword-play prompts his questioning of the whole civil rights' alliance and its mustering of Nationalists from different social classes. Does an affinity of interests really unite 'you and me and him' with doctors, teachers, accountants, he speculates, or are they all following a fiction? Refusing to be fobbed off with Lily's hesitant explanation as to why she marches, he avers that her real motives are

> Because you live with eleven kids and a sick husband in two rooms which aren't fit for animals. Because you exist on a state subsistence that's about enough to keep you alive but too small to fire your guts. Because you know your children are caught in the same morass....It's about us - the poor - stirring in our sleep. And then if that's not what it's about, then it has nothing to do with us(154).

[95] What this means in *political* terms is unclear. Although the speech is that of a fictional character, it is tempting to read it as pointing towards *Friel*'s future artistic and cultural project, Field Day. Seamus Heaney talks in similarly earnest terms about Field Day in Andrew Eaton's documentary, *History Boys on the Rampage*, BBC2, 1988. 'Each person involved in it is appeasing some oath-bound feeling of needing to be of service.'

His impassioned rhetoric here contains more than a grain of truth, but like Professor Dodds' readings, it is somewhat presumptuous. Recognising that his language is leading him into hazardous political terrain, Skinner retreats into mock political patter. The effect, however, on their audiences - Skinner's and Friel's - has been to sensitise, to induce personal reflection. Tellingly, Lily is able to confide to someone else that her real reason for marching is for the sake of her despised, rejected, written-off son, who exists in part as a metonym for herself, but also perhaps for her class and race.

As the others bustle round the Mayor's parlour, arranging chairs, flowers, papers and glasses to make an orderly closure, Skinner insists on leaving his mark, their signature; he dissuades Michael from removing the sword he had thrust into Sir Joshua's portrait, and persuades Lily to name herself in the Distinguished Visitors' Book, before giving her a parting kiss, and going out singing. Our last sighting of the three, like the first, finds them stretched across the front of the stage

> *(The entire stage is now black, except for a battery of spotlights beaming on the faces of the three. Pause. Then the air is filled with a fifteen-second burst of automatic fire. It stops. The three stand as before, staring out, their hands above their heads.)*

The difference, however, is that now they are standing, making long shadows. And as a result of the play's duration, their faces and identities have been illuminated.

VII

When asked to pass comment on *The Freedom of the City* in an interview some nine years after its premiere, Friel seemed to suggest that he viewed it as only a partial success:

> I think one of the problems with that play was that the experience of Bloody Sunday wasn't adequately distilled in me. I wrote it out of some kind of heat

and some kind of immediate passion that I would want to have quieted a bit before I did it. It was really...a very emotive time. It was really a shattering experience that the British Army, this disciplined instrument, would go in as they did that time and shoot thirteen people. To be there on that occasion and - I didn't actually see people get shot - but I mean, to have to throw yourself on the ground because people are firing at you is a very terrifying experience. Then the whole cover-up afterwards was shattering too.[96]

As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, in fact much of the power of the play comes from its 'heat'. It survives both as an immediate, passionate and *fitting* response to a particular set of appalling events and as a potent illustration of Friel's capacity for dramatic innovation. 'The recurrent dissolves of scene, the forceful management of shifting viewpoints, the commentaries'[97] are comparable to those in Heaney's work of this period, which is similarly casting around for forms and images appropriate to the cultural and political situation. Like Heaney's *North*, *The Freedom of the City* belongs to and illuminates a particular historical moment and the fierce outrage it generated in the consciousness of Northern nationalists. To see it solely as a play of the moment, however, is to underestimate its continuing relevance which lies in its attentiveness to issues of authority and language, and the abuse of both. In life and in death, each of its principal characters is not only a victim of external forces they cannot successfully counter; each is also 'a casualty of language',[98] their own and others.

[96] 'The Man from God Knows Where', an interview with Brian Friel by Fintan O'Toole, *In Dublin*, 14 July 1982, 22.
[97] D.E.S. Maxwell, *A Critical History of Modern Irish Drama 1891-1980*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.209.
[98] Friel, *Volunteers*, (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1989), p.28. Having coined the phrase, Keeney adds, 'Damnit...which of us here isn't?'

CHAPTER FIVE: SMALL GLEAMS: SEAMUS HEANEY'S *NORTH*

> Il va me falloir saisir la crise actuelle. Mais ça m'inquiète. J'hésite à intégrer l'histoire contemporaine dans mes poèmes car ce n'est pas vraiment mon sujet... Je ne vais pas me contenter de décrire des faits; si j'assiste à des manifestations, si je vais dans des quartiers dévastés, il ne suffit pas de décrire. Pour moi cela se fera toujours par des analogies...On procède de façon indirecte; et c'est ainsi que je construirai mon poème, avec des images que comprend la communauté.
>
> (Seamus Heaney, March 1973)[1]

> 'Many people dislike the notion that poetry can have any connection with politics and think... that its influence defiles an otherwise pure act.' So C.M. Bowra began his lectures at Queens University of Belfast nine years ago. These lectures published under the title *Poetry and Politics 1900-1906* make challenging reading today when Irish writers are faced with the social reality of 'the troubles' and with the choice of commenting on them or ignoring them...
>
> The Editors have received very few stories or poems dealing with the troubles.What is the matter? Are Irish writers guilty of self-censorship? Are they in plain language, scared? Or are they, on the contrary, simply being wise?
>
> (Editorial, *Threshold*, Summer 1974)[2]

I

Of all Seamus Heaney's poetry collections, *North* is the one which has attracted most controversy, and invariably negative critiques have focussed either on the book's actual or supposed politics and representation of gender. While admitting the validity of such readings, and the legitimate grounds for anxiety expressed by several critics, this chapter will point out how partial many of these interpretations turn out to be and how generally they neglect consideration of the contexts within which the work was produced. Frequently in order to sustain their arguments, Heaney's relationships with Nationalism, Catholicism and 'masculinity' are rendered less problematical, his responses more

[1] Seamus Heaney, 'Le clivage traditionnel', *Les Lettres Nouvelles*, March 1973, p.189.
[2] Editorial by John Boyd and Patrick Galvin, *Threshold* 25, Summer 1974, p.2.

consistent than they really are; his work is represented as *typically* Nationalist, Catholic, male. In the process the writer himself is translated almost into an allegorical figure, and the often riven, troubled texts are read as if they embodied some kind of unified, uncomplicated narrative.[3]

It should be borne in mind when discussing *North* and the responses it has evoked that the period in which it was produced was the bloodiest in Northern Ireland's recent history. Between the beginning of 1972 and the end of 1975, 1,180 people were killed; of these, 448 were victims of sectarian killings.[4] Not surprisingly given the extent and intensity of violence during this phase, Northern Irish writers found it impossible to remain at 'Pain's edge',[5] to ignore the 'things that happen in the kitchen houses/ and echoing back steeets',[6] and 'the latest whitewash'.[7]

II

Undoubtedly the single political event which had the greatest impact both within and beyond the nationalist community at this period was Bloody Sunday, yet such was the swell and scale of feeling in that day's wake that predictably any attempts to contain it in texts failed or were significantly flawed.[8] Even before that tragedy, as previous chapters

---

[3] This is a view shared by Eamonn Hughes in his essay,'Representation in Modern Irish Poetry', in Allen p.81.

[4] W.D.Flackes, p.320.

[5] Paul Muldoon, 'Party Piece', *New Weather*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p.52.

[6] Derek Mahon, 'Poem in Belfast', *WB*, pp.23-4.

[7] Paul Muldoon, 'Belfast', *Knowing My Place*, (Belfast: Ulsterman Publications, 1971), p.9. Fiacc quotes the poem in his article 'The North's Younger Poets', *Hibernia*, 20, October, 1972, 12:

From the higher ground I look over the city
To know last night's whitewash
Is being given the lie by this morning's rain.
That cemetery under the mountain
Is again appearing as a field of seagulls.

[8] Thomas Kinsella's *Butcher's Dozen* (Dublin: Peppercanister, 1972) is an obvious example. John Hewitt in 'Neither an Elegy nor a Manifesto', *CP Hewitt*, pp.188-9, written in the week that followed

have made clear, Friel's and Heaney's work was becoming increasingly politicised, as, along with other artists, they felt compelled to seek out narratives and forms, images and symbols which might adequately meet the violence and hurt. Numbed, appalled as they were by the brutal course events took, they nevertheless were anxious to retain some degree of artistic control and continuity, yet found their room for manoeuvre constantly threatened by persistent charges of evasion both from within their originary communities and from elsewhere.[9] The experience of living with intermittent violence prior to January 1972 had been disorientating enough; following Bloody Sunday, 'knowing my place', already and always a fraught, ambiguous business in Northern Ireland, as Muldoon's title concedes, became more difficult than ever.[10]

The pressure of the crisis was unrelenting. The outcry following Bloody Sunday, both in and beyond Ireland,[11] and continuing deterioration in the security situation led to the British Government's decision in late March 1972 to impose Direct Rule from Westminster.[12] However, this move neither halted the killings, nor eased tensions.

Bloody Sunday, gives a characteristically dignified and measured response, placing the latest unnamed 'dead' within a larger narrative of killings in the province. The poem drifts away towards its close, which is over-rhetorical.

In a private letter of 8 January 1973, Heaney wrote, 'I would have liked to do a really big poem on Bloody Sunday at the time but couldn't manage it. I wrote a song...but it wasn't good enough, or durable enough to let out.' The publication of this song, 'The Road to Derry', in the *Derry Journal* in January 1997, confirms Heaney's verdict. I can find no specific reference to Bloody Sunday in any of the interviews Heaney gave in the 1970s or 1980s. Perhaps even to name it would have been to release too much anger and distress.

[9] The *Threshold* editorial, cited as my epigraph, is a case in point, and is indicative of liberal peer pressure. In the private letter cited above, Heaney writes, 'Even as the violence proceeded, I still sought ways of keeping within the style and landscape of my earlier poetry...tried to be non-partisan, to comprehend all that was happening within the terms of history and myth'.

[10] Neither Friel's or Heaney's relocations in Co. Donegal and Co. Wicklow, or for that matter Mahon's or Mac Laverty's in London and Edinburgh, lessened the pull of 'home'.

[11] Three days after the killings and on the day of the funerals, 2 February, 1972, the British embassy in Dublin was burnt down by a crowd of 30,000. Four days later, 20,000 people, including Heaney and Michael Longley, gathered at a civil rights protest in Newry in defiance on a government ban. Major demonstrations also occurred in America and Australia (Bowyer Bell, p.278).

[12] 'The republican campaign destroyed what little chance Stormont had of saving itself. It did so by reducing the province to political chaos and by forcing the government to insist upon an ultimately

Rather, as J.C. Beckett has pointed out, it had the unfortunate effect of raising unrealistic expectations among nationalists, and confirming deep suspicions among unionists about British intentions:

> It was natural that the government of the Republic and public opinion both there and among Catholics in the north should see this as a step towards the incorporation of the six-county area in an all-Ireland state. It was equally natural that the northern Protestants should feel that their position was now under threat and that they might find themselves placed, without their consent, under what they regarded as alien rule.[13]

Bombings and shootings carried on unabated throughout April, May and June, 1972, as republican and loyalist paramilitaries sought to put a final end to partition or to talk of its final end.

Heaney's *Guardian* article, 'The Trade of an Irish Poet', dates from this very point in time and offers an interesting still of Heaney's thinking at this particular moment, late May 1972.[14] Characteristically, it endeavours to manage fermented feelings into a play of oppositions: 'At one minute you are drawn towards the old vortex of racial and religious instinct, at another time you seek out the mean of a humane love and reason'.[15] From the diction and syntax in this sentence one might confidently deduce that the writer's preference lies with the second of these options. The sequence, 'time...mean...humane love...reason', seems to privilege emotion recollected in tranquillity and civility over ruinous, irrational energies ('vortex', 'instinct'), which are paradoxically transitory ('minute'), yet long-sanctioned ('old'). In contrast to the

---

self-defeating security policy'(Buckland, p.148).

[13]J.C. Beckett, *A Short History of Ireland*, (London: Hutchinson, 1979), p.174.

[14]As I have indicated above and will argue below, one of the shortcomings of some Heaney criticism has arisen from a tendency to assign to him a particular position. This can be applied more widely to the criticism of Northern Irish literature as a whole. Though *what* and *how* a text says must remain of central importance to any analysis, *when* and *in what circumstances* are matters of considerable significance particularly in a political and cultural situation which is so fluid.

[15]'The Trade of an Irish Poet', 25 May 1972, reprinted in *P*, pp.33-7.

apparently less-favoured, first proposition, where the voice is passive and rendered child-like in the face of huger forces, ('you are drawn towards'), in the latter, grammatically, the addressee is active and individuated ('you seek'). Here we appear to be witnessing the triumph of liberal attitudes over atavistic, nationalist responses, yet elsewhere in the article there is much evidence of alternative perspectives. The previous paragraph is a case in point:

> One the one hand, poetry is secret and natural, on the other it must make its way in a world that is public and brutal. Here the explosions literally rattle your windows day and night, lives are shattered blandly or terribly, innocent men have been officially beaten and humiliated in internment camps - destructive elements of all kinds, which are deeply exhilarating, are in the air.[16]

Heaney begins by figuring poetic activity as a mysterious, 'natural' process, generating and sustaining itself apart, in accordance with the *Timon of Athens* line(s) he had cited earlier, '*Our poesy is as a gum which oozes/ From whence tis nourished*'. However, against that he sets his more recent recognition of poetry as a political ('public and brutal'), rather than purely aesthetic *act*. (It is simultaneously performance, illusion, a play with metaphors <u>and</u> a kind of political and moral action).[17] Interestingly, once his language engages with the actualities of domestic and political life in the North of 1972, it proceeds from describing experiences and sufferings common to both communities ('explosions rattle your windows', 'lives... shattered blandly or terribly') to references which specifically apply to one; internment camps are where *nationalist* prisoners have been 'officially beaten and humiliated'.[18] The idea that 'destructive elements' could be 'deeply exhilarating' sits ill with talk of 'humane love and reason', and might be read as

---

[16] ibid.

[17] These contrary readings of the poetic act mark some of the relocations that have occurred, as the Heaney of *Death of A Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark* has been forced to modify his Romantic/ symbolist apprehension of the poet as a species of diviner. In *Wintering Out* and *North*, because of the crisis and the literary influences identified in Chapters 1 and 3, the poet becomes more self-consciously a mediator of political /historical/ cultural 'truths'.

[18] The Civil Rights march on 30 January 1972, one should recall, was to protest about internment.

expressing a naive Pearsean hope that some 'good' (i.e. the reunification of Ireland) might come from the devastation and blood-letting.[19] Against such a view might be placed any number of entries from the chronology in *Troubled Times* for the month of May:

> **Sat. 13.5.72:** Kelly's bar in west Belfast was badly damaged by a bomb injuring 60 people. Shooting broke out from the direction of Catholic and Protestant enclaves and four civilians and one soldier were shot dead. Gun battles continued the following day until 400 paratroopers took up positions between (Catholic) Ballymurphy and (Protestant) Springmartin. By the end of the second day the death toll had risen to eight, seven of whom were civilians - six Catholics and one Protestant.
>
> **Mon. 22.5.72:** The Official IRA claimed the killing of Ranger William Best, home on leave in the Creggan district of Derry.[20]

William Best, a nineteen year-old Derryman, was a member of the Irish Rangers stationed in Germany. While on a home visit, he was captured and murdered 'in retaliation for murders committed by the British Army', according to sources in the Officials.[21] Many in the nationalist community were appalled and immediately made their anger felt. Two hundred women descended on OIRA headquarters and called on the Officials to quit the city. On the day of Best's funeral, 23 May, 1500 women took their demands for an end to violence to the Provisionals. Five days later, a crowd of 6000

[19] Elsewhere Heaney's choice of diction has similarly led to the charge that he may have harboured a lingering admiration for the IRA, but this, of course, crucially depends on *which* IRA is being referred to and *when*: the IRA of the War of Independence and of northern nationalist folklore? The IRA of the Civil War? The IRA of 1970? The Provisional IRA from 1971 onwards? The opening quatrain of 'After a Killing' (*FW*, p.12) connects contemporary paramilitaries and 'the unquiet founders' of the Irish state, describing them and their weapons as 'Profane and bracing'. The word, 'bracing', like the word 'exhilarating' in the *Guardian* article, can be seen as a frank admission that a boyish awe for 'the boys' does persist amongst northern and southern Catholics, and needs to be confronted; to admit to the existence of one's 'profane' feelings is not necessarily to endorse them. Against the traditional nationalist note conceded in 'After a Killing' - 'Who dreamt that we might dwell *among ourselves...?*' - can be set Heaney's critique of 'Our tribe's complicity' in 'Casualty' (*FW*, pp.21-4).
[20] Bell, Johnstone and Wilson (eds), p.155.
[21] Bowyer Bell, p.321. James Simmons's 'The Ballad of Ranger Best', which appeared in *The Wearing of the Black*, pp.72-3, suggests the killing was in revenge attack for the shooting by soldiers of 'a young boy out playing ball', Manus Deery.

took part in a peace rally in Derry. The next day, 29 May, the Dublin leadership of the OIRA announced a ceasefire.[22]

To a certain extent some of the conditions for this turn of events had been created by the newly-appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw. Back in April he had released 73 internees, and a further 80 were freed at the beginning of May.[23] Subsequently he met delegations from the UDA on 13, 14 and 28 June, and, in a move that would later have major repercussions, negotiated on June 19 an end to a hunger strike at the Crumlin Road prison, by granting prisoners 'special category status'.[24] That agreement, brokered by Paddy Devlin and John Hume of the SDLP, accelerated efforts to bring about a PIRA ceasefire and a face-to-face encounter between Whitelaw and the Provisional leadership.

On 26 June, eleven days after their truce had begun, six leading Provisionals were whisked away in secret to London to a meeting with Whitelaw held in a house belonging to one of his junior ministers. Having successfully 'bombed their way to the conference table',[25] the PIRA leadership set their three main demands before the Secretary of State. Instead of the concessions they were looking for,

> recognition by the British Government of the right of the people of Ireland acting as a unit to decide the future of Ireland; a declaration of intent to withdraw its troops by 1 January 1975; and an amnesty for

---

[22] It is salutary to note that had Best been from Derby rather than Derry his murder would probably have had very little impact. Bardon, p.693, sets this killing within the context of a number of other incidents involving young people.

[23] Paddy Devlin, p.174.

[24] See Bardon, p.693. As a consequence, internees no longer had to wear prison uniform, and were permitted extra visits and food parcels. The revoking of this special category status in 1976 led directly to the hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981, and 'one of the most bitter and polarising crises of the present troubles' (Kevin Boyle and Tom Hadden, *Ireland: A Positive Proposal*, [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985], p.69.

[25] ibid.

political prisoners.[26]

Whitelaw requested more time to consult colleagues. According to Bishop and Mallie, Sean MacStiofain, the Provisionals' chief of staff, was eager for the ceasefire to be maintained. 'His intention was to convene a conference of Irish organisations of all political and religious denominations to discuss the future of the North',[27] they claim. Given the terrible violence visited on the Unionist community over the past two years, it seems inconceivable that he would have found many Protestant representatives prepared to sit down to negotiate away 'their state' with men they regarded as callous murderers. Whatever Mac Stiofain's hopes might or might not have had in mind, others in his party suspected that the British were simply stalling. The fact that the ceasefire fell apart only two days later, when clashes on the Lenadoon estate in West Belfast sparked a fresh confrontation between nationalists and the Army,[28] has led some commentators to conjecture that its collapse had been 'engineered'.[29]

One doubts whether Heaney's earlier ambivalence about 'destructive elements' withstood the impact some twelve days later of 'Bloody Friday' - 21 July 1972 - when the Provisionals signalled their conviction that the British and the Unionists could only be beaten by bombing them into submission.[30] Twenty-two bombs went off in Belfast

[26] ibid, p.227-8. Buckland, p.160, confirms these details of the PIRAs 'peace plan'.
[27] ibid, p.228.
[28] Bishop and Mallie, p.229, detail the breakdown of trust. The PIRA had demanded that the Army supervise the move of a number of Catholic families, who had been allocated houses on the Lenadoon estate. These people were victims of sectarian intimidation. However, when the UDA threatened to burn down any homes occupied by these displaced Catholics, the Army, fearing confrontation with loyalists, 'turned away a van carrying the Catholics' furniture'. This action enraged the 3,000-strong Catholic crowd that had gathered, which began to stone the troops, who replied with rubber bullets and CS gas. At seven o'clock that evening, Mac Stiofain announced the end of the ceasefire.
[29] Bardon, p.695, citing another source, suggests that Gerry Adams may have had a significant role in the decision to end the truce and resume the PIRA offensive. See also Bishop and Mallie, pp.228-230, on Martin McGuinness's scepticism about British manoeuvrings, and Paddy Devlin, pp.179-180.
[30] Buckland, p.161, describes Friday, 21 July, as 'the most devastating day of violence in Belfast',

city centre in the space of sixty-five minutes, killing eleven and maiming over 130 people.[31] Though subsequently the Provisionals claimed that they had issued warnings, they omitted to mention that they had also been responsible for a considerable number of hoax calls.[32] Television cameras and journalists recorded appalling scenes of 'glass and blood', of faces 'mutilated beyond recognition', of policemen and soldiers 'scraping up the remains of human beings into plastic bags, like lumps of red, jellied meat from the pavement'.[33]

To find an apt objective correlative for such sights, to render such incidents in lyric form presented poets with a nigh-impossible task. Like Fiacc and Durcan, James Simmons endeavoured to create a poetry resistant to aestheticisation, but ran risks in doing so as can be seen from one of his poems from 1973. In it he represents the carnage caused by a series of car-bombs in a village in Co. Derry.[34] 'Claudy' addresses its readers and listeners with a pitiless directness, which may well seem crude to contemporary tastes, but at least should be credited for trying to grapple with actualities. Some might view his use of the jauntily rhythmic ballad form as grotesquely inappropriate, as an ironic effect

---

identifying it as 'the point at which the PIRA put itself outside the pale of political negotiation'. Heaney may well have had Bloody Friday in mind when, in his Nobel address, he spoke of his recognition that 'the very brutality of the means by which the IRA was pursuing change was destructive of the trust upon which new possibilities would have to be based' (*Crediting Poetry*, p.17).

[31] Bardon, pp. 695-8.

[32] Bishop and Mallie, p.232.

[33] The first two quotations are from *Belfast Telegraph* , 22 July 1972, the third from Alf McCreary, *Survivors*, (Belfast 1976), p.244; all are cited in Bardon, p.697. Disturbingly, one of Fionnuala O'Connor's interviewees, a teacher from North Belfast, speaks of her suspicion that Bloody Friday may have already been deleted from the republican 'memory': 'The kids just aren't aware of the early no-warning bombs in Belfast...They don't know about the IRA bombing atrocities of the seventies...It has not been passed down in the mythology'(p.122).

[34] James Simmons, 'Claudy: a Ballad', from *The Wearing of the Black*, p.74. Claudy is a village twelve miles from Derry, and where eight innocent people died in a car-bomb attack on the very day that Operation Motorman began. Whether the bombing was carried out with the blessing of the Provisionals, or by 'an IRA unit operating independently', as Bishop and Mallie suggest, p.233, the consequence was that 'the paramilitaries stock' sank still lower' (White, p.132).

which does not come off. Yet if one looks at the poem within the context of its time, one may allow the legitimacy of the poet's rhetoric in contesting a rhetoric where all too often cruelties inflicted on the other side had been lauded and legitimised:

> An explosion too loud for your eardrums to bear
> and young children squealing like pigs in the square,
> and all faces chalk white and streaked with bright red,
> and the glass and the dust and the terrible dead...
>
> for an old lady's legs are ripped off, and the head
> of a man's hanging open and still he's not dead.[35]

Whereas in the past television coverage had often seemed to convey the impression that invariably nationalists were victims of others' violence, now following Bloody Friday a different picture emerged. Most significantly for the long term, perceptions began to change in the Republic.[36] The Dublin Government made no demur when the British authorities response to the Provisionals' terror campaign manifested itself ten days later. This took the form of Operation Motorman, a massive military assault on the 'no-go' areas of Belfast and Derry. Fears that the operation might result in huge casualties proved unfounded, and in the event it turned out to be a major success for the Army and its masters, as it radically curbed the paramilitaries' capacity to wage war.[37] For a long time the loss of 'safe' enclaves made it much more difficult to store weapons and explosives and to launch attacks.

Operation Motorman also opened the way for constitutional moves, and during the following year the search for some kind of political solution began in earnest. After an inauspicious start, 1973 witnessed an almost fifty per cent reduction in killings in Ulster

[35] cf. Friel's questioning of the ballad tradition and the 'false consciousness' induced by ballads in *The Freedom of the City*.

[36] Bardon, p.698, quotes a *Sunday Independent* editorial, which denounced Bloody Friday as 'a black sin...Murder now lies at the feet of the Irish nation and there is no gainsaying that fact'.

[37] ibid.

in comparison with the previous year,[38] but it also saw the IRA carrying its fight to the British mainland. In London on 8 March two bombs were detonated, killing one man and injuring one hundred and eighty. The attack had been timed to coincide with voting in Northern Ireland on whether the border should remain. In late June, however, polling took place for a new Assembly for Northern Ireland, and in December a conference was convened at Sunningdale in Berkshire, involving the British and Irish Governments, some Unionists under Brian Faulkner, the SDLP, and the non-sectarian Alliance Party, with the aim of setting up an Executive for Northern Ireland in which power could be shared by both Catholics and Protestants. The Sunningdale Agreement also proposed the setting up of a Council of Ireland, with representatives drawn from both parts of the island. In effect this was an admission by London of the legitimacy of the Republic's interest in northern affairs, an admission which ignited fears among the Protestant population that before long the British Government might well contemplate handing them over to the South.[39]

On the first day of January 1974 the Northern Ireland Executive took office with the former Stormont premier, Brian Faulkner, as its Chief Executive and Gerry Fitt of the SDLP as his deputy. In the Assembly elections of summer 1973, unionist supporters of Faulkner had held a commanding lead over their opponents, yet after Sunningdale his

[38] Mid-January saw bombings in Derry and Belfast, and riots in Derry, Newry and Strabane followed the first anniversary of Bloody Sunday. Late January and early February witnessed a sharp increase in sectarian killings, one of the results of which was the internment of two loyalists on 3 February. The decision prompted the Ulster Loyalist Council to call for a general strike to take place on Wednesday, 7 February. Seven people were killed during widespread rioting and arson attacks.

[39] Tom Hadden in 'Towards an Autonomous Ulster', *Fortnight*, 84, 7 June 1974, argues that Sunningdale quickly came under attack because of the way it was 'proclaimed both in the republic and by the SDLP as the means by which the ultimate dream of Irish unity would be peacefully achieved'. (This article was reprinted in *Troubled Times*, pp.29-33). Bardon, p.703, states that the Council of Ireland was 'assigned a very minor role' which went 'little further than the agreement made by O'Neill and Lemass in 1965'. However, as Chapter 1 of this study made clear, the repercussions of that agreement were considerable.

popularity with rank-and-file unionists rapidly dwindled. Within four days of the Executive's coming into existence, its authority was challenged by the United Ulster Unionist Council, which voted by 427 to 374 to reject power-sharing and the Council of Ireland. Faulkner's Unionist opponents, led by Harry West and the Reverend Ian Paisley, undermined his position still further when in the Westminster General Election of February 28 they gained eleven out of the twelve available seats.

Although Heaney's poem 'Act of Union' belongs to the previous year, its reference to 'an obstinate fifth column/ Whose stance is growing unilateral' seems prophetic in the light of the events of May 1974. The struggle between the power-sharing Executive and its adversaries reached its climax on the fourteenth of that month. Immediately after winning a vote in the assembly by 44 to 28 on the Sunningdale Agreement, the Executive was faced by a devastating strike organised by the Ulster Workers Council, an *ad hoc* body consisting of opposition politicians, trade unionists and paramilitaries. For two weeks from 15-28 May, economic life in the country was paralysed. Roads were blocked by armed and masked men. Power cuts blacked out homes and factories. In hospitals operations were postponed and patients sent home. Petrol supplies quickly dried up. Postal and telephone services neared collapse. Though the newly re-elected Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, and his Secretary of State, Merlyn Rees, denounced the strike, and considered - briefly - using soldiers to man the power stations, in the end they bowed to senior army advice and held back, fearing a confrontation with large numbers of angry Protestant workers.[40]

[40] Bardon, p.711, reports that the strike committee's chairman, Glenn Barr, later admitted that 'decisive action by the army could have broken the UWC on the first day'.

Three days into the strike, on Friday 24 May, loyalist paramilitaries struck at the Republic. In Dublin and Monaghan town thirty-two people were killed and over a hundred were injured by three car bombs.[41] Two of the three cars used in the bombings had been hijacked in Protestant districts of Belfast. Fionnuala O'Connor reports that when questioned about the bombings, 'a leading loyalist spokesman said that Southerners had laughed at the suffering the IRA caused: "But we're laughing now."'[42]

A week later, with the situation growing desperate by the day, a delegation from the Executive, including Brian Faulkner and his deputy, Gerry Fitt, flew to London in one last effort to persuade Harold Wilson to use the Army to break the UWC's stranglehold. Instead of taking the decisive, but risk-fraught measures they sought, Wilson offered rhetoric.[43] That evening in an extremely ill-considered television broadcast he denounced loyalists supporting the strike as 'spongers', who had taken full advantage of the generosity of British taxpayers, yet used 'every undemocratic and unparliamentary means' available to defy Westminster's will.[44] The effect of Wilson's speech was to rally even more Protestants to the strikers' cause, to such an extent that Glen Barr joked that Wilson should be made an honorary member of the UWC.[45] With the electricity service's public relations officer predicting 'terminal damage to the power plants' and the threat that sewage would shortly be 'bubbling through the manhole covers',[46] the power-sharing Executive - along with the British Government which had backed, then

[41] This became the subject of an exceptional poem by Paul Durcan, 'In Memory of Those Murdered in the Dublin Massacre, May 1974', from *The Selected Paul Durcan*, (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1983).
[42] Fionnuala O'Connor, p.227. In *Troubled Times*, p.164, Robert Bell attributes these sentiments to a UDA press officer.
[43] Paddy Devlin, pp.241-3, suggests that Wilson reneged on promises made on the evening of 24 May following discussions with military advisers.
[44] Buckland, pp.171-2.
[45] Bardon, p.710.
[46] White, p.167.

failed to back it - was forced to admit defeat. On 28 May Faulkner resigned, the Executive fell, and Direct Rule resumed. The following day, the UWC leadership called off their strike, having achieved their goal, a halt to the steady erosion of unionist power.[47]

In the eyes of nationalists, then and now, the British had simply 'caved in'.[48] Recalling these events in his memoir, *Straight Left*, Paddy Devlin directs his outrage equally between those who had staged the 'coup d'état' and those who, he feels, allowed them to:

> The truly astonishing fact is that all this was carried out without the intervention of a combined security force of over 30,000 soldiers and policemen, who did not lift a finger to stop it. Incredibly, not one single case of arrest was reported, yet, for fourteen whole days there was a state of complete lawlessness in the North. The fact that not one single case relating to the stoppage was brought before the courts created the impression in the minds of loyalists that the police, the military and Rees acquiesced in their illegal actions.[49]

III

In poems, interviews and articles from 1972 to 1975, Heaney makes no specific reference to any of the crisis points outlined above, yet it would be absurd to suggest that their influence on his work was anything but profound. Though recognising that one must regard any writer's readings of himself/herself as text with a degree of caution, it seems to me that his 1972 and 1973 interviews for *The Guardian* and *Les Lettres Nouvelles* do shed considerable light on a 'quarrel' he could not satisfactorily resolve,[50]

[47] Buckland, p.172, argues that opposition to the Executive sprang from unionist resentment against a 'settlement' imposed upon them by outside intervention, and distaste at the elevation of 'some of its traditional opponents...into positions of authority'.
[48] Seamus Heaney, *Crediting Poetry*, p. 17.
[49] Paddy Devlin, p.236.
[50] In'The Trade of an Irish Poet', reprinted in *P*, p.34, Heaney asserts that 'Poetry is out of the quarrel with ourselves and the quarrel with others is rhetoric'. In fact, poetry is also a form of rhetoric;

and effectively illustrate the rivenness referred to earlier. Both pieces intimate how a sense of obligation compelled him to 'start squaring up to contemporary events',[51] 'Il va *me falloir* saisir la crise actuelle',[52] and yet working against that was a reluctance to 'wrench the rhythms of my writing procedures'[53] in order to accommodate the growing weight he felt that his writing should be bearing. The closure of this same sentence from *The Guardian* piece suggests another crucial factor inhibiting Heaney, and indeed other Northern poets; what has been holding him back is not a lack of 'will', but rather a lack of confidence over what might be the appropriate *means* to deploy ('ways to deal with them').[54] What aesthetic strategies might enable him to address the 'terrors and the wrongs'[55] and what might be the ethical consequences?

> By upbringing and education, and by experience of life in the north, one is destined to be partisan. Yet an intense fidelity to one's own tribe can only lead to a continuous cycle of revenge - that's what we have anyway, but to embrace it as a deliberate view of life and to celebrate it as the truth goes against the grain of Christian/ humanist feelings.[56]

Here the reference to 'Christian/ humanist feelings' would seem to indicate support for, if not belief in a value system which transcends the partisan/nationalist impulse, associated as it is with negativity, partiality and repetition. Interestingly the emphasis here differs from that articulated at the end of 'Punishment',[57] where 'Christian/humanist

---

Heaney's attempt to distance his art from 'the quarrel with others' and the quarrel of others is a revealing one.

[51] ibid. The boxing metaphor contains an admission that up until this point he has not been 'tough' enough politically/poetically, and could be read as expressing again a sense of anxiety about the issue of 'masculinity' within Irish culture, North and South.

[52] 'Le clivage traditionnel', p.189.

[53] 'The Trade of an Irish Poet', *P*, p.34. (In 'Le clivage traditionnel', he says of the contemporary conflict, 'ce n'est pas vraiment mon sujet').

[54] ibid.

[55] The private letter of 8 January 1973, previously cited.

[56] ibid. This comment confirms my earlier reservations about the application of words like 'nationalist' and 'Catholic' to Heaney and Friel, since the terms can too easily be used to assign the writers to an ideological position which the critic then attacks. (Equally limiting, of course, are the designations 'Protestant' and 'unionist').

[57] *N*, p.38.

feelings' presumably 'connive/ in 'civilized outrage', and perhaps alerts us to the fact that different personas are speaking in different texts.[58] Heaney's 'solution' to the deadlock induced by such 'contradictory awarenesses'[59] and 'moral confusion'[60] was to adopt a variety of strategies, many of which seemed to have previously stood him in good stead. In Part One of *North*, historical analogies and myths predominate and proffer a temporary illusion of distance, while in the at-times Wordsworthian Part Two he constructs a personalised mythology out of 'spots of time' charged with literary and political resonances.[61] What he consciously avoids is the stark 'documentary' approach favoured at times by Fiacc and Simmons for reasons which he subsequently explained to Brian Donnelly. The exchange is again worth quoting in detail:

> BD: Was your interest in Professor Glob's book, *The Bog People*, an interest which came about because it offered you a series of metaphors by which you could objectify what was going on in your part of the world - in other words, did it make writing about things like punishment less painful than they might otherwise have been...?
> SH: Yes, that's absolutely true. That was why I was attracted by these things, because my emotions, my feelings, whatever those instinctive energies are. .. quickened more when contemplating a victim, strangely, from 2,000 years ago than they did from contemplating a man at the end of a road being swept up into a plastic bag - I mean the barman at the end of our road tried to carry out a bomb and it blew up. Now there is of course something terrible about that, but somehow language, words didn't live in the way I think they have to live in a poem when they are hovering over that kind of horror and pity. They became inert, strangely for me anyway. And it was in these victims made strangely beautiful by the process of lying in bogs, it was in them that somehow I felt I could make offerings or images that were emblems...[62]

---

[58] In his interview with James Randall, 20, Heaney recalls a letter sent to Brian Friel, 'just after *North* was oublished, saying I no longer wanted a door into the dark - I want a door into the light. And I suppose as a natural corollary or antithesis to the surrender, to surrendering one's imagination to something as embracing as myth or landscape, I really wanted to come back to be able to use the first person singular to mean *me* and my lifetime'.

[59] 'Pilgrim's Journey', *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, 123, Winter 1984.

[60] The private letter of 8 January 1973.

[61] Eamonn Hughes, in 'Representations in Modern Irish Poetry', in Allen, pp. 78-94, offers a very effective reading of these resonances within *North*, Part Two. Heaney's procedures in many of these poems mirror those he had employed in *Stations*. Two of his contributions to *The Wearing of the Black* are prose poems - 'Romanist' and 'A Constable Calls' (pp.44, 45-6) - reappear in verse form in *North*, Part Two.

[62] 'Brian Donnelly talks to Seamus Heaney', in Broadbridge, pp.60-1.

Much of the hostile criticism of *North* arises directly from the poet's espousal of myth, a narrative form which may have attracted Heaney for a number of reasons. As Clair Wills has pointed out, myth seemingly offered a 'means of acccess to the primitive and "atavistic" part of Irish psyche',[63] what Montague had termed 'the primal Gaeltacht'. Labouring under a double sense of dislocation induced both by the all-pervasive political crisis and by their own professional 'circling'[64] in and beyond Ireland, Heaney and Montague viewed myth as an invaluable instrument for (re-)connecting themselves with their originary 'community', their preferred, imagined audience; by that means a healing might be effected, and the poet might fulfil his role as 'wounded surgeon',[65] addressing those private and public wounds which had so recently 'left you raw...again'.[66] Equally myth could function as a source for 'contemplation', encapsulating tensions and contradictions within and between the 'inner and outer world',[67] and as a cultural weapon against hegemonic forces,[68] as a counter-narrative, a way of 'writing back'. A sense of verification, they believed, might be achieved through the invocation of mythic archetypes which paradoxically and simultaneously seemed able both to 'comprehend' and transcend the historical moment. As a cultural narrative myth seemed to contain the potential both to de- and re-familiarise.[69]

---

[63] Wills, p.28.

[64] 'With all my circling a failure to return', John Montague, *RF*, pp.13, 83.

[65] T.S. Eliot uses the phrase in *Four Quartets, East Coker*, IV, 1. The term could be appositely used to describe Friel's Frank Hardy and Heaney's Philoctetes.

[66] 'Act of Union', *N*, p.50.

[67] Ted Hughes, 'Myth and Education', from *Writers, Critics and Children*, ed. Geoff Fox, (London: Heinemann, 1976), reprinted in *Winter Pollen*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), pp.139.

[68] Snyder, Bly and Duncan, the Berkeley poets, had used myth in this oppositional way, ans as a means of atonement. Said in *Culture and Imperialism*, pp.xiii-xiv, talks about culture as a 'combative' means of expressing identity and warns how 'returns' can generate 'religious and nationalist fundamentalism'.

[69] In practice, myth, like metaphor, analogy or any other 'narrative', could only take Heaney so far. In several key poems in *North*, as I shall argue, Heaney recognises the fact that it cannot suffice.

For others, however, myth was 'false memory', a tainted, discredited form, and its use constituted 'a corruption of pure poetic imaginative discourse'.[70] The first to voice his opposition to Heaney's deployment of this strategy was Ciaran Carson in his review of *North* for *The Honest Ulsterman.* For Carson, the poet's decision to impose 'a superstructure of myth and symbol'[71] on his material mars much of the collection, ruins several potentially effective poems,[72] and results in repeated falsifications. By conflating contemporary acts of barbarity with ancient ritual killings, Heaney confers an aura of 'normality' upon them; by representing them as if they belonged to some timeless, archetypal pattern of human behaviour, he was endowing these vile deeds - unconsciously perhaps - with a spurious 'respectability', and denying their *political* origins and consequences.[73] Revealingly - in terms of the critic and his subject - Carson characterises Heaney's procedures as essentially those of the Catholic Church, whose mysteries and rituals are intended, we are informed, to induce 'a willing ignorance'.[74]

Repeatedly in her critique of *North*,[75] which first appeared in the year following the Hunger Strikes, Edna Longley also lays stress on the 'Catholic' features of the volume

---

[70] Wills, p.28. The appropriation of pagan and Christian myth by militant Republicans in 1916, 1966 and, later, during the 1981 Hunger Strikes, not surprisingly provoked hostility to that form of narrative in anti-Republican quarters. In such quarters, myth would be inextricably linked with fascism.

[71] Ciaran Carson, 'Escaped from the Massacre?', *The Honest Ulsterman*, Winter 1975, p.183.

[72] See his comments, pp.184-5, on 'Kinship' and 'Funeral Rites'.

[73] A similar line of argument can be found in Patricia Coughlan's"Bog Queens": The Representation of Women in the Poetry of John Montague and Seamus Heaney', in *Gender and Irish Writing*, ed. Toni O'Brien Johnson and David Cairns, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), pp.88-111. Coughlan maintains that the direct consequence of Heaney's use of gendered myth results is 'an elision of history...an elision which precludes the possibility of understanding history as the product of human actions and not merely as a fated, cyclical process.'

[74] ibid, p.185.

[75] Edna Longley, '*North*: "Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. Tony Curtis, (Bridgend: Poetry Wales, 1982), pp. 65-95. Subsequently it has appeared in slightly revised form in her own volume of essays, *Poetry in the Wars* and in *Seamus Heaney*, ed. Michael Allen. (Added to the original text are two more positive, retrospective sections, found on pp.141-2, 144 of *Poetry in the Wars*). Her dissatisfaction with *North* is apparent in a much earlier article, 'Fire and Air', which appeared in *The Honest Ulsterman*, 50 (Winter 1975), 179-183, and immediately

and what she views as its strongly nationalist perspectives, which have caused a sharp contraction in imaginative focus. *North*, we are told, 'is a book of martyrs rather than of tragic protagonists'(79), and throughout her essay one finds a litany of references to the poet's 'ritualising habit'(84), his use of 'rites'(84, 85), 'ritual'(67, 84, 85, 88) and 'ritual observance'(76), and allusions to the rosary (twice on 76, once on 84, 85), pilgrims and pilgrimage (66, 75), icons (80, 91), pieties (71, 83) and 'doctrine'(77).[76] Given that Heaney's poetry indeed in part 'itself derives from his religious sensibility',[77] it is entirely appropriate that such a vocabulary should be applied to describe his work. Yet, these iterations - her own 'stacking up' of 'parallels'?[78] - could equally be read as part of her attempt to position Heaney politically, to present his relationships with Nationalism, and with Catholicism, as unproblematical ones. Although elsewhere Longley warns of the need to maintain the partition between poetry and politics,[79] her own critical discourse - like everyone else's - has trouble confining itself to solely aesthetic matters.

Where Edna Longley makes a stronger case is when she draws attention to the structuring of the volume and the prominence afforded to myths and analogies. To a

preceded Ciaran Carson's review. Page references in my main text will be to the Poetry Wales version.

[76] References to the poet as an 'initiate' and to 'ordination'(66) also imply that Heaney has become more rigidly orthodox Catholic in stance. However, as Tom Garvin pointed out in a recent lecture at 'The Stories of Ireland' conference in Belfast (30 June-3 July, 1997), the Catholic Church in Ireland was itself in a state of flux as a result of social and economic changes and Vatican II.

[77] '*North*: "Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', p.84.

[78] ibid, p.81.

[79] 'Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland', *Poetry in the Wars*, pp.185-210. Whereas Longley attributes many of the changes in Heaney's poetry to a physical and political re-location - 'Heaney's move South between *Wintering Out* and *North* must indeed have shifted the co-ordinates of his imagination'(91), '*North* was written from the perspective of Wicklow/ Dublin; and a broader Nationalism'(92) - I would suggest that the deteriorating political narrative within Northern Ireland itself may have been a much more significant factor. When in the 1977 interview with Seamus Deane, Heaney speaks of his conviction that 'the genuine political confrontation' in the North 'is between Ireland and England', this, I suspect, might have more to do with Bloody Sunday and the Ulster Worker's Strike, for example, than with living a cocooned existence in Glanmore, County Wicklow.

large extent the 'success' of Heaney's 'design'[80] and 'architectonic methods'[81] in *North* depends upon the reader's willingness to accept its sustained focus on the bog victims and Viking Ireland.[82] Confronted by the challenge of her question, 'What is the precise "emblematic" relevance of these mummified figures to the "man-killing parishes" of Northern Ireland?'[83] or her dismissive description of the Viking presence as 'costume-drama imports',[84] some of Heaney's keenest advocates have had problems coming up with a convincing 'defence'. Even Seamus Deane conceded that Heaney's 'transmuting' of 'ground and victim, old sacrifice and fresh murder' into 'marriage myth' was suspect, and that though '*at first*' he found the analogy between Norse myths and the contemporary experience 'thrilling', subsequently he recognised that these myths 'do not correspond to Irish experience *without some fairly forceful straining*' (my italics).[85]

Another important aspect of Longley's critique of *North*, which follows up Carson's and prefigures Lloyd's, is where she identifies what she sees as Heaney's recurring tendency to aestheticise the violence set before us.[86] She illustrates the way victims of tribal 'justice' are transmuted, 'perfected' by means of a rhetoric which comes down too definitely on the side of 'beauty', and against 'atrocity',[87] and singles out what she regards as the 'unduly self-referring'[88] ending of 'The Grauballe Man' and the contrived

[80] '*North*: "Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', p.86.
[81] ibid, p.88. Bernard O'Donoghue, a highly sympathetic reader of Heaney's poetry, concedes that the structure 'certainly has an air of demonstration to it'(p.70).
[82] Heaney's decision to subject his individual lyrics to the rigours of a larger scheme may have in part been prompted by the model of *The Rough Field.* I recall, but have not been able to trace a comment by Montague from the early 1970s which argued that Heaney's work lacked 'architectonic' form.
[83] '*North*: "Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', p.74.
[84] ibid, p.82.
[85] 'The Timorous and the Bold', *Celtic Revivals*, p.179.
[86] Lloyd, p.102, would later accuse Heaney of reducing 'history to myth, furnishing an aesthetic resolution to conflicts that are constituted in quite specific historical junctures'.
[87] '*North*: "Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', p.76.
[88] ibid. It is entirely possible that the narrator of 'The Grauballe Man' does not intend us to take the word '*perfected*' at face value. The closure of the final stanza, with its references to 'each hooded

closure of 'Funeral Rites' as instances of an ill-judged, but 'passionate desire to assuage'.[89]

It would be not be far-fetched to credit Longley's essay with some part in the development of a feminist critique of Heaney's poetry in recent years; certainly both of its principal exponents, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford and Patricia Coughlan,[90] acknowledge her contribution in exposing gendered positioning in his work.[91] Initially Cullingford's focus lies with the poet's redeployment of traditional nationalist iconography, what Longley refers to as the 'aisling element' in *North*.[92] In her 1990 essay, 'Thinking of Her...As...Ireland', Cullingford attacks the use of allegorised female figures within such poems as 'Act of Union' and 'Bog Queen', which she sees as naturalising the reification of women in Irish society:

> Politically the land is seen as an object to be possessed, or repossessed: to gender it as female, therefore, is to confirm and reproduce the social arrangements which construct women as material possessions, not as speaking subjects.[93]

Within Heaney's re-presentations of earth-goddesses and ordinary mortal female figures, Cullingford detects traces of the misogynistic tendencies inherent within Catholic ideology.[94] By resorting to 'atavistic myth'[95] as a means of expressing his outrage at the

---

victim/ slashed and dumped', could be seen as undermining the aestheticising procedures that have gone before.

[89] ibid, p.85. Wills, p.8 and elsewhere, questions the concept of art as socially redemptive, and 'the idea of the aesthetic' as existing 'above or beyond politics, and outside of ideology'.

[90] Elizabeth Butler Cullingford's '"Thinking of her...As...Ireland":Yeats, Pearse and Heaney', *Textual Practice*, Spring 1990, 1-21; Patricia Coughlan's '"Bog Queens": The Representation of Women in the Poetry of John Montague and Seamus Heaney', pp.88-111. An important contribution to the discussion of gender in Irish poetry which precedes these pieces is Eavan Boland's *A Kind of Scar: The Woman Poet in a National Tradition*, (Dublin: Attic Press, 1989).

[91] See '*North*: "Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', pp.77-81. (Longley is cited in footnote 4 in Cullingford, "Thinking of her...As...Ireland", and in notes 28, 30 and 31 of Coughlan's).

[92] ibid, p.80.

[93] Cullingford, '"Thinking of her...As...Ireland", p.1.

[94] 'Mariolatry in Ireland *must be understood as* the deliberate identification of a conquered people with a cult which was anathema to their Protestant oppressors'(my italics), Cullingford, p.2. Given her

violence inflicted upon his community, by repeatedly deploying 'gender polarities'[96] in order to 'explain' political and cultural divisions, she argues, Heaney's poetry itself colludes in violence - against women; instead of challenging 'the social arrangements which construct women as material possessions',[97] his poetry confirms them.

Cullingford's thesis posits not only a Heaney whose texts are possessed by subconscious hostility and anxieties about womankind, but perhaps equally damningly one who is deeply attracted towards the IRA.[98] 'Heaney, a Catholic, sees the IRA as pouring out their blood, and the blood of their victims, in order to restore the violated territorial integrity (read virginity) of Ireland.'[99] The implication here is of an endorsement of Republican ideology, an approval of the blood-sacrifice, though the evidence she cites in support of this claim seems to me negligible. (Syntactically, 'Heaney', 'Catholic' and 'IRA' are made to 'run' with each other). The 'innumerable doubts, qualifications, self-criticisms, and changes of heart'[100] and latitude she allows to Yeats is denied to Heaney, whose political stance is deduced from three poems ('The Tollund Man', 'Act of Union' and Kinship') and extracts from two articles, one from 1972, the other from 1974.[101]

---

criticism of reductivist tendencies in others, it is surprising that she should dismiss the Marian strain within Catholicism as simply a provocation or as a Romanist ploy developed to maintain patriarchal control inside and outside the home.

One might contrast Cullingford's comment with those of one of the authors she cites in her essay. While condemning the psychic abuse inflicted on women over the centuries as a result of the Vatican's promotion of the Virgin cult, Marina Warner also acknowledges that it has also been a source of 'splendour and lyricism', which has 'filled men and women with deep joy and fervent trust', and 'has inspired some of the loftiest architecture, some of the most moving poetry, some of the most beautiful paintings in the world.' See *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, (London: Picador 1985), pp.338-9.

[95] Cullingford, '"Thinking of her...As...Ireland", p.3.

[96] ibid, p.2.

[97] ibid, p.1.

[98] James Simmons makes an identical charge in 'The Trouble with Seamus', in *Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Elmer Andrews, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.57.

[99] Cullingford, '"Thinking of her...As...Ireland", p.3.

[100] ibid, p.13.

[101] She quotes from 'Mother Ireland', *The Listener*, 27 November 1972 and the *Preoccupations* essay, 'Feeling into Words', which dates from October 1974. Given that Cullingford's essay was published

According to Patricia Coughlan, Heaney's texts are 'dismayingly reliant upon old, familiar and familiarly oppressive allocations of gender positions'.[102] Where others have interpreted Heaney's texts as celebrating feminine creativity and insight, Coughlan claims that in fact they constantly subject actual, individual women into a male *ideal*.[103] Her critical task is to interrogate the poet's predilection for archetypes, and challenge the way in which 'rationality, speech and naming' appear to be 'the prerogatives of the autobiographically validated male poet', while 'the various female figues dwell in oracular silence, always objects, whether of terror, veneration, desire, admiration or vituperation, never the coherent subjects of their own actions.'[104] Ironically, though both Heaney and Montague claim to speak for a 'politically oppressed and therefore hitherto unspoken group, Northern Catholics',[105] they exclude 'women as speaking subjects' in their poems, and, adding insult to injury, exploit gendered images in order to sustain their stereotypical constructions of 'Irish' and 'Englishness'.[106]

The validity of Coughlan's specific comments concerning representations of gender will be considered later as part of the discussion of particular poems in *North*. Her general critique of patriarchal attitudes within Irish culture and literature is, like Boland's, Cullingford's and Meaney's,[107] convincing, as is her identification of certain recurrent

---

in 1990, there seems to be little reason why she could not have referred to later poems.

[102] Coughlan, p.88.

[103] ibid, p.90.

[104] ibid, p.89.

[105] ibid, p.90.

[106] Coughlan draws attention to the frequency with which male-authored Irish texts preoccupy themselves with 'neo-Oedipal' struggles. (This also forms part of the matter of Edna Longley's essay, 'When Did You Last See Your Father?', first published in 1988, reprinted in *The Living Stream*, pp.150-172). A common strategy for the poet/ son is to appear to ally himself with the feminine against familial, clerical or colonial authority.

[107] Gerardine Meaney, *Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics*, (Dublin: Attic Press, 1991).

tropes within Heaney's poetry, such as his deployment of 'erotic disrobing narrative(s)'.[108] However, her allegations that Heaney consistently subordinates women in his poetry and aestheticises their 'deprivation, suffering and hard work' do not stand up to close scrutiny. When, for example, he locates mother figures in domestic contexts, he is depicting gender relations *as they were* when he was growing up; to present or re-present is not to endorse.

Like almost all critics examining texts from a particular ideological angle, Coughlan chooses texts which seem to fit her thesis and confirm her presuppositions. Significantly, in her discussion of the early poems which provide a foundation for her critique of *North*, she omits any reference to 'Churning Day' and 'Mother',[109] both of which place considerable stress on the physical toll exacted upon the women. The narrator in 'Churning Day' describes how his mother 'slugged and thumped for hours', like some heavyweight, until 'Arms ached/ Hands blistered'. Both 'Mother', and the poem which precedes it, 'The Wife's Tale', contradict Coughlan's contention that Heaney's women are never 'speaking subjects'. The female speaker in the former rages against the way she is 'pumped',[110] and expected to meet the excessive demands of others, while her own emotional and sexual needs are neglected.[111]

[108] Coughlan, p.99.
[109] 'Churning Day', *DN*, pp.21-2 , Admittedly, 'Churning Day' could be read as a typical early Heaney text, encoding a - spurious? - analogy between physically arduous farm-chores and his own creative labour, were it not for the exactness of the poet's focus on the primary process, the transformation of milk into butter.
[110] 'Mother', *DD*, pp.29-30: 'I am tired of walking about with this plunger/ Inside me. God, he plays me like a young calf/ Gone wild on a rope'.
[111] She likens herself to an abandoned bedhead that 'does not jingle for joy any more'. Their love-making results in more burdens for her to carry.

Coughlan appears to have a particular blindspot when it comes to recognising irony when Heaney engages with issues of gender, and fails to register those occasions when Heaney is *exposing* arrogant and complacent, sadistic and predatory male attitudes.[112] Thus in her interpretation of 'The Wife's Tale', the female narrator is merely wearily compliant, and incapable of criticising the smug, self-satisfied manner with which her husband treats her.[113] Her handling of 'Act of Union' is similarly reductive. She unites the poet and the poem's narrator in chauvinist complicity, and, like some other critics, seems unable to grasp that the subject of Heaney's ironic sonnets might be both gender and politics, sexual imperialism and what she somewhat coyly refers to as 'the tangled intimacy of Anglo-Irish political relations'.[114]

There is not space here to embark on a comprehensive discussion of Heaney's use of sexual and gendered images, or indeed on other critiques of the poet's work that accentuate its alleged political shortcomings.[115] Suffice it to say, Longley, Cullingford and Coughlan have been attentive to the way in which Heaney's texts can translate women into iconic presences, and on occasion exploit gender in order to deliver political parables. In *North*, poems such as 'Ocean's Love to Ireland', 'Aisling' and 'Act of Union' persist in interpreting the Northern Ireland conflict from a Jacobite perspective, as essentially a struggle between 'male' England and 'female' Ireland.

[112] The narrator in 'The Wife's Tale', according to Coughlan, celebrates '*without obvious intentional irony*, the separate spheres of farm and home labour'(p.100). In discussing the second sonnet of 'Act of Union', she asks, '*How ironically is that speech to be read*?' (p.106), and then answers her own question by suggesting that the poem reveals a similar 'gender triumphalism' to that exhibited in 'Rite of Spring'.

[113] Lines such as 'Always this inspection has to be made/ Even when I don't know what to look for' implies to me that she finds some of her husband's demands absurd and pointless. Her description of him 'as proud as if he were the land himself' suggests that he is like a little boy whom she is expected to humour. See *DD*, pp.27-8.

[114] Coughlan, p.106.

[115] I have discussed David Lloyd's analysis in some detail and referred to Desmond Fennell in a recent essay, 'Levelling with Heaney', 101-5.

There is a case, however, for reading many of the poet's allusions to sexuality in a much more affirmative, celebratory light, and as contributing to a developing spirit of pluralism within contemporary Irish culture. That there has been a substantial tradition in Irish writing this century of challenging theocratic forces in both the island's unfree states is indisputable. For Heaney, as for so many other Irish artists, Catholic and Protestant, sexual repressiveness is a manifestation of a broader cultural, political, psychological and spiritual malady infecting 'Ireland'.[116]

IV

In his commentary on *North* for the Poetry Book Society, Heaney is clearly at pains to present the volume as a homogeneous work.[117] The very different procedures adopted between the collection's first and final poems, along with the uncertainties they voice, are subsumed under the proposition that philology and landscape form its central, unifying concerns:

> The title of the book...gestures towards the north of Ireland and the north of Europe. The first poems are set in Mossbawn, my earliest home, the last one in Wicklow, where I moved in 1972. Both places have Norse elements. In fact, the language and landscape of Ireland, as the poem set on the archaeological site at Belderg insinuates, can be regarded as information retrieval systems for their own

[116] Perhaps an important forerunner of Heaney's and Friel's in this respect is Austin Clarke. One thinks of poems such as 'Penal Law', from *Six Irish Poets*, ed. Robin Skelton, (Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 21, which anticipates a time when

> Lovers will find
> A hedge school for themselves and learn by heart
> All that the clergy banish from the mind.

'Cloistered' and 'Ballad', two of the final prose-poems in *Stations* (Belfast: Ulsterman Publications, 1975), pp.20-1, interestingly juxtapose scenes of the academic, clerical and political conditioning to which adolescent Catholics were subjected. 'Cloistered' ends with triumphs 'in examination halls' which mask the narrator's 'scalding...lust', while 'Ballad' observes how, post-Pearse, Republican tradition has appropriated images from Christ's martyrdom and Catholic ritual.

[117] This has reproduced in *Thirty Years of the Poetry Book Society 1956-1986*, ed. Jonathan Barker, (London: Hutchinson, 1988), pp.126-7.

history; the bog bank is a memory bank.[118]

In that analogy between high-tech 'information retrieval systems' and the non- tech 'bog bank', one gets a foretaste of Heaney's method in *North* of suddenly telescoping time and distinctions.

Following precedents established in his first three books, *North* begins with an encounter rooted in private history and spaces. Although it is tempting to sentimentalise 'Mossbawn Sunlight' as a celebration of a past perfected, a re-creation of a tangible world of warmth, solidarity and mellow fruitfulness, it should be remembered that this too is a poem about time and absence.[119] 'Mossbawn: Sunlight' dates from the intensely violent 1972,[120] but attempts to conjure a different North. It opens with a mystery, with the illumination of a vacancy, which the text seeks to fill by reincarnating two substantial family 'presences', and by fleshing out the doubleness of things. Like its human counterpart, the pump is realised as both a physical and mythic entity. The adjective, 'helmeted', which initially describes it, suggests not only its shape and its human attributes, but also militates in favour of its symbolic role as guardian of the territory. Certainly the pump embodies cast-iron reality, occupies, literally, a concrete place within the Mossbawn scheme of things, yet at the same time it is placed by the narrator in a plane beyond matter. Through the intercession of the sun, it participates in a miracle, as water collected in the casually 'slung bucket' undergoes a transubstantiation. 'Sunlight'

[118] ibid, p.126.

[119] Edna Longley in'*North*: "Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', p.90, argues that both the dedicatory 'Mossbawn' poems occupy 'a truly timeless zone' within which "calendar customs" of domesticity and agriculture inoculate against the more barbaric "rites" to come'. I have serious doubts about the possibilities of inoculation and the existence of 'truly timeless' zones in Heaney; the barbarism haunts even the poems which try to exclude it. O'Donoghue, p.75, reads *North* as an attempt 'to chart moral absence, the abdication of the responsibility of judgment'.

[120] It was first published in *Soundings*, p.23.

imagines a world where even the immensity of the sun can be contained and domesticised, and time itself can seem to stretch; the sun's huge heat is made comparable to 'a griddle', a word which, like 'pump', 'stove', 'goose's wing', 'tinsmith's scoop', 'meal-bin', calls to mind an earlier - but in reality, no less-troubled - age.

Skilfully the narrative voice manoeuvres our move from outside to inside the house, from a wall of warmth to a 'plaque of heat' and the principal figure of the poem. The fact that the aunt is portrayed engaged in a domestic task, and 'defined' through a series of metonyms ('her hands', 'a floury apron', 'whitened nails', 'measling shins') and verbs which emphasise alternating bursts of activity and passivity ('scuffled', 'stood', 'dusts', 'sits'), might seem to confirm Coughlan's reading of the way Heaney's poems 'construct' women. The narrator clearly values the creativity observed, but though the outcome is celebrated ('the scone rising', 'here is love'), the processes by which it has been achieved remain unknown or unrecorded. The scone functions as an objective correlative for the poem itself, and is not treated as an inferior product; like the poem 'rising/ to the tick of two clocks', past and present, it gives the impression of just having 'happened'.

What the narrative voice is endeavouring to efface is the tarnishing of time. Love, like the 'tinsmith's scoop', seems tangibly 'here' in the present tense, and somewhere below the surface its gleam is retained. The metaphorical strategies the text employs resemble those of John Montague in a poem from the same time.[121] *The Rough Field*'s second

[121] Montague, *RF*, p.19:

Each morning, from the corner
of the hearth, I saw a miracle
as you sifted the smoored ashes
to blow a fire's sleeping remains

section opens with a short lyric dedicated to his Aunt Brigid. She too is depicted in a domestic situation, suffused with symbolic meaning. In attempting to counter the awful narrative enacted beyond their world of words, both texts utilise simple unglamorous 'ingredients'. Comparable to the sunlight, water, honey, scones and meal in Heaney's poem, are Montague's humble, equally sacred images - hearth, ashes, fire, brands, turf. However, whereas the almost 'absent' narrator of Heaney's *pietas* strives to suppress any sense of the tense present, Montague's much less self-effacing speaker makes us painfully aware in the four poems that follow of the fault lines that have opened up both inside and outside familial spaces.[122]

Like its companion piece, 'The Seed Cutters' is concerned with continuities, reaching back to an almost pre-lapsarian age, 'hundreds of years away', when there was only 'time to kill',[123] and no thought of killing. Its origins lie in 'images drawn from art', and though it started life as an entry in a prose journal, 'the more exactly I described what I remembered, the further and further away it became and it went so far away it turned itself into a sonnet.'[124] On the surface, the poem is no more than an affectionate portrayal of a seasonal custom which could be located anywhere in Northern Europe during the last four centuries. His rustics are grouped in a half-circle, kneeling behind an ineffective windbreak which the 'wind is breaking through'. The only 'tuck and frill' in their lives is

---

back to life, holding the burning brands
of turf, between work hardened hands.
I draw on that fire...

[122] The riven state and his own sense of an ending are conveyed in a series of images, such as the 'broken tree'(*RF*, p.21), 'the moon in her/ last phase', the fault that'runs/from roof to base' (p.22), the repeated 'hollow note'(p.23).

[123] The phrase was used by Marie Heaney's brother, Barry Devlin, as a song-title on the Horslips L.P., *The Tain* in 1973. That song in turn provided the title for Jennifer Johnston's novel, *Shadows on our Skin* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977), and further evidence of how strong intertextual links are within Irish culture.

[124] Heaney commenting on the poem in the radio programme, *In Their Element*, BBC Radio 4, 1977. Corcoran, pp.98-9, links 'Mossbawn Sunlight', via Robert Lowell with Vermeer.

to be found on the sprouting potato leaves, and - happily - the only stain 'the dark watermark' inside the milky root. The narrative voice constructs a world of relative innocence and indolence, yet at the same time recognises that it is the labour of these fellow countrymen[125] which perpetuates the creative cycle. Like the man 'wading lost fields' observed in 'Gifts of Rain', the seed cutters are at one with the earth, and in their deaths are blessed by the 'broom/ Yellowing over them'. The world which the frame narrator inhabits, however, is another world, tainted by experience. Though he delights in using the collective 'us' and 'our', and longs to merge into 'the frieze/ With all of us there, our anonymities', he *knows* that anonymity and collective security are presently things of the past; 'the shelter was once there but is there no longer'.[126] In order to ensure the authenticity of this scene, the narrator invokes the aid and authority of Pieter Breughel the Elder (c.1525-69), the Flemish painter.[127] As Ciaran Carson has pointed out, the apostrophe 'works perfectly; we realise how Breughel's realism, his faithfulness to minutiae, are akin to Heaney's, and what could have been portentousness takes on a kind of humility'.[128] Breughel's art, like Heaney's, is not that of 'a retiring escapist. His art shows that he had been the witness of the brutal aspects of contemporary life. The misery of the prisoner, the barbarity of judicial punishment...the havoc wrought by soldiers sent to search and destroy';[129] he too belonged to a time when 'religious questions' were 'a matter of life or torture and death'.[130]

[125] At a recent lecture delivered at the University of Sheffield, 15 March 1997, Neil Corcoran quoted Heaney's use of this phrase in praising Paul Muldoon.

[126] 'Unhappy and at Home', p.67. These are Seamus Deane's words to which Heaney gives assent. Interestingly in Heaney's reading of the poem for the radio programme, *In Their Element*, the words 'O calendar customs!' and 'anonymities' are intoned with a heavy cadence. What may have begun to feel like celebration, ends in elegy. For an alternative reading of 'The Seed Cutters' as part of the regionalist debate, see Kirkland, pp.32 -3.

[127] Previously Heaney had used a Breughel painting as part of the stimulus for 'The Wife's Tale' in *Door into the Dark.*

[128] Carson, 'Escaped from the Massacre', pp.185-6.

[129] Gregory Martin, *Bruegel* (New York: Park South Books, 1978), p.2.

[130] ibid.

The second movement in *North* consists of a cluster of poems, 'Belderg', 'Funeral Rites', 'North', 'Viking Dublin' and 'Bone Dreams', which centre upon the Viking presence in Ireland and Northern Europe as a whole.[131] Though these poems certainly endeavour to establish that a congruence exists between the tribal violence of a thousand years and that of the contemporary North, they should perhaps also be seen within the context of Heaney's expanding vision of what constituted his poetic terrain.[132]

'Belderg' brings together much of the matter Part One of *North* will range over - bogland, Norse history, etymology, culture and agriculture - and many of the collection's characteristic features of style. Retrieved from 'the soft-piled centuries' are innumerable linguistic relics, as Heaney repeatedly deploys words of Anglo-Saxon or Viking origin (*eye, house, quern, stone, wheat, plough*), words from Gaelic (*glib*) and archaic dialect (*coomb*), along with a fair sprinkling of kennings (*turf-coomb, stone-wall, world-tree*), which are so frequently found in the work of Norse and Saxon *scops*.[133]

Appropriately, since the poem examines persistence, change and recurrence, its dominant shape and symbol is the circle, inscribed in the images of eyes, 'growth-rings' and the quernstones themselves. Whereas for the poem's first speaker, an archaeologist one

[131] During the early seventies,as a result of excavations being carried out by Brendan O'Riordan and Tom Delaney into Dublin's Viking past, the role of the Vikings in history was undergoing radical revision. Heaney recalls being 'terrifically awakened' by a National Museum exhibition in Dublin, and describes with child-like glee his delight in 'the combs. the little scale-pans and so on...all that Bronze Age stuff', and, above all, 'the gold' (Corcoran, p.34). In November and December 1973, Heaney collaborated with David Hammond on a school series for Northern Ireland's Radio 4, entitled *Explorations*. His texts glisten with images which would find their way into the poems of *North*. In 'Words working', for example, he speaks with relish of the rich and secret treasure within words, drawing students' attention to the Anglo-Saxon phrase, 'opening the word-hoard'(*Explorations*, recorded 29 November 1973, broadcast 17 January 1974).

[132] This increasing engagement with European experience is reflected in Heaney's prose writings, and as has been pointed out above, p.143, coincides with Ireland's entry into the EEC. The 1973 essay, 'Faith, Hope and Poetry' (*P*, pp.217-220), deals with Osip Mandelstam, and marks the beginning perhaps of widening range of reference. Heaney returns to the Mandelstams in *GP*, pp. 71-90, which

assumes, the stones have become familiar and assimilated into his domestic space, for the main narrator they house a 'charge of primal energy'[134] which increasingly comes to affect and afflict him. The more his eyes and ears take in, the more oppressive the massy weight of history becomes. All too soon the reader also succumbs to the pressure of so many palaeolithic and neolithic sights, and the word-cairns used to render them:

> There were the first plough-marks,
> The stone-age fields, the tomb
> Corbelled, turfed and chambered,
> Floored with dry turf-coomb.
>
> A landscape fossilized,
> Its stone-wall patternings
> Repeated before our eyes
> In the stone walls of Mayo.[135]

Even a change of tack and an etymological discussion offers no respite, as the narrator is forced to contemplate more recent acts of invasion, division, separation. 'Home', like the linguistic components it comprises, proves as 'mutable as sound'. Even supposedly academic questions - 'moss' from Norse or Planter Scots? Gaelic 'bán' or English 'bawn'? Fort or sanctuary? - conspire with the stones to draw him into a vortex, towards the fatalism of the Norse and, perhaps now, the Northern Catholic psyche. The poem's closure finds him picturing Yggdrasil, the World-Tree - a Viking equivalent of Jacob's ladder - reduced to an ossified ruin, a skeletal winding stair that leads nowhere.[136]

---

also contains essays dealing with Dante, Chekhov, Holub, Milosz and Zbigniew Herbert.

[133] Morrison, p.60, provides a useful list of *North*'s linguistic rarities.

[134] Seamus Heaney, introduction to *A Personal Selection*, (Belfast: Ulster Museum Publication Number 248, May 1982).

[135] That reference to 'A landscape fossilized' calls to mind Montague's lines from 'A Severed Head'

> The whole landscape a manuscipt
> We had lost the skill to read,
> A part of our past disinherited (*RF*, p.35)

and the bleak mood that pervades so much of *The Rough Field*.

[136] Yggdrasil, was 'the greatest and best of all trees, a mighty ash-tree...which held the fabric of the universe together'(Magnus Magnusson, *Viking: Hammer of the North* [London: Orbis 1976], p.49). H.R. Ellis Davidson, in *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp.190-2, talks of Yggdrasill as 'a guardian tree...visualised as a kind of ladder stretching up to heaven and down to the underworld'.

The second poem in this sequence, 'Funeral Rites', charts a very different journey, and concludes not with a crushing sense of the past, but with 'a dream of forgiveness, the dream of the possibility of forgiveness';[137] instead of dislocation, re-location. What anchors the poem before its drift into myth is its descriptive detail and depth of feeling. It takes as a starting point its narrator's detailed recollection of family funerals at a time when there was still 'custom' and 'ceremony'.[138] In his youth, he had 'shouldered *a kind of* manhood' and 'the coffins/ of dead relations', yet nothing prepared him for what he would witness in maturer years. Like the boy narrator in Joyce's 'The Sisters', he notes dispassionately the face and hands of the dead, observing the leaden 'dough-white hands' and darkened nails of the deceased, how curiously in death 'Their puffed knuckles/ had unwrinkled'. Significantly when the narrative voice turns to way the living 'construct' the dead in a pose of pious submission ('*shackled* in rosary beads', 'the wrists/ *obediently* sloped'), or within their 'quilted satin *cribs*', his ambivalence towards these rituals becomes even more apparent, which again illustrates my earlier point about attempts to present Heaney or any other Catholic writer as unproblematically 'Catholic'. The approval signalled in the verbs and adverbs

> I knelt courteously
> admiring it all

is something which belongs now to a past which is almost as remote as the world of the seed-cutters.

This breach in time and between times is examined from the outset of Part Two. The stark adverb, 'Now', ushers in a mournful succession of resonants ('*n*ews', 'co*m*es', 'i*n*', '*n*eighbourly *m*urder', 'pi*n*e', 'cere*mon*y', 'custo*m*ary rhyth*m*s') and the awful truth that

[137] Heaney's comment on this poem on the *Faber Poetry Cassette*, 1982.
[138] W.B.Yeats, 'A Prayer for my Daughter', *Collected Poems*, p.214.

murder occurs with such numbing regularity that the telling of it seems almost to have eclipsed the crime itself. Atrocity has become such a frequent and familiar event, whether next door or in the next street, that it merits the epithet, 'neighbourly'.[139] With this bitterly ironic word, the Christian/ humanist speaker voices his disgust at how supposed adherents of 'the Catholic faith' and 'the Protestant religion' defy the commands of their founder, who instructed his followers to 'love thy neighbour', not to blast them to Kingdom come. Earlier drafts of the poem[140] possess Owenesque references to 'men whose blown stomachs were cleaned like dung/ into eight plastic bags'(Version 1), 'men whose stomachs were cleaned like dung/ Off the pavements'(Version 2) and 'shovelled remnants'(Version 3), but in the poem's final form Heaney chose not to amplify on the word 'murder', its kinds or outcomes, but rather to direct its metaphoric energies towards a closure of atonement. His use of 'we' and 'our' and later reference to 'the whole country' indicate that his dream of restoration embraces both communities, is an inclusive one.[141] The diction in which it is couched is highly reminiscent of Yeats,[142] and constitute an obvious acknowledgement of the cultural contribution of Anglo-Irish tradition. Words such as 'ceremony', 'customary', 'temperate', 'cortège' seem to lead back to Yeats's idealised vision of Urbino and Renaissance Italy, and to the *ordered* world of Coole Park, which itself lived under threat.

[139] It is almost as obscene as the situation described by the Semichorus in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, I, 565, 'See how kindred murder kin'.
[140] See Arthur E. McGuinness's article, 'The Craft of Diction: Revision in Seamus Heaney's Poems' from *Image and Illusion: Anglo-Irish Literature and its Contexts* (Portmarnock: Wolfhound, 1979), pp.62-91.
[141] Feminist critics might well disagree with that view, however, and focus on what they would regard as the reductive images used to represent women in the poem. They are first glimpsed 'hovering', like the flames, and later described as 'somnambulant', which they almost certainly would be following their night-long vigil.
[142] In contrast to Edna Longley, 'Inner Emigré or Artful Voyeur?', p.85, who characterises Heaney's rites as 'profoundly "Catholic" in character', I would suggest that within this text the poet is consciously imitating Yeats's cultural strategy in the 1890s, in attempting to construct a 'common ground', imagining a time long before the disabling divisiveness of sectarianism.

Heaney's narrator, however, seeks his 'place of resurrection' not in ancestral houses, but rather in pre-colonial, pre-sectarian, pre-Christian Ireland. He imagines a mass funeral procession snaking its way out of the North, away from its 'blinded' homes, blinded by grief, blinded by prejudice, blinds drawn in mourning.[143] The destination proposed for the North's collective mourning would be the ancient tumuli of Newgrange, in the valley of the sacred river, Bo-an or Boyne, 'the fountain of all knowledge'.[144] According to later Celtic legends this mound contained the palace of Aengus, the god of love. Perhaps at this place, the bereaved of both communities might perform a joint act of contrition at a new 'sepulchre'. However, in juxtaposing naturalistic and mythic locations, private and public spaces and symbols - 'emptied kitchens'/ 'the great chambers of Boyne', 'family cars'/ 'the cupmarked stones' - the poem runs the risk of losing its 'starting-point',[145] realised as it in physical actualities. Though one may empathise with the poem's sentiments, its prayer for the island's release from the political and spiritual paralysis gripping it, it is hard in retrospect to credit the terms the poem proffers for accomplishing that change.[146]

---

[143] There may be another Anglo-Irish allusion here, this time to Louis MacNeice's 'Valediction', *Collected Poems*, p.53:

> But no abiding content can grow out of these minds
> Fuddled with blood, always caught by blinds.

[144] Seamus Heaney, commentary in the film, The Boyne Valley, BBC 1980, directed by David Hammond.

[145] Edna Longley, '*North*: "Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', p.85.

[146] It must have been difficult for contemporaneous critics of *North* to relate, for example, serpents' heads in megalithic doorways with the actuality of Northern Ireland in the early 1970s, where sectarian killings and Sunningdale were of more immediate concern. Furthermore, chronologically speaking, the connections between Newgrange, built circa 3100 B.C., and *Njal's Saga*, composed in the late thirteenth century A.D., seem tenuous indeed.

The third part of 'Funeral Rites' begins with the sealing of the sepulchre and concludes with an image of resurrection, a further reminder of the hold Christian mythology continues to exert, despite the lamentable behaviour of 'Christians' in Ireland. Driving 'north again/ past Strang and Carling fjords', the narrator recalls an episode from the Icelandic epic, *Njal's Saga*, in which the tribal appetite for feuding and revenge is 'allayed for once'.[147] While the word 'imagining' two lines later, like the phrase 'Men said that', may imply that what follows is just wishful thinking, the vision with which 'Funeral Rites' ends is an attractive, consoling one. The poem's dream is that those who have been killed in the Troubles might know in death the serenity of Gunnar Hamundarson, 'beautiful/ inside his burial mound'. His chanting of verses effects a miracle, we are told.[148] As the chamber of death opens, he turns to that assuaging, eternal, feminine symbol, the moon, to achieve release.

Following the seemingly beatific affirmation of 'Funeral Rites', 'North' plunges us immediately back into colder, saltier domain. Re-visiting a western shoreline to take breath, to take stock, to find or will some kind of confirmation, the narrator of 'North' hears at first 'only the secular/ powers of the Atlantic thundering', rather than the voice of God or Thor. From out of this noise emerges a sound, warning him against the temptations of 'violence and epiphany', of raiding atrocity to make art. Admiration for what Magnus Magnusson has called the 'pent-up dynamism'[149] of the Vikings, borne by

[147] Hart points out, p.85, that Gunnar's death does not halt the killings, and adds that 'Heaney's fertility myths and elegiac visions are tendered with less credulity than his critics imply. The poem that envisions the end of the revenge cycle...implies its bloody perpetuation'.

[148] In fact, again according to Hart, pp.84-5, there is a certain irony here. Gunnar's chant ends affirming continuing belligerence, 'He would rather die than yield/ Much rather die than yield'. See also Corcoran, p.111, on the 'optative' aspect of the poem; 'it urgently desires an end to the terrible cycle, but it can imagine such a thing only in a mythologized imaginary realm'.

[149] Magnusson, *Vikings*, p.7.

that swashbuckling adjective 'fabulous', is qualified by his knowledge of the more prosaic facts. Beneath the veneer of religious observances, their world too was pre-occupied with

> geography and trade,
> thick-witted couplings and revenges,
>
> the hatreds and behindbacks
> of the althing, lies and women,
> exhaustions nominated peace.[150]

Perhaps the longship 'source' for this account of Viking society is 'buoyant' with foresight as well as 'hindsight'. The scathing attitude it/he voices towards the 'althing'(the ancient Icelandic parliament) might be seen as anticipating a nationalist contempt for some of the politicking that went on/ goes on at Stormont and Westminster,[151] while the reference to 'exhaustions nominated peace' might possibly be allusion to the June-July 1972 ceasefire.[152]

The earliest drafts of seventh stanza of 'North' speak of 'poets', rather than 'memory', 'incubating the spilled blood', but both these and the final version indicate an awareness of the morally hazardous relationship between art/myth and killing; though the Northern Irish artist has a responsibility to the community to commemorate the deaths inflicted upon it, there exists an all-too-real danger that the very act of commemoration will breed further slaughter.[153] Ultimately the best counsel the Viking mentor come up with is for the poet-narrator to place his trust in language itself, the 'nubbed treasure' of the 'word-hoard', the 'gleam' of his own private experience. Within the poem's closure comes the acceptance that if moral darkness does prevail in the public sphere, then poets will have

[150] Edna Longley, '*North*: "Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', p.83, draws attention to the zeugma. Parker, p.251 n160, suggests that it may have been prompted by the machinations of the three female principals in *Njal's Saga*.

[151] See, for example, above, pp.260-3.

[152] The phrase also appears in 'Ballad', *S*, p.21. There it would appear to refer to an earlier phase in Northern Ireland's history, probably 1921-22.

[153] D.George Boyce, in a review in *Irish Studies Review*, 17, Winter 1996/7, p.56, argues that Northern Irish writers are placed in an impossible position. They feel compelled to affirm 'their own peculiar political and cultural identity, without which the Ulster person does not exist', yet at the same time recognise that 'their desire to do some good' may necessitate a denial of 'the consequences of that affirmation'.

to acclimatise to 'the dark'.[154] However the problem with this apparent 'resolution' of locking oneself into the 'word-hoard' is that language as *parole*, as a particular poetic utterance, can never extricate itself from its relationship with that larger entity to which it belongs (*langue*), which, in the Northern Ireland of the 1970s and of the 1990s, has no immunity from political and moral constraints.[155]

That this is so can be seen in Heaney's repeated returns to Glob and the sacrificial victims of the Iron Age. Many readers have had difficulty in accepting the analogies these texts strain to make between a cruel past and the barbaric present, and some have even suggested that they expose 'necrophiliac',[156] 'pornographic'[157] tendencies or 'neo-sadism'.[158] Certainly they frequently deploy sexual and gendered images derived from eighteenth and nineteenth narratives in their troubled examination of nationalist and republican traditions. Although clearly constituting a sequence, these poems do not share a single speaking 'voice', and articulate a diversity of responses to the 'objects' and acts they meditate upon. Underneath their often erotic surfaces/ surface eroticism, or what Clair Wills would call their 'improprieties', pulse conflicted feelings. Amongst these are a renewed resentment at punishments unjustly inflicted upon the Catholic 'majority' and 'minority',[159] a passionate longing for cultural and territorial reclamation, and a sense of horror at the brutality that resentment and that longing have released.

---

[154] On the ancient Celtic ritual of 'composing in the dark', see Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1967), pp.74-6.

[155] Wilson Foster, *The Achievement of Seamus Heaney*, p.32, detects in some of the poems of *North*, a 'swerve from politics' motivated by a desire to avoid 'moral condemnation of violent elements of his own tribe'.

[156] Morrison, p.62.

[157] Coughlan, p.103.

[158] James Liddy in 'Ulster Poets and the Catholic Muse', *Eire-Ireland*, 13:4, Winter 1978, p.135.

[159] i.e. Catholics as an all-Ireland majority both before and after the Elizabethan wars and the Plantation, Catholics as a minority in Northern Ireland. All northern republicans and probably a majority of nationalists would view all acts of violence committed against them as totally unmerited.

The sequence opens with two dramatic monologues, 'Come to the Bower' and 'Bog Queen', which, like Paul Muldoon's early poem, 'Macha',[160] embrace traditional Jacobite representations of 'Ireland' as feminine. Here perhaps Coughlan is justified in criticising the way stereotypical gender positions are being replicated in order to gain access to the 'violated' territory, though, as I have suggested before, to present a perspective is not to endorse it. It is possible to read these mythic narratives, however, as intimating that cultural and political, spiritual and sexual renewal can only be effected, not when these 'female' dead wake, but when they are wakened. After centuries of waiting, pinned to the bog by 'sharpened willow'[161] or trapped 'between turf-face and demesne wall',[162] these sleeping beauties do seem dependent upon male 'deliverance'.

'Come to the Bower' derives its title from a republican ballad, 'Will You Come to the Bower?'. Whereas the original issues an invitation which is transparently political

> You can visit New Ross, gallant Wexford and Gorey
> Where the green was last seen by proud Saxon and Tory
> Where the soil is sanctified by the blood of each true man

Heaney's allegorical poem masks its cultural and political imperatives. Here the apparent object of the male gaze is a decomposing composite, kin to both the ancient goddess, Nerthus, and the less 'late' Kathleen ni Houlihan. There is a desperate, macabre urgency in all the 'unpinning and unwrapping'[163] that occurs in the poem, as the dispossessed

---

[160] In 'Macha' (*Knowing My Place*, p.5, reprinted *New Weather*, p.18), Muldoon represents his home county of Armagh as female. She is presented as a sexual victim and as a latter-day Medb ('Now at war/ With men/ Leading them against/ Each other'), and though she embodies resilience, ultimately she is forced into retreat.

[161] 'Come to the Bower', *N*, p.31.

[162] 'Bog Queen', *N*, pp.32-34.

[163] Morrison, p.62.

narrator sets off 'Foraging past the burst gizzards/ Of coin-hoards', before reaching his goal, 'the bullion / Of her Venus bone'.

In 'Bog Queen', by contrast, the advantages of a voice and a history are conferred on its female narrator. The poem's origins lie in the discovery of the skeleton of 'a very small woman' in a peat bog on Drumkeragh Mountain in County Down in the spring of 1781, on land belonging to Lord and Lady Moira. The numerous garments on and around the body and the 'ornaments found on the skull...belonging to a diadem' indicated that she was a lady of high rank, probably a Danish Viking.[164] The queen represented in the poem accepts the indignities of Time with a fortitude and a confidence that her day will come. She has become at one with the land. Her body has developed the features of landscape - she speaks of her 'breasts'/ soft moraines' - and changed after the intimate attentions of the Ice Age, 'the nuzzle of fjords/ at my thighs'. Despite her latest injury caused by 'a turfcutter's spade, which results in a temporary re-burial, a triumphant re-birth is at hand:

> and I rose from the dark,
> hacked bone, skull-ware,
>
> frayed stitches, tufts,
> small gleams on the bank.

At a cultural/ political level, therefore, as well as through the period of her 're-discovery', the radicalised 1780s, 'Bog Queen', like 'Requiem for the Croppies' before it, is linked with nationalist resurgency.[165] At the same time it is clearly integrated within the poet's literary terrain, connected as it is through its imagery ('turf', 'spade', 'jar of spawn', 'fermenting' and 'bruised berries') not merely to other poems in *this* collection, but also to *Death of a Naturalist*. Thus the text reverses the process of disintegration

[164] Glob, pp.103-4.
[165] It is interesting to compare this poem with Paul Muldoon's 'Macha', *New Weather*, p.18, which feminises the town of Armagh, but resists the urge to politicise the terrain.

Such moral/ spiritual victories become increasingly rare in the remaining 'bog' poems. Whereas 'The Tollund Man' began in a reverential tone, with its gentle consonants, fertile images and future tense, 'The Grauballe Man' is tarred by the present, 'and seems to weep/ the black river of himself'.[166] A succession of similes and metaphors drawn from nature - 'the grain of his wrists/ is like bog oak', 'the ball of his heel/ like a basalt egg', 'His instep has shrunk/ cold as a swan's foot' - confine him to his peat-bed. His integration in the animal and vegetative world is perhaps at the expense of his humanity,[167] and all possibility of transcendence seems 'arrested' once 'The head lifts' to expose 'the vent/ of his slashed throat'. Subsequent metaphors struggle against that stark fact, and though the poem's narrator applies healing adjectives ('cured', 'vivid') and positive nouns ('repose', 'elderberry', 'foetus') to the wound, ultimately 'the pain and terror', which Glob saw in the face, assert themselves.[168] Within the final three stanzas, the poem attempts to weigh 'beauty' and 'atrocity', art against actuality. However much instinct and imagination urge him to elevate this casualty of religion to the communion of saints, the savage fate suffered by the Grauballe Man compels him towards a heavier conclusion. No-one in the North can or should escape the burden 'of each hooded victim/ slashed and dumped', and the evidence of their eyes.

A later poem in the sequence, 'Strange Fruit',[169] similarly concludes with its narrator's aestheticising impulses defeated. Heaney's sonnet stares unremittingly at the decapitated

[166] For a postmodernist reading of this poem, see Thomas Docherty, 'Ana-; Postmodernism, Landscape, Seamus Heaney', in Allen, pp.206-222.

[167] See Edna Longley, '*North*: "Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', p.76, on what she views as the competing 'humanising images' in the poem.

[168] Glob, pp.39, 48. 'There could scarcely be any doubt as to the cause of death. A long cut ran round the front of the neck practically from ear to ear, so deep that the gullet was completely severed'.

[169] Its title comes from a mournful Billie Holliday number, depicting white 'justice' at work in the southern United States. Innocent blacks, lynched by racist mobs and left to hang on trees, are referred to as 'strange fruit'. The song was first recorded by Holliday on 20 April 1939, a week after Heaney's birth. (W.J. McCormack in *The Battle of the Books* [Dublin: Lilliput, 1986], p.33, refers to a 1946

head of a girl exhumed from the Roum Fen in northern Denmark in June 1942. Having set up a familiar pattern of associations, which sees her compared to a baby ('unswaddled') and to fruit and other flora ('gourd', 'prune-skinned', 'prune-stones', 'fern'), and views her head as a mirror of her landscape ('Her broken nose...a turf clod', 'Her eyeholes blank as pools in the old workings'), the narrator voice breaks off in the last four lines, realising that the metaphor game - his 'artful voyeurism' - is leading him towards 'beatification', 'reverence', 'assuaging bows'.[170] Just in time he redeems himself with a grim catalogue of adjectives that stick with the cruel facts - 'Murdered, forgotten, nameless, terrible' - and allow the victim to retain her desolate integrity.

The poem immediately preceding 'Strange Fruit' in the collection is one that has provoked considerable debate over the years as again critics have endeavoured to ascribe to the poet or, in rarer cases, the poem itself a particular 'position'. Frequently, and not surprisingly given its apparent candour about its own sexual and political ambivalences, 'Punishment' has been read as deeply autobiographical,[171] as a searching and sometimes unintentionally revealing piece of self-analysis. However, while concurring with the general view that the speaker in the poem may well reflect something of the poet's own troubled state at this time, I would again like to emphasise the constructedness of the narrative voice[172] which articulates anxieties and guilts shared by many both within and beyond his community.

---

recording of the song, and is perhaps not aware of the earlier recording and its significant date).

[170] The latter phrase is from 'Ballad', *S*, p.21.

[171] Morrison, p.62, discusses the poem in terms of Heaney's 'gradual mastery' of 'impure' feelings; Corcoran, pp.116-7, refers three times to Heaney's 'dumbness'; and, like most of his predecessors, Andrew Murphy, p.43, assumes that the speaking voice in the poem must be the poet's own.

[172] One is reminded of the similarly literalist approach to Sylvia Plath's poetry, which is misrepresented and underestimated when critics naively presume that the narrative voices are simply the author's own.

Ironically, the poem opens assertively, with its first person narrator making the dramatic, impossible claim that he can feel what a girl about to die must have felt two thousand years ago:

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

Inevitably what undermines this act of self-projection is language itself. Art can only represent suffering by translating it into signs; it can mediate, but cannot contain.[173] The repetition of the third person possessive adjective, 'her', effects a separation between his imagined and her actual exposure, and from stanza two onwards this 'divorce' becomes even more apparent, as touch gives way to sight, and close-ups to long shots. Quickly, tacitly, the narrator admits his inability to sustain his gaze, by swerving away from the fact of the halter and the physical 'presence' of the murdered girl's body. Verses two, three, four and five see her dehumanised and dismembered in a succession of images - her nipples become 'amber beads', her ribs 'frail rigging', her 'shaved head/ a stubble of black corn'[174] - eclipsed by 'the weighing stone/ the floating rods and boughs', re-located in the past tense, concealed under the soiled blindfold and the noose.

By broaching again the matter and means of her sadistic punishment in verse five, the narrative voice sets up the ethical dilemma which perplexes him and provides the poem its ambiguous charge. As was apparent from the outset, the girl's allocated 'role' as a transgressor seems to excite sympathy and desire; the focus on her neck and 'naked

[173] It is significant, of course, that Heaney's initial encounter was not with the bog bodies themselves, but with photographs of them. They had already been transformed into images.

[174] One might compare the metaphorical dismemberment she undergoes with the physical fragmentation suffered by the four brothers in the second section of 'The Tollund Man'.

front' in stanza one may be read as suggesting that the speaker is both moved and aroused by her vulnerability. As the narrative progresses, however, these emotions become checked by feelings of guilt and complicity.[175] Compassion for her suffering vies with his perception of her as 'an erotic object';[176] she was 'beautiful', 'flaxen haired', an 'adulteress'. Having admitted the attraction he feels for her ('I almost love you'), and equated her status as ritual sacrifice with that of Christ,[177] the narrator aligns himself not with the victim, but with those who passively colluded in murder. He positions himself not with Christ who halted the stoning of the woman taken in adultery, but with the Pharisees:[178]

> I almost love you
> but would have cast, I know,
> the stones of silence.

The narrator's sense of his own moral cowardice at this point in the poem is very much bound up with a consciousness and uneasy conscience about the activity he is engaged in - the making of a text. His condemnation of himself as an 'artful voyeur' suggests that he is very much aware that his narrative thus far has involved an appropriation and exploitation of the girl's body in order to satisfy a complex need for resolution; the phrase itself is 'artful', preceded as it is by two biblical allusions, followed as it is by a startling shift forward in time and place.

---

[175] The original title of the poem was 'Shame'.

[176] Coughlan, p.103. In verse 5, he imagines the fatal noose as a ring in which are stored 'the memories of love'.

[177] She too is the 'scapegoat', killed to atone for the sins of the community.

[178] *The Gospel according to St John*, Chapter 8, v.1-11. The subsequent reference to her 'numbered bones' is connected both with archaeological practice and to Christ's comments in *Matthew*, Chapter 10, v.28-30, on the preciousness of human life: 'Even the hairs on your head are numbered'.

The final stanzas find the narrator struggling to confront an actual, rather than imagined conflict of loyalties, and trying to justify his ambiguous moral and political stance faced with the brutal, communal 'justice' meted out in contemporary Belfast in the early 1970s:

> 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.

His use of the phrase 'betraying sisters' to characterise women from his own community accused of being involved with British soldiers or suspected of acting as informers implies an assumption of guilt and perhaps some degree of assent in their punishment.[179] Many of his listeners, he realises, would regard this assent as a betrayal of his earlier, tender feelings towards the girl from the bog and as a sign of his passive compliance with the sadistic will of the 'tribe'. Even to countenance revenge might well be construed as reprehensible and at odds with the Christian ethic of forgiveness.[180] One wonders what 'exact' and 'intimate' retribution he might deem appropriate or acceptable for *male* partners in these liaisons.

It could be argued, however, that the final stanza constitutes not so much a defence of his own inaction, which continues to cause him unease, as an explanation or rationalisation of the acts of others. Given that at various stages in the early 1970s - in particular after the events of July 1970, August 1971, January 1972, May 1974 - a

[179] Conor Cruise O'Brien makes this point in his review, 'A Slow North East Wind', reprinted in Allen, pp.25-9. Pitched against 'betraying', however, is the word 'cauled' which one associates with the innocence of a new-born baby.

[180] The narrator in 'Funeral Rites' appears to reject vengeance as a viable way of proceeding, and advocates instead 'the chanting of verses' as a means of resisting violence.

majority in the minority community genuinely believed that they were under attack, the narrator's 'understanding' attitude towards those exacting 'tribal revenge' becomes understandable. To understand the motives of others is not necessarily to endorse their actions. Nor is it to be free of conflicting allegiances.

Clearly what the reader is being presented with in 'Punishment', and in *North* as a whole, is *not* a coherent, autonomous 'I', who stands for the poet, but a persona who, like ourselves, is a messy amalgam of often conflicting physical, moral, social, political and cultural impulses, and who responds to his own indeterminacy by trying to construct a self and justify it. Although Patricia Coughlan carefully refers to the 'speaker' in this and other poems, she then rests a substantial section of her argument on a blurring of the distinction between poet and personae, and somewhat presumptuously concludes that the male poets she discusses 'seem to be stuck in the self/ not-self dualism of the mirror-stage'.[181] Necessarily for her case, which involves attributing to Heaney a lack of engagement with and sensitivity to issues of gender, the telling phrase 'artful voyeur' is read primarily in relation to the poem's *political* ambiguities.[182]

Yet 'Punishment' is an acknowledgment of a more general failure. The fascinated absorption with and reification of the female body, the artistic opportunism, the moral and political quietism it admits are not unique to its narrator. It voices a widespread and recurring apprehension amongst writers and artists in Northern Ireland about their 'civic

[181] Coughlan, pp.103, 108.

[182] ibid, p.103. 'The words' *overt application* here is to his sense of political ambiguity' (my emphasis). In the following paragraph, however, she does admit that the 'usual sense of the word "voyeur"' also applies. Kiberd, pp.592-4, comments aptly on the poem's sexual concerns, and claims that it is 'as much about pornography as about violence'.

inactivity'[183] and their anxiety over potential accusations of exploiting violence. At the same time it could be seen as speaking for and to a substantial contingent of people in the North, from *both* communities, cast in the role of spectators, appalled by cruelties inflicted in their name, and yet fearful of or unwilling to disassociate themselves from those committing these acts and the motives behind them.[184] And for those reading the poem from outside the North - for example in Britain, in the Republic, in America - it warns against 'liberal lamentation'[185] by implicating us in its voyeurism and by reminding us that 'there are no easy solutions to the poetic, as well as the political, problems posed'.[186]

---

[183] Michael Longley, 'Strife and the Ulster Poet', 11: 'I accept, as I must, the criticism of the slogan "Malone Road fiddles while the Falls Road burns", the implication that the still and heartless centre of the hurricane is the civic inactivity of liberals like myself'. See also the Editorial to *Threshold*, 25, ed. John Boyd and Patrick Galvin, Summer 1974:

Poets today
Are silent as the grave;
Or put it another way
Poets today
Are gravely silent...

The question is
How best to stand aside
To look as if
You hadn't died
Were not mouldering

Fading
Disappearing
Into
Thin
Air

Where it's always difficult to hear -
Gunfire.

[184] McGuinness, 'The Craft of Diction', p.84, provides an earlier version of the poem, in which the text reads

I almost love you, but must be barbarous
as your outraged neighbours
whom I find it hard to blame.

No doubt, John Wilson Foster, p.32, has 'Punishment' in mind when he speaks of 'the poet's swerve from moral condemnation of violent elements of his own tribe'.

[185] Edna Longley, '*North*: "Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', p.79.

[186] Kiberd, p.594. In 'The Poet as Watcher', an essay in *Threshold* 22, pp.64-70, ed. Seamus Heaney, Alan Warner argues that Patrick Kavanagh 'became a watcher because he became a poet. Poetry is essentially a mode of contemplation, as soon as a man begins to contemplate the things and the people around him he begins to detach himself, to put himself at a distance from them'.

Many of these problems haunt 'Kinship', the final poem of the bog poem sequence. Here gender features prominently once more, not as a subject, but rather as an element within a mythic narrative which seeks to interpret the 'persistent...barbaric attitudes'[187] of today by reference to an ancient, pre-Christian fertility cult.[188] In contrast to the kindly, but abused Mother Earth figures in Snyder and Bly, Heaney's poem is haunted by the presence of a goddess who, like Yeats's Cathleen ni Houlihan, seems insatiable in her appetite for blood.

Its narrator is another solitary, struggling with texts - including the text of himself - and relationships which are resistant to meaning. On returning to his native landscape, he experiences familiar sensations of defamiliarisation. His initial depiction of the bogland as 'hieroglyphic'[189] conveys both a sense of its sacredness and impenetrability, though this does not deter him from attempting to anatomise its doubleness. It is simultaneously the land of 'the strangled victim' and of 'the love-nest in the bracken', a repository of the lyrical ('a moon-drinker', a 'pupil of amber'), and, from the outset of part two, the loathsome. Where once only innocent frogs 'gathered...for vengeance',[190] there are now the killing fields, 'domains of the cold-blooded'. The narrator's attempts to sound out the

[187] *P*, p.59.

[188] cf. Heaney's comments in *P*, pp.56-7. 'To some extent the enmity can be viewed as a struggle between the cults 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 sovereignty 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 residsent in a palace in London'.

[189] *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* gives the original meaning of 'hieroglyph' as 'sacred carving', and lists amongst its subsequent definitions, '2. Having a hidden meaning' and '4. Difficult to decipher'. Later the pools in the bog prove similarly resistive to reading; they are 'not to be sounded/ by the naked eye', that last phrase focussing attention on the exposed condition of the narrator.

[190] *DN*, p.16.

land as a literal ground for hope and as a possible site for poetic renewal, only lead to the discovery that, like language, it cannot be extricated from history and ambiguity. For all his artful and, at times, tiresome efforts to catalogue its diverse attributes - as a vast stomach ('Ruminant ground'); a womb ('deep pollen bin', 'nesting ground'); a store-house ('Earth-pantry', 'sun-bank'); a necropolis ('bone-vault'); a magic receptacle ('casket'); a cess-pit ('midden') - it eludes him.

As a result within Part Three he resorts again to myth and the marriage trope[191] as means of imaginatively re-possessing the territory he has 'lost'. In effecting this dénouement, this consummation, he deploys an extremely creaky, stagey narrative and over-insistent sexual allusion. The re-erecting of a discarded spade

> hidden under bracken,
> laid flat, and overgrown
> with a green fog

becomes a pre-nuptial rite, and, as Winston Smith[192] would have recognised, 'a political act'. Calmly the narrator notes how others - an unspecified 'they' - are engaged in a complementary ritual, raising up a 'cloven oak-limb'. Though this totem originates in Glob and is associated with the Goddess Nerthus,[193] it stands also as a symbol of Derry, of partitioned Ireland, and the pervasiveness of psychic and ideological divisions amongst the island's peoples.

---

[191] Seamus Deane in *Celtic Revivals*, p.175, describes marriage as 'the central trope' in Heaney's work.

[192] The hero of George Orwell's *1984* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954). Winston's first love-making with his fellow rebel, Julia, prompts the following narratorial gloss: 'No emotion was pure, because everything was mixed up with fear and hatred. Their embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act'(p.112).

[193] See Glob, p.81. 'In the summer of 1961 Harald Andersen uncovered at Foerlev Nymolle three sacrificial sites...In one of these sites the stones were gathered up in a heap, and under this heap lay a cloven oak-branch nine feet in length - the goddess herself'. The name Derry comes from the Irish *doire*, meaning 'oak grove'. The tree image is taken up in Part Four, with the reference to the 'weeping willow'.

The consequences of these divisions are confronted most forcibly in the poem's final section, which can be seen as confirming Seamus Deane's contention that 'the roots of poetry and of violence grow in the same soil'.[194] Here the narrative voice bitterly concedes that the self-same spirit of territory which has stimulated and sustained his poetic energies has excited others to horrific acts of slaughter. Where once 'Our mother ground' was strewn with 'sour' autumnal leaves (Part IV), now it is

> sour with the blood
> of her faithful.

It comes as something of a surprise to me that Edna Longley should have characterised this section as 'astonishingly introverted Catholic and Nationalist'[195] in its terms. Given the scale of atrocities by the Provisionals between 1972 and 1975, and their claim that these 'operations' were carried out 'on behalf of' the minority community ('for the common good'), should one wonder at a poet from that community being deeply disturbed by these events and engaged by questions of moral responsibilities? The anti-colonial reference to British 'legions' and the allusion to the 'sacred heart' might indeed be taken as *typically* Catholic and Nationalist, were it not for the fact that they feature also in John Hewitt's 'The Colony' and Michael Longley's 'Wounds',[196] both of which 'Kinship', Part VI, may be in part addressing. Surely one might expect from someone with an orthodox Irish Nationalist background if not an endorsement of the concept of blood-sacrifice in certain circumstances, at least some covert sympathy with it. What we are presented with instead is a denunciation of brutalities committed in the name of 'Ireland', and, by extension, violence perpetrated by the other participants in the conflict, all of which 'sour' the land. The closure of 'Kinship' has no truck with the notion piously

[194] Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, p.180.
[195] Edna Longley, '*North*: "Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', p.78.
[196] Michael Longley, *Poems 1963-1983*, p. 86, and *CP Hewitt*, pp.76-79.

expressed in 'The Tollund Man' that the killings might serve as some kind of fertility rite. And in answer to the question Yeats posed in the bloody aftermath of the Rising, 'O when may it suffice?',[197] Heaney's narrator replies, for some people, never.

In order to corroborate his acerbic analysis - and to bolster his own (uncertain?) authority by means of intertextuality[198] - he requisitions support from Tacitus, the Roman historian. At first his role appears simply to be that of an arbiter, a trustworthy observer, invoked as a source of one of the earliest accounts of the rituals of the ancient Celts. In *Germania,* written in the first century A.D., he details human sacrifices performed in honour of Nerthus, including 'the drowning of the goddess's attendants'[199] in lakes and bogs. However, as Heaney is fully aware, 'history', like 'poetry', is not an uncontentious matter, and the presence of Tacitus in the text much more problematical than might first appear.[200] As Elizabeth Butler Cullingford has ably demonstrated, his position as a writer at a time of imperial prosperity can make him vulnerable to the accusation of acting as an ideological accessory to the imperial crime, of guilt by association:

> Ironically positioning the 'Romans' as 'civilised' observers points to their complicity in producing a colonial situation where the Irish 'tribes' murder each other in the name of religion. With the line 'a desolate peace', Heaney expands

[197] W.B. Yeats, 'Easter 1916', *Collected Poems*, p.204. In an extremely valuable, relatively recent piece of research, 'British Romans and Irish Carthaginians: Anti-Colonial Metaphor in Heaney, Friel and McGuinness, *PMLA*, 111:2, March 1996, 222-239, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford maintains that in alluding to Yeats's poem Heaney may be questioning the 'nation-founding sacrifice of the patriots who died for Ireland in the 1916 Easter Rising'. Following the Provisionals' campaign in the North from the early 1970s onwards, politicians, writers and large numbers of ordinary citizens in the Republic have become increasingly sceptical about the mythology surrounding the founding of the state.

[198] Eamonn Hughes, art cit. p.82, discussing Heaney's deployment of 'foreign discourses' in the 'Singing School' sequence, concludes that these are 'external and determining in one way, but..are equally internal and determined presences; that is to say they exist apart from Heaney, but they are also part of Heaney's own voice'.

[199] Glob, p.152. See also pp.159-162.

[200] In 'Mother Ireland', *The Listener*, 7 December 1972, 790, however, Tacitus is mentioned in the same breath as 'leader-writers in the *Daily Telegraph*', i.e. not the most impartial of observers..

his condemnation to include the legions, just as in Tacitus's *Agricola* the British chief Calgacus assails the Roman invaders of his country: "Robbery, butchery, rapine, the liars call Empire; they create a desolation and call it peace".'[201]

While Tacitus may well be implicated to some extent in the text's anti-colonial subtext - like those of Dodds in *The Freedom of the City*, his observations are made from the vantage-point of privilege[202] - at the same time one detects a feeling of affinity between him and the narrator. Circumstances have similarly forced the latter into an oppositional role, and made him into an appalled voyeur of violence.[203] Ironically though the Roman is addressed as an authority within the poem, the narrator instructs him as to what his conclusions should be.

Read the inhumed faces

of casualty and victim;
report us fairly,
how we slaughter
for the common good.

Whereas Morrison and Longley are convinced that in those last lines Heaney's persona merely replicates 'the language of the tribe',[204] Corcoran, Coughlan and Cullingford have little doubt about their 'evident irony',[205] and nor do I. In my view, they point to the

---

[201] Cullingford, 'British Romans...', 228. Calgacus' charges against the grand imperial myth were repeated in Howard Brenton's controversial play, *The Romans in Britain* (1980). In this the Roman occupation of Britain is equated with the British 'occupation' of the Northern Ireland.

[202] Tacitus enjoyed senatorial rank and achieved high office.

[203] Of the historical Tacitus, Andrew Lintott has written in the *Oxford History of the Classical World*, eds. Boardman, Griffin and Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.647, 650:

> As a historian of the Empire he is most interesting for his ability to put the case for the opposition, not only by denouncing the corruption of Roman rule...but also highlighting courageous independence and resistance to the blandishments of Roman civilization.... Tacitus' attitude to history was pessimistic...It is hard to deduce a consistent religious or philosophical view from his work. However, this did not effect his moral purpose. Destiny might provide an explanation for human conduct, but not an excuse.

[204] Morrison, p.68. See also Edna Longley, '*North*: "Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?', p.78,.

[205] Corcoran, pp.119-120, Coughlan, p.105, Cullingford 'British Romans..', p.236, note 15. Coughlan, however, argues that 'the evident irony in the expression "slaughter for the common good" does not solve the more general problem of a projection of the mythic and ritual onto history and the resulting blockage of rational understanding and possible action'.

grotesqueness and redundancy of Republican rhetoric, and its figuring of a state where 'good' and 'love' might be served by 'slaughter' and 'terror'.

Despite its overall unevenness, 'Kinship' deserves some recognition for its attempt to extricate itself from a barren state of repetition. Its bitter conclusions about 'Ireland,, my Ireland' are perhaps akin to those in another poem, written in the year of Heaney's birth:

> I envy the intransigence of my own
> Countrymen who shoot to kill and never
> See the victim's face become their own
> Or find his motive sabotage their motives.[206]

The final two poems which I would like to focus upon in this re-consideration of *North* are 'Act of Union' and 'Freedman'. It is easy to see why 'Act of Union', like the poems preceding it,[207] should have been read almost exclusively in political terms, and condemned by some as a crude representation of Anglo-Irish relations. Precedents for its portrayal of Ireland as a 'ruined' maid and England as her conscienceless, hypocritical attacker can easily be found, for example, in the work of the seventeenth century Munster poet, Aodhagán ó Rathaille (Egan O'Rahilly). In 'The Wounds of the Land of Fodla', he offers the following vision of Ireland's future under colonial rule,

Beir feasta aca it mhéirdrigh fé ga críonchóisir,	Henceforth shalt thou be an unwilling handmaid to every withered band,
'S gach ladrann caethach d'éis do chlí-dheólta.	While every foreign churl shall have sucked thy breasts.[208]

Evidently Heaney's narrator *is* redeploying a sexual-political analogy with a long history, but what has not always been sufficiently recognised, however, is his simultaneous use of

---

[206] Louis Macneice, *Autumn Journal*, XVI (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), p.61.
[207] 'Ocean's Love to Ireland' and 'Aisling', *N*, pp.46-47, 48.
[208] Corkery, p.173. Breandán Ó Buachalla in 'Irish Jacobite Poetry', *The Irish Review*, 12, Spring/ Summer 1992, pp.40-9, stresses how seventeenth and eighteenth century Irish Jacobite poetry was 'pervaded by a central ubiquitous image: the female persona brining consolation, hope, relief to her own'.

politics as a metaphor to depict gender relations.[209] It is not insignificant that the poem was composed in the course of Marie Heaney's third pregnancy, which lasted from the summer of 1972 until the spring of 1973.[210]

Admittedly in its earlier published four-sonnet form (Stage II),[211] Heaney's poem specifically traced phases in the seizure of 'Ireland', detailing unwelcome 'advances' in the reign of Elizabeth, 'determined' embraces by the Planters, 'skirmishes' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and 1798, the memorable night before 'our union'.[212] Prior to that, however, 'A New Life' had given more prominence to its erotic concerns, 'preferring your geography/ to politics', anticipating 'landslides and erosions/ the emergence of new contours'(Stage I, lines 16-17, 29).[213] Although these landslides and contours can be read as alluding to the possibility of constitutional changes in the North,[214] if interpreted biographically, they may be seen as also referring to his wife's condition and *their* 'new start' together in Glanmore, Co. Wicklow.[215]

---

[209] Like *The Gentle Island*, 'Act of Union' deals with both political and sexual reaction.

[210] The pregnancy coincided with a period which, as we have seen earlier in the chapter, witnessed an intensification of inter-sectarian violence, of violence involving Republicans and the security forces, and violence within the minority community, In the aftermath of Bloody Sunday and Direct Rule, as we have also observed in relation to Fiacc, Montague, Friel and Heaney's work, writing from out of the Nationalist community often, though not always, chose to foreground British v. 'Irish' dimensions of the conflict.

[211] See McGuinness, pp.88-91. The first draft of the poem was called 'A New Life', a title which Heaney retained when publishing its second version in *The Listener*, 22 February 1973. References in brackets relate to the three stages McGuinness cites.

[212] No doubt one of the key models Heaney had in mind was 'The Colony' by John Hewitt, *CP Hewitt*, p.76.

[213] Friel would later takes up geography and mapping as a metaphor and theme in *Translations*.

[214] See above, p.249.

[215] See Michael Parker, *Seamus Heaney*, pp.119-120. The phrase, 'new start', appears in Paul Muldoon's poem, 'Seanchas', *Knowing My Place*, p.4, which bears a number of interesting verbal and thematic resemblances to 'Act of Union'. It contains, one suspects, traces of a private narrative and perhaps allegorical fragments which may refer to recent 'history' within the Northern Nationalist community and post-independence Ireland. Just as in *North* and in the later Heaney, one can not be wholly certain who 'we' refers to:

> Coming here, we were like that mountain whose base
> We kept sidestepping. Thinking ourselves superior.
> Having, we thought, our final attitude and bias,
> Really wanting a new start. For the past hour

What is retained throughout each of the stages of 'Act of Union' is the arrogance of its male narrator. His aloofness is immediately conveyed by the aerial view he gives of his 'beloved', and, following a brief proprietorial caress, he makes it abundantly clear to her that the only feasible response to his 'suit' is submission:

> I am the tall kingdom over your shoulder
> That you would neither cajole nor ignore.

While clearly the narrator does represent the colonial power - in 'A New Life'(Stage II) he admits to 'dark deeds' committed against Ireland[216] - at the same time he embodies the sexually aggressiveness of the male, as Coughlan somewhat reluctantly allows.[217] In the second sonnet, the speaker reveals little sense of guilt over the 'legacy' he has bequeathed. For him, pain is merely a sequence of images ('the rending process', 'the battering ram', 'the boom burst from within'), something 'big' that his 'partner' must accept as her inexorable fate. To make matters worse, the aftermath of the birth offers no prospect of 'consolation, hope, relief':[218]

> No treaty
> I foresee will salve completely your tracked

> We heard the seancha relearn
> What he has always known,
>
> Region of heroes, gentle maidens,
> Giants that war and landgrab.
> Each phrase opening like a fern.
> Till some make fists of themselves, like the stones
> In a landslide, a cadence
> That comes in his way. He can adlib
> No other route. If we play back the tape
> He may take up where he left off...

[216] 'And as my secret papers come on show/ You rightly drag my name into the mud'(McGuinness, p. 90).

[217] Coughlan, p.106. However, immediately afterwards she questions the narrator's intentions ('How ironically is that speech to be read? Does not the tone strongly recall the gender triumphalism of 'Rite of Spring'...?), and then, somewhat incredibly, goes on to imply that he is really spoiling for a bigger man-to man fight ('The speaker in 'Act of Union' regrets the pain of his partner's imminent childbirth...but also reads it as *the promise of a forthcoming Oedipal struggle*'). Is England really spoiling for a showdown with Northern Protestants?

[218] According to Ó Buachalla, 48, these were the usual compensations delivered by 'the female *persona* Ireland' in Irish Jacobite poetry.

And stretchmarked body, the big pain
That leaves you raw, like opened ground, again.

Just as in the opening quatrain of 'Limbo' in *Wintering Out*, a narrator's indifferent, matter-of-fact response to a series of events, has the effect of quickening the reader's empathy, and is intended to foster moral outrage and resistance.[219] Read simply as a political allegory, 'Act of Union' largely restates inherited northern nationalist attitudes, which had achieved renewed currency as a result of blunders in 'security policy'; read as a poem about sexual politics, like other writing of its time, it interrogates assumptions its narrator has outgrown.[220]

Like the Wordsworthian 'Singing School' sequence which it precedes and to which it is closely connected, 'Freedman' lends itself easily to Jungian interpretation, attempting as it does to mark stages in the process of individuation, mythic turning-points in which the narrator-hero sets a further distance between his previous obeisant self and present freer state of consciousness.[221] In order to effect this liberation, the poem's subject affects to re-read his formative years as a narrative of continuous repression at the hands of 'masters', who manifest themselves in a variety of guises and habits, secular and clerical. Resentment, however, is initially and perhaps primarily directed not so much at the

[219] The emotional charge and sense of inevitability within those final lines often bring to my mind a comparable childbirth scene from Sylvia Plath's novel, *The Bell Jar*, in which another presumptuous male voice attempts to foist his reading of a pregnant woman's experiences and feelings, and similarly provokes reader resistance:

> Buddy told me the woman was on a drug that would make her forget she'd had any pain and that when she swore and groaned she didn't really know what she was doing...
> I thought it sounded just like the sort of drug a man would invent. Here was a woman in terrible pain, obviously feeling every bit of it or she wouldn't groan like that, and she would go straight home and start another baby, because the drug would make her forget how bad the pain had been, when all the time, in some secret part of her, that long, blind, doorless and windowless corridor of pain was waiting to open up and shut her in again (p.68).

[220] When in the final stanza of 'Kinship', IV, the narrator asserts, 'I grew out of this/ like a weeeping willow', he is offering not simply a self-mocking account of origins. He is also describing a condition, a way of perceiving the world that he believes he has left behind. See below, footnote 229.

[221] The counterpart of 'Freedman' in *Stations* is perhaps the final poem, 'Incertus', p.24. There the narrator speaks mockingly of his 'Expert obeisance. Oh yes, I crept before I walked'.

'groomed optimi' - identified by Cullingford as the 'unionist establishment'[222] - as on those whom he sees as colluding with them, in particular those who operate the education system and the Catholic Church.

Once again Heaney's critique deploys a historical, or, some might say, an ahistorical analogy. The epigraph to 'Freedman' invites the reader to 'recognise' the resemblance between Roman policy towards subject races and the duplicitous strategies of later imperialists: '*A man from a 'backward' race might be brought within the pale of civilization, educated and trained in a craft or a profession, and turned into a useful member of society*'. Heaney seizes on R.H. Barrow's allusion to '*the pale* of civilization' to give the historian's words an Irish spin. Anticipating the attention Friel's *Translations* will give to schooling as means of extending cultural and political control, Heaney's poem seems to suggest that education policy in Northern Ireland since partition - especially within the minority community - has been less concerned with expanding academic opportunities and horizons, more concerned with maintaining an iniquitous and divisive status quo.[223] It is worth recalling, however, that for countless years the British education system as a whole has been indicted on similar charges; the consequence of conferring 'privilege' on a few has been to foster alienation amongst the many.[224]

---

[222] Cullingford, 'British Romans...', 230.

[223] In 'An Open Letter to John Malone, Headmaster of Orangefield School', *Threshold*, 23 (The Northern Crisis), Summer 1970, 20-5, John D. Stewart castigates what *he* regards as the total failure of the Northern Ireland experiment. Writing from out of the Protestant community - in two senses - he describes how he 'went abroad, in disgust, at the age of 32, and found, in the end, a better civilization amongst the half-naked natives of Polynesia'(21). By contrast

> You stayed in Ulster, John, and I don't doubt that you fought the good fight. But it seems to me that you failed. You and I were born, fifty years ago, into riots, murder and looting. Here this day in 1970, we sit in the midst of it all. The Orange mobs of Shankill throw petrol bombs now where they used to throw steel rivets. Nothing else has changed (23).

[224] Some of the recipients of this apparent largesse have been from working-class backgrounds. Many of Tony Harrison's poems speak movingly of the breach that opened up between him and his family as a result of his academic success. Like Heaney, indeed like so many of their readers from the post-war generation, he was the first of his family to receive a grammar school and university education.

Appropriately the poem's first word is of Latin origin. 'Subjugated' establishes both theme and mood, and receives prompt support from 'Manumitted', meaning 'released from slavery', and 'murex', a shellfish which yielded a purple dye.[225] Faced with such lexical obscurities in the first four lines, and '*Memento homo quia pulvis es*' in the fifth, many non-classically-educated readers might well disinclined to continue. The linguistic strategy employed by the narrator seems calculated to induce frustration, to replicate the defamiliarising experience he was subjected to as part of his education; just as he was, we are being taught the lesson that language is power (or, rather, a good part of it). Understandably Cullingford reads, 'Subjugated yearly under the arches', as a reference to Protestant decorations on the Twelfth of July, though the line might equally allude to the cloistered world of St Columb's, Derry and at Queen's, because of the subsequent mention of 'parchments and degrees'.[226] Two other poems from this period which specifically speak of the austere, monastic existence at St Columb's are 'The Ministry of Fear' from *North* and 'Cloistered' from *Stations*.[227] The representation of Catholicism in subsequent lines stresses the penitential ('lents', 'fast and abstinence', 'dust' and 'ashes') and stands in marked contrast to the feminised religion of home - rushes for St Brigid's Eve, buttercups and ladysmock for the May altar - where the liturgical cycle is locked into the rhythms of the countryside.[228] Further evidence that *North* clearly does *not* merely recycle Catholic or nationalist perspectives can be found in the poem's central

[225] Cullingford, 'British Romans...', 230, links the colour purple with the Phoenicians. Earlier in the same article she establishes the currency of the Phoenicia-Carthage-Ireland trope, which Friel employs in the final speech of *Translations*.

[226] *The Wearing of the Black*, p.44, contains an earlier prose version of 'Freedman' entitled 'Romanist', which resembles the poems in *Stations* in form and style. In this he refers to being 'manumitted at a graduation ceremony'.

[227] *N*, pp.63-5, *Stations*, p.20.

[228] 'The Poet as a Christian', *The Furrow*, 29:10, October 1978, 605. May altars appear in 'Summer Home', *WO*, p.60, and 'Hedge School', *Stations*, p.6.

image and a significant tense change.[229] The ashes 'impressed' upon the narrator's forehead are not treated as a print to be celebrated; and his earlier, child-like awe, conveyed through the conditional, 'I *would kneel* to be impressed', belongs to a time now passed. The original, theological sense of the ashes, to act as a reminder to the faithful of their mortality ('*Remember, Man, you are dust*'), has become supplemented within the Northern Ireland context by other meanings. There, the narrator implies, the seemingly inconsequential 'light stipple of dust' served as a caste-mark, as an indelible sign of social and cultural inferiority, which the Catholic Church endorsed.[230]

Released into the wider community, but not free, the narrator in the third stanza portrays himself as a marked man.[231] Despite aspiring to authority and to the role of 'reader', he ends up again as text, as 'read'. Real power in the city, he discovers, is still vested in 'the groomed optimi', who instantly place him as an outsider:[232]

> Their estimating, census-taking eyes
> Fastened on my mouldy brow like lampreys.

Interestingly within the final poem and its precursor, what seems to hurt most is the authorities' failure to *discriminate* between him and the rest of his tribe. In 'Freedman' the first person singular is galled at being 'under that thumb *like all my caste*', at having his individuality denied by those 'census-taking eyes', while in 'Romanist' he objects to

---

[229] Writing now, from what he takes to be a maturer vantage-point, he concludes, 'I *was* under that thumb too like all my caste' cf. 'I knelt courteously/admiring it all' ('Funeral Rites', *N*, p.15).

[230] cf. the priests' negative comments in 'The Ministry of Fear', *N*, p.64: 'Catholics, in general, don't speak/ As well as students from the Protestant schools'. The poem defines 'not speaking well' primarily in terms of accent, though as 'Freedman' shows lexis and grammar are major signifiers. grammar as well as accent.

[231] 'The status of a freedman in Rome, according to Barrow, was equivocal; he was neither enslaved nor free, but "freed"' (Cullingford, 230).

[232] cf. 'Romanist', *S*, p.44. 'Caste-marked annually, I went among the freemen of the city for their inspection. In forum and theatre I felt their gaze bend to my mouldy brow and fasten like a lamprey on the mark'.

being 'estimated and enumerated *with my own,* indelibly *one with the earth-starred denizens* of catacomb and campagna'(my emphasis).[233]

By the close of this stanza, it seems that the establishment's cynical experiment in social and cultural engineering has achieved the desired outcome; the production of a 'useful' member of the underclass. By successfully detaching him from his 'caste' and kin, they hope to neutralise him, or, better still, persuade him to co-operate in extending the process of alienation into the next generation.[234]

In the last verse it is revealed how Heaney's narrator escaped this fate, thanks to Poetry.[235] By personifying it (twice), he confers on poetry a magical quality, and the role of a *deus ex machina.* By talking of how it simply 'arrived in the city', he normalises it. Ultimately, however, his attempt to end on a high, to hit an upbeat, perky note, 'poetry wiped my brow and sped me', is thwarted. In expressing fears of what '*they* will say', he discloses the fact that the stigma is still there. From the closure of 'Freedman', as from the close of 'Exposure' and the later 'Station Island' sequence, one deduces that like Joyce's Stephen in *Ulysses*, 'he has not yet won the battle behind his forehead...to free the mind from the mind'.[236] Individuation - the idea that at some point in life one might

[233] ibid. The prepositional change to 'One *of* the earth-starred denizens' in 'Freedman' is extremely important.

[234] 'Embourgeoisification' was the term one of my former colleagues gave to this process whereby the brightest of working-class children were creamed off from their communities. It is pertinent to note that when Heaney resigned from his position as a lecturer at Queen's in April 1972, he was making a break from a 28-year stint in education, as a pupil (1944-57), student (1957-1961), teacher (1961-63) and lecturer (1963-72). That others might view his decision to leave the education system as some form of betrayal is conceded in the final line.

[235] This may be a specific allusion to Philip Hobsbaum's arrival in Belfast, or to the crucial formation of the Group. See Michael Parker, *Seamus Heaney*, pp.49-53.

[236] Sydney Bolt, *A Preface to James Joyce* (London: Longman, 1981), p.95.

achieve a whole, integrated, 'freed' self - has itself proved to be a deeply attractive myth, like 'Ireland'.

Before passing judgment on *North*'s relative successes and relative failures, the circumstances of its production should be kept firmly in mind. Here we have a text which attempts to engage with a devastating sequence of events, a narrative deeply resistant to language, metaphor, the aestheticising impulse. In retrospect, it is easy to be critical about the poet's dependency on myth, inappropriate historical analogy, or incautious use of gendered or political stereotypes. Like any other writer, Heaney could only deploy the imaginative resources available to him at the time. As the 1970s and 1980s wore on, he would find other exemplars and texts from further afield, which would open up different, and sometimes more direct and subtle ways of confronting his responsibilities as an artist in time of war.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown how political crisis and bloody violence exerted a continuous presence and insistent pressure on literature in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. It has illustrated the way in which writers suddenly found themselves plunged into 'a perplexed debate'[1] about the very function of their art. It has shown how texts return again and again to matters of political, moral and aesthetic responsibility - and complicity - and reflect an increasing sensitivity to questions of gender.

At the same time it has been concerned with how these literary texts have been read subsequently. Critical practice, like the object of its enquiry, 'should not simplify. Its projections and inventions should be a match for the complex reality which surrounds it and out of which it is generated'.[2] Some critiques, however, written from the perspective of the 1980s and 1990s, have been rather too quick in accusing Northern Irish writers of partiality, in attributing to them fixed, coherent positions on politics, aesthetics or gender. As will have been apparent, for me what characterises so much of the writing from this initial phase of the recent 'Troubles' is its uncertainty, its profound disquiet with its own authority, not to mention all other forms of authority and their acts of inscribing.

[1] Hart, p.78.
[2] Seamus Heaney, *RP*, p. 8.

Another charge sometimes levelled against these early literary responses which this thesis has sought to rebut is that they are excessively introspective. Friel and Heaney, in particular, have been taken to task for failing to encompass sufficiently in their work the hurt experienced outside their own community. This seems an understandable, justifiable complaint, though it perhaps may not fully take into account how dramatically sectarian violence intensified existing feelings of outrage and horror, alienation and grief within Northern Ireland's already polarised peoples during the period. And in laying bare 'the ingrained emotional grain lines'[3] of their communities within their texts, they - along with writers from the different Protestant traditions - contributed to the slow, but necessary *collective* process of exposing the 'ideological premises'[4] underlying and sustaining the conflict.

Others have found common cause with Adorno in condemning 'the way in which art falsifies atrocity (and perhaps all history) by rendering it in forms which afford it a meaning or a spiritual dimension which it does not have'.[5] Yet it is in the very nature of art and of human beings to seek meanings and construct images, especially at times when both human life and art are treated as things without value. Like those exemplary voices from Eastern Europe whose work has deeply informed and affected theirs, writers from Northern Ireland should be commended for the way they have fought to combat the 'nihilism which menaces culture the most. Nihilism of fire, stupidity and

[3] Seamus Heaney, interviewed by Rand Brandes, *Salmagundi*, 8.

[4] Edna Longley, 'Irish Bards and American Audiences', 771. In his introduction to *The Faber Book of Political Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p.43, Tom Paulin commends Heaney for his 'warmly inclusive vision', but the phrase could equally apply to many other Northern writers.

[5] Quoted in Seamus Deane, *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies* (Dublin: Blackwater Press, 1982), p.512. In *Against Piety: Essays in Irish Poetry* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1995), Gerald Dawe similarly talks of the way in which 'Literature seems to stabilise the violence by drawing it into its own circuit of imaginative ordering'(p.112).

hatred'.[6] What individually and collectively they have achieved - as this thesis has demonstrated - is an art that 'constantly changes the perceptual angle',[7] within texts, between texts, within and between peoples.

[6] Zbigniew Herbert, *Poezje Wybrane* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spoldielnia Wydawnicza, 1970), p.150.
[7] Edna Longley, speaking on *Start the Week*, BBC Radio 4, 13 November 1994.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The bibliography has been divided into two Parts, the first consisting of texts consulted relating to Irish Literature, Culture and History, the second dealing with source material relating specifically to the Plays of Brian Friel and Poetry of Seamus Heaney.

PART ONE

a) Books: Irish Literature, Culture and History cited in the Thesis.

Bardon, Jonathan *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1992).

Beckett, J.C. *A Short History of Ireland* (London: Hutchinson, 1979).

Beckett, Mary *A Belfast Woman* (Swords: Poolbeg, 1980).

Beckett, Samuel *The Beckett Trilogy* (London: Picador, 1979).

Bell, J. Bowyer *The Irish Troubles: A Generation of Violence 1967-1992* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993).

Bell, Robert; Johnstone, Robert; Wilson, Robin (eds) *Troubled Times: 'Fortnight' Magazine and the Troubles in Northern Ireland 1970-91* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1991).

Bew, Paul and Gillespie, Gordon *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1993* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993).

Bew, Paul; Gibbon, Peter; Patterson, Henry *The State in Northern Ireland 1921-72* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979).

Bishop, Patrick and Mallie, Eamonn *The Provisional I.R.A.* (London:Corgi, 1988).

Boland, Eavan *A Kind of Scar: The Woman Poet in a Nationalist Tradition* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1989).

Boyce, D. George and O'Day, Alan *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (London: Routledge, 1996).

Boyle, Kevin and Hadden, Tom *Ireland: A Positive Proposal* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

Brown, Terence *Northern Voices: Poets from Ulster* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975).

— *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-1985* (London: Fontana, 1981).

Bruce, Steve *God Save Ulster: The Religion and Politics of Paisleyism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

Buckland, Patrick *A History of Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989).

Carson, Ciaran *Belfast Confetti* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1990).

Chadwick, Nora *The Celts* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

Connolly, Peter (ed) *Literature and the Changing Ireland* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1982).

Coogan, Tim Pat *The I.R.A.* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1980).

— *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1995 and the Search for Peace* (London: Hutchinson, 1995).

Corcoran, Neil (ed) *The Chosen Ground: Essays on the Contemporary Poetry of Northern Ireland* (Bridgend: Seren, 1992).
Corkery, Daniel *The Hidden Ireland*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1924).
Dawe Gerald and Longley, Edna (eds) *Across a Roaring Hill: The Protestant Imagination in Modern Ireland*) (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1985).
— *Against Piety: Essays in Irish Poetry*, (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1995).
Deane, Seamus *Celtic Revivals* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985).
Devlin, Anne *The Way Paver* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).
Devlin, Bernadette *The Price of My Soul* (London: Pan, 1969).
Devlin, Paddy *Straight Left* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1993).
Durcan, Paul *The Selected Paul Durcan* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1983).
Edwards, Owen Dudley *The Sins of Our Fathers: Roots of the Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970).
Farrell, Michael *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London: Pluto Press, 1976).
Fiacc, Padraic (ed) *The Wearing of the Black* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1974).
— *Ruined Pages: Selected Poems*, eds. Gerald Dawe and Aodan Mac Poilin (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1994).
Foster, R.F *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989).
— *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Allen Lane, 1993).
— *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, Vol 1, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
Hamill, Desmond *Pig in the Middle: The Army in Northern Ireland 1969-1984* (London: Methuen, 1985).
Harmon, Maurice (ed) *The Irish Writer and The City* (Gerrard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1984).
Heaney, Marie *Over Nine Waves: A Book of Irish Legends*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1994).
Hewitt, John *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, ed. Frank Ormsby (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1993).
Hughes, Eamonn, (ed) *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).
Johnson, Jennifer *Shadows on our Skin* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977).
Johnson, Toni O'Brien and David Cairns (eds) *Gender and Irish Writing* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).
Kavanagh, Patrick *Collected Poems* (London: Martin Brian and O'Keeffe, 1972).
Kearney, Richard *Transitions* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1988).
Kee, Robert *Ireland: A History* (London: Abacus, 1980).
Kiberd, Declan *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Verso, 1996).
Killanin, Lord and Duignan, Michael *The Shell Guide to Ireland* (London: Macmillan, 1989).
Kinsella, Thomas *The Tain* (Oxford University Press, 1970).
— *Butcher's Dozen* (Dublin: Peppercanister, 1972).
Kirkland, Richard *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965* (London: Longman, 1996).

Lloyd, David *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Movement* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993).
Longley, Edna *Poetry in the Wars* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1986).
— *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1994).
Longley, Michael *Lares* (Woodford Green: Poet & Printer, 1972).
— *Poems 1963-1983* (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1985).
— *Tupenny Stung: Autobiographical Chapters* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1994).
— *The Ghost Orchid* (London: Cape, 1995).
McCann, Eamonn *War in an Irish Town* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).
McCormack, W.J. *The Battle of the Books* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1986).
Mac Laverty, Bernard *Cal* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980).
MacNeice, Louis *Autumn Journal* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939).
— *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979).
Mahon, Derek *Lives* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).
— *Poems 1962-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
Maxwell, D.E.S. *A Critical History of Modern Irish Drama 1891-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
Meaney, Gerardine *Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1991).
Montague, John *Death of a Chieftain and Other Stories* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1964).
— *A Chosen Light* (MacGibbon and Kee, 1967).
— *The Rough Field* (Portlaoise: Dolmen, 1972).
— *The Faber Book of Irish Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974).
— *The Figure in the Cave and Other Essays*, ed. Antoinette Quinn (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989).
— *Collected Poems* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1995).
Moore, Brian *The Mangan Inheritance* (London: Cape, 1979).
Muldoon, Paul *Knowing My Place* (Belfast: Ulsterman Publications, 1971).
— *New Weather* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973).
O'Brien, Conor Cruise *States of Ireland* (London: Hutchinson, 1972).
O'Connor, Fionnuala *In Search of a State: Catholics in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1993).
O'Malley, Padraig *Biting at the Grave: The Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair*, (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1990).
Pakenham, Thomas *The Year of Liberty: The Great Irish Rebellion of 1798* (London: Granada, 1969).
Parker, Michael *The Hurt World: Short Stories of the Troubles* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1993).
Patterson, Glenn *Fat Lad* (London: Minerva, 1992).
Paulin, Tom *Ireland and The English Crisis* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1984).
— (ed) *The Faber Book of Political Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).

Phoenix, Eamon *Northern Nationalism: Nationalist Politics, Partition and the Catholic Minority in Northern Ireland 1890-1940* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1994).
Purdie Bob *Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1990).
Richtarik, Marilynn *Acting Between the Lines: The Field Day Theatre Company and Irish Cultural Politics 1980-1984* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
Sekine, Masaru (ed) *Irish Writers and the Theatre* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987).
Skelton, Robin (ed) *Six Irish Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).
Somerville-Arjat, Gillean and Wilson, Rebecca E. (eds) *Sleeping With Monsters* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1990).
The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, *Ulster* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).
Synge, J.M. *The Playboy of the Western World* (London: Unwin, 1968).
Taylor, Peter *Families at War* (London: BBC Books, 1989).
Thompson, Sam *Over The Bridge*, with an introduction by Stewart Parker (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970).
White, Barry *John Hume: Statesman of the Troubles* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1984).
Whyte, John *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).
Wills, Clair *Improprieties: Politics and Sexuality in Northern Irish Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
Yeats, W.B. *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1950).
— *Selected Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1966).

d) Articles and Broadcasts on Irish Literature, Culture and History

Boyce, D. George, review of Richard Kirkland's *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965*, *Irish Studies Review*, 17 (Winter 1996/7), 55-6.
Cole, John 'The lost last hope of Northern Ireland', an obituary for Lord O'Neill of the Maine, *The Guardian*, 14 June 1990, 39.
Deane, Seamus 'Why Bogside', *The Honest Ulsterman*, 27, January-March 1971, 1-6.
Foley, Michael 'This Thing Could Rule the World', *Fortnight*, 3 September 1971, 20.
History Boys on the Rampage, *Arena*, dir. Andrew Eaton, BBC2, December1988.
Keane, Feargal 'No Man is an Island', BBC Radio 4, 18 November 1996.
Kennedy, Liam 'Modern Ireland: Postcolonial Society or Postcolonial Pretensions', *The Irish Review*, 13, (Winter 1992/93), 107-121.
Longley, Michael 'Strife and the Ulster Poet', *Hibernia*, 7 November 1969, 11.
— 'Poetry', in *Causeway: The Arts in Ulster*, Belfast: Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1971.
Longley, Edna 'Heaney's Hidden Ireland', *Phoenix*, 10 (Winter 1973), 86-9.
— 'A Northern Turn', *The Irish Review*, 15 (Spring 1994), 2-13.
— 'Irish Bards and American Audiences', *The Southern Review*, 31:3 (Summer 1995), 757-771.
Mahon, Derek, 'Poetry in Northern Ireland', *Twentieth Century Studies*, November 1970, 89-93.

— letter to *New Statesman*, 10 December, 1971.
Montague, John, Interview with Dennis O'Driscoll, *Irish University Review*, 19:1 (Spring 1989), 58-72.
O' Buachalla, Breandan 'Irish Jacobite Poetry', *The Irish Review*, 12 (Spring/ Summer 1992), 40-9.
O'Faolain, Sean 'Silent Ireland', *The Bell*, 6:5, August 1943, 465.
O'Toole, Fintan *Dancing at the Crossroads: A Portrait of Modern Ireland, The Late Show*, BBC2, 6 March 1995.
— *The Bloody Protest*, BBC Radio 4, 10 April 1996.
Parker, Michael 'Levelling with Heaney', *The Honest Ulsterman*, 103, 101-5.
Paulin, Tom *Poetry, Language, History*, BBC2, Open University, 1986.
Remember Bloody Sunday, BBC2, dir. Peter Taylor, January 1992.
Secret History: Bloody Sunday, Channel 4, 4 December 1991.
Stewart, John D. 'How It Is', *The Honest Ulsterman*, 8, December 1968, 2-4.
— 'An Open Letter to John Malone', *Threshold*, 23 (Summer 1970), 20-5.
Threshold, 17 (1962); 20 (Winter 1966-67) ed. Brian Friel; 22 (August 1969) ed. Seamus Heaney; 23 (Summer 1970) ed. John Montague.
Warner, Alan 'The Poet as Watcher', *Threshold* 22, August 1969, 64-70.
Wilson, Robert McLiam 'The Glittering Prize', *Fortnight*, 344, November 1995, 23-5.

e) Other Literary, Historical and Cultural Texts Cited

Aristotle, *Poetics* in *Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeown (New York, 1941).
Auden, W.H. *Selected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1979).
Bakhtin, Mikhail *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).
Barker, Jonathan (ed) *Thirty Years of the Poetry Book Society 1956-1986* (London: Hutchinson, 1988).
Bly, Robert *Talking All Morning* (University of Michigan, 1980).
Bolt, Sydney *A Preface to James Joyce* (London: Longman, 1981).
Davidson, H.R. Ellis *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964).
Davies, R.T. *Medieval English Lyrics: A Critical Anthology* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966).
Donne, John *Selected Poems* ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).
T.S. Eliot 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *Twentieth Century Poetry: Critical Essays and Documents*, eds. Graham Martin and P.N. Furbank (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1975).
Fanon, Frantz *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).
Foucault, Michel *Untying The Text* (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1971).
Glob, P.V. *The Bog People* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).
Gombrich, E.H. *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1972).
Hamilton, Ian *Robert Lowell: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983).
Herbert, Zbigniew *Poezje Wybrane* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spoldielnia Wydawnicza, 1970).
Hobsbaum, *Metre, Rhythm and Verse Form* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Hughes, Ted *Wodwo* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967).
— *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971).
— 'Myth and Education' in *Writers, Critics, Children* ed. Geoff Fox (London: Heinemann, 1976).
JanMohamed, Abdul 'Sophisticated Primitivism: The Syncretism of Oral and Literate Modes in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*', *Ariel* 15:4, 1984.
Lacan, Jacques *Écrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan, reprinted in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, eds. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Arnold, 1992), pp.122-7.
Larkin, Philip *The Whitsun Weddings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964).
Lessing, Doris *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (Londom: Cape, 1971).
Lowell, Robert *Notebook* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970).
Magnusson, Magnus *Viking: Hammer of the North* (London: Orbis, 1976).
Martin, Gregory *Bruegel* (New York: Park South Books, 1978).
Milosz, Czeslaw *The Captive Mind* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980).
Ngugi *Devil on the Cross* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1982).
Orr, Peter *The Poet Speaks* (The British Council, 1963).
Orwell, George *1984* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954).
Parker, Michael and Starkey, Roger (eds) *Postcolonial Literatures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).
Plath, Sylvia *The Bell Jar* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966).
Poulin, A. (ed) *Contemporary American Poetry* (Boston: Houghton Miflin, 1971).
Rice, Philip and Waugh, Patricia (eds) *Modern Literary Theory* (London: Arnold, 1989).
Rothenberg, Jerome *Interviews 4* (London: Binnacle Press, 1984).
Said, Edward *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto, 1993).
Shaffer, Peter *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (London: Longman, 1983).
Shoat, Ella and Stam, Robert *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994).
Sidney, Sir Philip *An Apology for Poetry* ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (London 1965).
Snyder, Gary *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions, 1974).
Spenser, Edmund *A Veue of the Present State of Ireland*, ed. W.L. Renwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).
Tindall, George Brown and Shi, David *America: A Narrative History* (New York, Norton, 1993).
Unterecker, John *A Reader's Guide to W.B.Yeats* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969).
Warner, Marina *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador, 1985).
Wordsworth, William *Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

PART TWO

THE PLAYS OF BRIAN FRIEL

Primary Sources

Plays

The Enemy Within (first performed 1962; Dublin: Gallery Press, 1979).
The Blind Mice, unpublished (BBC Northern Ireland 1963).
Philadelphia Here I Come! (London: Faber and Faber, 1965).
The Loves of Cass McGuire (London: Faber and Faber, 1967).
Lovers (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).
Crystal and Fox and *The Mundy Scheme* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970).
The Gentle Island (first performed 1971; London: Davis-Poynter 1973; Dublin: Gallery Press, 1993).
The Freedom of the City (first performed 1973; London: Faber and Faber, 1974).
Living Quarters (London: Faber and Faber, 1978).
Volunteers (first performed 1975; London: Faber and Faber, 1979; Dublin: Gallery Press, 1989).
Aristocrats (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1980).
Faith Healer (London: Faber and Faber, 1980).
Translations (first performed 1980; London: Faber and Faber, 1981).
Three Sisters (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1981).
The Communication Cord (London: Faber and Faber, 1983; Dublin: Gallery Press, 1989).
Selected Plays with an introduction by Seamus Deane (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).
Making History (first performed 1987; London: Faber and Faber, 1988).
Dancing at Lughnasa (London: Faber and Faber, 1990).
The London Vertigo (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1990).
Wonderful Tennessee (London: Faber and Faber, 1993).
Molly Sweeney (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).

Interviews, Articles and Autobiographical Pieces by Brian Friel

'The Theatre of Hope and Despair', *Everyman* I, 1968, 17-22.
'A Challenge to *Acorn*', *Acorn*, 14, Autumn 1970, 4.
'The Future of Irish Drama', *The Irish Times*, 12 February 1970, 14.
Hickey, Des and Smith, Gus, *A Paler Shade of Green*, London: Leslie Frewin, 1972.
'Plays Peasant and Unpeasant', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 17 March 1972, 305-6.
'Self-Portrait', *Aquarius*, 5, 1972, 17-22.
'Extracts from a Sporadic Diary', in Carpenter, Andrew and Fallon, Peter (eds), *The Writers: A Sense of Ireland* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1980), 39-43.

'Extracts from a Sporadic Diary' in Coogan, Tim Pat (ed), *Ireland and the Arts*, a Special Issue of *Literary Review* (London: Quartet Press) n.d., 56-61.
'The Man from God Knows Where', interview with Fintan O'Toole, *In Dublin*, 14 July 1982, 22.

Secondary Sources :

a) Books on the Plays of Brian Friel

Andrews, Elmer *The Art of Brian Friel* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).
Dantanus, Ulf *Brian Friel: A Study* (London: Faber, 1988).
Maxwell, D.E.S. *Brian Friel* (Lewisburg, Penn: Bucknell University Press, 1973).
O'Brien, George *Brian Friel* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989).
Peacock, Alan (ed) *The Achievement of Brian Friel* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993).
Pine, Richard *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* (London: Routledge, 1990).

b) Articles on the Plays of Brian Friel

Boland, Eavan 'Brian Friel: Derry's Playwright', *Hibernia* 16, February 1973, 18.
Deane, Seamus 'Brian Friel: The Double Stage', in *Celtic Revivals* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985).
Grene, Nicholas 'Distancing Drama: Sean O'Casey to Brian Friel' in *Irish Writers and the Theatre*, ed. Masaru Sekine (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987), pp.47-70.
Jent, William 'Supranational Civics: Poverty and the Politics of Representation in Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*', in *Modern Drama*, 37, 1994, 568-87.
Lanters, Jose 'Violence and Sacrifice in Brian Friel's *The Gentle Island* and *Wonderful Tennessee*', *Irish University Review*, 26:1 (Spring/Summer 1996), 163-176.
McGowan, Moray 'Truth, Politics and the Individual: Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* and the Northern Ireland Conflict', *Literatur in Wissenschaft and Unterricht*, 12: 4, December 1979, 287-301.
O'Toole, Fintan 'Keeper of the Faith', *The Guardian*, 16 January 1992, 6.
Ormsby, Frank 'The Plays of Brian Friel', *Honest Ulsterman*, 23, May-June 1970.
Winkler, Elizabeth Hale 'Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*: Historical Actuality and Dramatic Imagination', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, June 1981, 17:1, 12-31.

THE POETRY OF SEAMUS HEANEY

Primary Sources

Poetry

Death of a Naturalist (London: Faber and Faber, 1966).
Door into the Dark (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).
Wintering Out (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).
Soundings (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1972).
North (London: Faber and Faber, 1975).
Stations (Belfast: Ulsterman Publications, 1975).
Field Work (London: Faber and Faber, 1979).
Station Island (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).
Sweeney Astray (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).
Hailstones (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1985).
The Haw Lantern (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).
Seeing Things (London: Faber and Faber, 1991).
The Spirit Level (London: Faber and Faber, 1995).

Prose

Preoccupations (London: Faber and Faber, 1980).
Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry of Northern Ireland, Peter Laver Memorial Lecture, Trustees of Dove Cottage, 1984.
The Government of the Tongue (London: Faber and Faber, 1988).
Crediting Poetry (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1995).

Uncollected Articles

'Out of London: Ulster's Troubles', *New Statesman*, 1 July 1966, 23-4.
'The Poetry of John Hewitt', *Threshold*, Summer 1969, 73-7.
'Old Derry Walls', *The Listener*, 24 October 1968, 521-3.
'Seamus Heaney Writes', *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, no.61, Summer 1969.
'Celtic Fringe, Viking Fringe', *The Listener*, 21 August 1969, 254-5.
'Delirium of the Brave', *The Listener*, 27 November 1969, 757-9.
'King of the Dark', *The Listener*, 5 February 1970, 181-2.
'King Conchobor and his Knights', *The Listener*, 26 March 1970, 416-7.
'Views', *The Listener*, 31 December 1970, 903.
'Seamus Heaney praises Lough Erne', *The Listener*, 4 February 1971, 142-3.
'A Poet's Childhood', *The Listener*, 11 November 1971, 660-1.
'After the Synge-Song: Seamus Heaney on the writings of Patrick Kavanagh', *The Listener*, 13 January 1972, 55-6.
'Mother Ireland', *The Listener*, 7 December 1972, 790.

'Lost Ulstermen', *The Listener*, 26 April 1973, 550-1.
'Summoning Lazarus', *The Listener*, 6 June 1974, 741-2.
Biographical Comment in *Worlds*, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield, Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1974.
Introduction to *T.P.Flanagan, Paintings 1967-1977*, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1977.
Introduction to *Collected Short Stories: Michael McLaverty* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1978).
'The Poet as a Christian', *The Furrow*, 29:10, October 1978, 603-6.
Ulster Museum: A Personal Selection by Seamus Heaney, Belfast, 1982.
'A Tale of Two Islands: Reflections on the Irish Literary Revival', *Irish Studies*, I (Cambridge University Press, 1980) 1-20.
Comments on Faber Poetry Cassette, 1982.
Among Schoolchildren, A John Malone Memorial Lecture, Belfast University, June 1983.
'Pilgrim's Journey', *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, 123, Winter 1984.

Interviews and Radio Broadcasts

'Le Clivage Traditionnel', *Les Lettres Nouvelles*, March 1973, 87-89.
With Harriet Cooke, *The Irish Times*, 28 December, 1973, 8.
With Seamus Deane, 'Unhappy and at Home', *The Crane Bag*, 1:1, 1977, 61-67.
In Their Element, Heaney reading with Derek Mahon, BBC Radio 4, 1977.
With Robert Druce, 'A Raindop on a Thorn', *Dutch Quarterly Review*, 9, 1978, 24-37.
With James Randall, *Ploughshares*, 5:3, 1979, 7-22.
With John Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, London: Faber and Faber, 1981, 57-75.
With Frank Kinahan, *Critical Inquiry*, 8:3, Spring 1982, 405-14.
With Rand Brandes, *Salmagundi*, 80, Fall 1988, 4-21.

Secondary Sources:

a) Books on the Poems of Seamus Heaney

Allen, Michael *Seamus Heaney* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).
Andrews, Elmer *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: All the Realms of Whisper*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).
Bloom, Harold (ed.) *Seamus Heaney: Modern Critical Views* (New Haven-New York-Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986).
Broadbridge, Edward (ed.) *Seamus Heaney* (Copenhagen: Danmarks Radio, 1977).
Buttel, Robert *Seamus Heaney* (Lewisburg, Pa: Bucknell University Press, 1975).
Corcoran, Neil *Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).
Curtis, Tony (ed.) *The Art of Seamus Heaney* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1985).
Hart, Henry *Seamus Heaney: Poet of Contrary Progressions* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993).

McGuinn, Nicholas *Seamus Heaney: A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems 1965-75* (Leeds: Arnold Wheaton, 1986).
Maguire, Aisling, *Selected Poems of Seamus Heaney* (Longman:York Press, 1986).
Morrison, Blake *Seamus Heaney* (London: Methuen, 1982).
Murphy, Andrew *Seamus Heaney* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1996).
O'Donoghue, Bernard *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994).
Parker, Michael *Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993).

b) Articles on the Poetry of Seamus Heaney

Allen, Michael 'The Parish and the Dream: Heaney and America 1969-1987', *The Southern Review*, 31:3 (Summer 1995), 726-738.
Allison, Jonathan 'Beyond Gentility: A Note on Seamus Heaney and American Poetry', *Critical Survey*, 8:2, 1996, 178-185.
Cahill, Eileen 'A Silent Voice: Seamus Heaney and Ulster Politics', *Critical Quarterly*, 29:3, 55-70.
Carson, Ciaran 'Escaped from the Massacre?', *The Honest Ulsterman* (Winter 1975), 183-6.
Coughlan, Patricia '"Bog Queen's": The Representation of Women in the Poetry of John Montague and Seamus Heaney' in *Gender and Irish Writing*, eds. Toni O'Brien Johnson and David Cairns (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).
Cullingford, Elizabeth Butler '"Thinking of Her as Ireland": Yeats, Pearse and Heaney', *Textual Practice* (Spring 1990), 1-21.
– 'British Romans and Irish Carthaginians: Anti-Colonial Metaphor in Heaney, Friel and McGuinness', *PMLA*, 111:2, March 1996, 222-239.
Greaves, Richard 'Terms of Engagement', unpublished paper delivered at University of Aberystwyth, July 1996.
Liddy, James 'Ulster Poets and the Catholic Muse', *Eire-Ireland*, 13: 4 (Winter 1978), 126-137.
McGuinness, Arthur E. 'The Craft of Diction: Revision in Seamus Heaney's Poems', in *Image and Illusion: Anglo Irish Literature and its Contexts* (Portmarnock: Wolfhound, 1979).
O'Brien, Conor Cruise 'A Slow North East Wind', *The Listener*, 25 September 1975, 404-5.